Journalism Research

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Editorial

Artificial intelligence (AI) is the phrase on everybody's lips. But why? A guest paper by American researcher Meredith Whittaker on netzpolitik.org[1] provides a plausible explanation: It is a narrative. She claims that the cognition and computer scientist John McCarthy came up with the term in the 1950s in order to attract better funding for his research – and to marginalize unwelcome competition, specifically the information technology expert Norbert Wiener. That is why the more imaginative term »artificial intelligence« was able to assert itself over »cybernetics.«

The narrative of »artificial intelligence,« which can be used as a vessel for a wide range of content, is actually an example of successful public relations for science, Whittaker argues. In her readable and worthwhile article, she highlights the invisible human work behind the enormous quantities of data used to train generative AI platforms. And she also warns of the dangers of the platforms' »extractive logic.« Society needs to be aware that the data base and the algorithms that process it are based on existing texts, with all their strengths and weaknesses.

In his paper »New game, new rules,« Kim Björn Becker examines these weaknesses in the use of AI in journalism. He was interested to explore the question of how German-language media and press agencies are currently handling AI. Becker successfully shows that »although media are already looking at fundamental questions thrown up by the new technology, newsrooms still have blind spots when it comes to dealing with AI.« It is particularly common for media to ignore the »algorithmic bias« – just two of the media he looked at appeared aware of the problem.

AI companies themselves are above all companies with economic interests, as Meredith Whittaker points out. In relation to newspaper companies, Karl Bücher criticized the subordination of journalistic quality to advertising revenue as the »true seat of the evil« as far back as 1926, as Horst Pöttker shows in his paper on »Karl Bücher's reform concept.«

According to Bücher, this concept means that anything that »could damage« the advertising section, the elixir of life for the newspaper, is »by default

1 WHITTAKER, MEREDITH (07. 06 2023): *Künstliche Intelligenz: Vermessung bis ins Innerste*. Accessed on 12 June 2023 at *netzpolitik.org*: https://netzpolitik.org/2023/kuenstliche-intelligenz-vermessung-bis-ins-innerste/#netzpolitik-pw This text is based on the speech Meredith Whittaker gave at re:publica 2023.

excluded from being covered« in the journalistic section. In order to break this economic dependency on advertising revenue, Pöttker proposes expanding the organizational principle of public service broadcasting to other sectors of the media. Even Karl Bücher had imagined a public advertising monopoly that could separate advertising and journalism in both economic and organizational terms.

Is this feasible? »The approach proposed here would not be as far removed from the current situation as it might first appear,« wrote Bücher. But the narrative of media companies fighting for their economic survival (while bravely maintaining journalistic standards) and having to assert themselves against public service media who are allegedly harmful to competition is widely circulated – by who, we wonder?

Narratives of a very particular kind are the topic of Fox News' website, foxnews.com. Numerous content analyses have attempted to work out what defines its particular populistic content. In his discourse analysis »Fear and balanced. The world according to foxnews.com homepage,« Fred Vultee also examines the narratives that did *not* take place on Fox News. Fox News is already outside the mainstream when it comes to negativity in selection and authority in sourcing. For example, there are no cases in which Twitter explodes in favor of a policy aimed at reducing carbon emissions; the vice president is never a figure of policy, only a figure of ridicule; presidential approval is forever plummeting, even when it is rising.

Instead, it is dominated by narratives that confirm the world view of large parts of its audience: Critical race is to be forced onto children in elementary schools, presidential fecklessness is moving China closer to world dominance by the day, cities will collapse under the self-induced burdens of crime and homelessness – the end of the world is nigh. »Whichever side is winning, there is no respite from the ultimate battle of good and evil.« The repetition of this kind of narrative and the way in which it is combined with other pieces are reminiscent of Yulia Belinskaya's piece in edition 1/2023, in which she described the theory of securitization in relation to the internet in Russia.

Fred Vultee's discourse analysis is based on a database of foxnews.com homepages from the years 2022–23. It is only when they are put in context that the links between the narratives' meanings become clear.

Meredith Whittaker's piece was published after I had already completed my workshop report on ChatGPT in journalism teaching, so I was unable to address the narrative behind it more explicitly. I merely gently mock the predictability of the discourse. But my main focus was on asking myself what journalism teaching looks like in a world of generative AI platforms. Which competencies, which specific knowledge and skills need to be taught?

Together with students, I explored the use of generative language AI in text production during degree studies and reflected on what we had learned. My

choice of topics for this exploration was guided by learning objectives, which of course need to be expanded. Examples include checking facts, knowing and applying the journalistic rules of separation, transparency, and reporting and reportage using prompting in the dialog.

We were able to disprove one narrative: Students certainly do not use the tools uncritically, but instead in a well-considered and critical way.

Journalists should recognize narratives. But for various reasons, they often do not. They are particularly vulnerable to a narrative when it is about a good cause. Georg Cremer, long-time Secretary General of the charity Caritas-Verband, has examined the narrative of decline in social policy. In his debate piece »A lack of critical corrective,« he uses various examples to demonstrate how charities' public relations departments achieve major coups – which does not always help to maintain the debate's objectivity. His conclusion? »The media frequently fail to provide a critical corrective, especially when press releases from social organizations are in line with preconceived perceptions and the demands that the organizations derive from them appear to be for a good cause.« A lack of statistical skills plays a role here, but so too do priming and framing. Cremer does not use these terms, but describes the situation and its consequences accurately. He would like to see professional training for journalists »encourage openness and curiosity among trainee journalists, so that they develop an interest in exploring whether the development of the situation in society might be different, more complex or more contradictory than they had previously imagined.«

There is no better way to describe the requirements of journalism: to recognize narratives as such and to compare them with the facts as well as possible.

We are inviting submission for the upcoming issues of Journalism Research/ Journalistik for Winter 2023 (Issue 3/4, 2023) and Spring 2024 (1/2024) on the special topic of broadcasting in all its forms and manifestations, including public-service broadcasting, private commercial/corporate broadcasting, and last, but not least, non-profit and community broadcasting. Contact redaktion@journalistik.online.

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Call for Papers

Broadcasting in all its manifestations

Journalism Research/Journalistik for Issue 3/4, 2023
and 1, 2024

We are inviting submission for the upcoming issues of Journalism Research/ Journalistik for Winter 2023 (Issue 3/4, 2023) and Spring 2024 (1/2024) on the special topic of broadcasting in all its forms and manifestations, including public-service broadcasting, private commercial/corporate broadcasting, and last, but not least, non-profit and community broadcasting. We welcome scholarly engagement with the structures, organizational forms, financial models, and technological transformation of broadcasting as well as with the continuing debates about »reforming« broadcasting, programming and content, diversity, innovations, »collaboration« with big tech companies, etc. We are looking forward to fresh perspectives and insights in the form of studies, essays, and commentary for debate, to international comparative perspectives, and articles on the professional field and changing working conditions in broadcast journalism. Please follow our style guide for references, word count etc.: https://journalistik.online/ wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Style-Sheet-journalism-research.pdf

Please send your submissions by September 15, 2023 to redaktion@ journalistik.online.

Research Paper

Kim Björn Becker

New game, new rules

An investigation into editorial guidelines for dealing with artificial intelligence in the newsroom

Abstract: The introduction of the language model ChatGPT created plenty of hype around the use of artificial intelligence – not least in journalism. In a profession based around language, the new technology has a wide range of applications. Yet these new possibilities also give rise to questions about how the media deal with artificial intelligence (AI). Some editorial offices have now begun to react to the challenge by publishing their own AI guidelines, aiming to clarify the principles on which their use of algorithms is based. This paper conducts a comparative examination of the documents issued by seven international media in order to gain a fundamental understanding of where the editorial offices see opportunities and the pitfalls they address. The investigation looks at two organizations each from Germany and the USA, as well as one each from the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Canada. The analysis shows that news agencies tend to have more concise rules, while public service broadcasters are subjected to more comprehensive regulatory standards. Each editorial office sets its own focus: While almost all the media's guidelines cover human control of AI and questions of transparency, there is less focus on requirements for trustworthy algorithms. The investigation shows that, although media are already looking at fundamental questions thrown up by the new technology, newsrooms still have blind spots when it comes to dealing with AI.

Keywords: *artificial intelligence, guidelines, journalistic ethics, byline, newsroom*

1.   Introduction: Why editorial offices are not simply doing nothing

Editorial offices are already using artificial intelligence (AI) at practically every stage of the journalistic process (cf. DIAKOPOULOS 2019: 76f.; BUXMANN/SCHMIDT 2022). The new technical possibilities in research, production, and distribution present new, urgent questions for media organizations. How should they deal responsibly with language models like ChatGPT? Which goals should guide their use of AI in the newsroom? And what hazards do they need to steer clear of if at all possible? Given that distortions of content and factual errors could have a direct impact on the perceived credibility of reporting, editorial offices and publishers need clarity quickly.

Professional ethics provides a good basis for finding initial answers to these questions. Yet the journalistic principles set out by specialist organizations like the Deutscher Presserat [German Press Council] and the USA's Society of Professional Journalists tend to be very general and too abstract for these challenging issues. In Brussels, the Raad voor de Journalistiek [Press Council] has published guidelines that supplement the Belgian Press Code and focus on transparency in the way journalists work. They state that users need to know when an algorithm has been used to help write a story (cf. RAAD VOOR DE JOURNALISTIEK n.y.). In Spain, the Catalonian press council issued recommendations to editorial offices in December 2021, setting out eight rules that can be used to avoid potential pitfalls in data usage, transparency, and algorithmic distortion (cf. VENTURA POCINO 2021). And in Germany, the Deutscher Journalisten-Verband [German Federation of Journalists, DJV] published a position paper in late April in which it made clear that editorial offices cannot »steal away« from responsibility for content created with the involvement of AI (DEUTSCHER JOURNALISTEN-VERBAND 2023: 1). It states that the actions of AI applications are »far removed from ethics and a value system« and that such applications are therefore »not able to take on the watchdog function that journalists have always held« (ibid.). In nine content-related points, the Federation then sets out the boundaries for the use of AI in journalism, intended to ensure that the new technology is handled responsibly and transparently (cf. DEUTSCHER JOURNALISTEN-VERBAND 2023: 2f.).

Yet, looking at the specific way such guidelines are implemented in the newsroom, editorial offices are often on their own when it comes to dealing with AI – not least because implementing algorithms in media organizations can be seen as a challenging communicative task (cf. SKRUBBELTRANG MAHNKE/KARLIN 2023) for which little training material is available. A few organizations have begun to react to this by issuing their own guidelines for dealing with AI in the newsroom. Yet the responses from the editors responsible vary widely. This paper looks into seven sets of guidelines from international media in terms of both form and content, with the aim of gaining a fundamental understanding of

early approaches to self-regulation in the media. How detailed and binding are the rules that media houses set themselves? At which objectives and journalistic values is their commitment to AI aimed? And does a human need to check and approve every item of news in which a large language model was involved? By conducting a comparative investigation into seven regulatory documents, this paper intends to create a fundamental understanding of the editorial fields of application that international media generally consider suitable for algorithmic applications, the requirements they set for responsible AI, and the situation regarding transparency for the user.

2. Recommendations, legal codes, and guiding questions: Formal aspects of editorial AI guidelines

Each set of guidelines on dealing with AI is different, in both form and content. Some boundaries are set out in the form of a powerful journalistic text; others are formal and matter-of-fact like an ordinance from a ministry. Some documents link each rule to ethical self-assurance, others are like algorithms in themselves – work instructions intended to train interdisciplinary project teams. And while one document sets out laws that seem unbreakable, another goes no further than offering careful guiding questions.

Before analyzing the content, this paper first takes a look at how the relevant documents were created in the first place. Who published them and when? What standards did the authors want to achieve? And in how much detail are the specifications for dealing with AI set out?

Which media have issued their own guidelines?

In liberal democracies, media are usually free to report as they choose, their internal processes not subject to any monitoring by state authorities. Media houses are therefore under no obligation to set out guidelines for dealing with AI – nor are there central bodies where such guidelines need to be recorded. That results in a problem for this investigation: It is all but impossible to state the number of editorial offices that had set out their own AI guidelines by the end of April 2023. As a result, it is only possible to investigate those documents that editorial offices have themselves made public or specifically made available for research.

The study looks at seven sets of guidelines. Six of them were published by the respective organization themselves; the guidelines of the Dutch news agency Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau, ANP, became public via social media (cf. ANP 2023). The investigation covers documents from media organizations from five Western countries, including two each from Germany and the United States,

and one each from Canada, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Making up four of the seven organizations, news agencies dominate the investigation. They include ANP, based in The Hague, and the dpa or Deutsche Presse-Agentur (cf. DPA 2023), based in Hamburg. Both of these report predominantly from their respective countries. They are joined by two agencies with an international focus: the New York City-based Associated Press (cf. AP n.y.), AP for short, and the internationally active agency Thomson Reuters (cf. THOMSON REUTERS n.y.), based in Toronto. There are also documents from two public service broadcasters: Munich-based Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR) (cf. BR 2020) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), based in London (cf. BBC 2021). Finally, the American tech magazine *Wired* has also issued guidelines; the editorial office of the magazine, which is published by Condé Nast, is in San Francisco. The organizations included in the investigation thus work on the basis of national rules on AI which differ in some areas, such as in relation to data protection.

Table 1

Overview of guidelines investigated

	Headquarters	Category	Date on which AI guidelines were first published
Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau (ANP)	The Hague, Netherlands	News agency	March/April 2023
Associated Press (AP)	New York City, USA	News agencyr	No date
Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR)	Munich, Germany	Public service broadcaster	November 30, 2020
British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)	London, UK	Public service broadcaster	May 2021
Deutsche Presse-Agentur (dpa)	Hamburg, Germany	News agency	3 April 2023
Thomson Reuters	Toronto, Canada	News agencyr	No date
Wired	San Francisco, USA	Technical magazine	No date

Table compiled by author

Four of the seven documents include the date on which they were first published. As Table 1 shows, the precise date is known in two cases, while for two others the period can be narrowed down to one or two months. It is therefore difficult to be entirely certain about the chronological order in which the guidelines were published. At most, there are some possible connections within the media genres. BR, for example, published its guidelines around six months earlier than the BBC. It is also striking that the two news agencies dpa and ANP both published their own guidelines for the first time within weeks of each other in spring 2023 – around

six months after the American provider OpenAI launched its GPT-3 language model in an adapted form as ChatGPT on November 30, 2022 (cf. OPENAI 2022). There is therefore much to suggest that this event and the »hype« (MENN 2023) that went with it may have accelerated the development of editorial guidelines. Analyses by the American search engine Google show that global interest in AI has grown significantly since the start of December (cf. GOOGLE TRENDS 2023).

Specificity, structure and binding nature

The first way in which the guidelines differ is in their form, i.e., in terms of their specificity, structure and how binding they are. ›Specificity‹ describes the question of whether AI guidelines are explicitly labelled as such. The term ›guidelines‹ is used comparatively broadly here to include any text in a central location, such as an editorial, a blog post or a separate document, that targets the fundamental way in which the respective media organization deals with AI – even if the text in question is not explicitly described as such. ›Structure‹ refers to the form and construction of the document. Some editorial offices embed their recommendations in journalistic-style prose, while others structure their papers strictly in multiple chapters or points. Finally, the binding nature defines the extent to which the rules set out in each case are to be applied.

The specificity of the guidelines differs widely. The American news agency Associated Press presents its rules on an overview page in which it sets out its AI activities (cf. AP n.y.). Recommendations on handling AI are therefore not bindingly marked as such, but are covered under the term »strategy around the technology« (AP n.y.). The three news agencies are clearer in setting out their aim of placing limits on dealing with AI in their documents. In its guidelines, the ANP also refers to the main editorial office in order to underscore the binding nature of the regulations (cf. ANP 2023). The BBC, too, is clear about the crux of the matter, albeit using not the term AI, but instead machine learning, or ML (cf. BBC 2021). The American magazine *Wired* is clearest about the binding force that readers can expect the document to have: »How WIRED Will Use Generative AI Tools« (WIRED 2023, capitals in original). Instead of soberly setting out the principles, those responsible wrap their guidelines in powerful language in a declaration of intent. The Dutch news agency takes a similar approach (cf. ANP 2023).

There are also differences in the way the documents are structured. As a general rule, the more structured a document, the more specific the individual elements can be – and the more precisely guidelines can be directed at specific application cases in an editorial context. The ANP is the only one with unstructured guidelines (cf. ANP 2023). The AP's recommendations are also relatively general, but the agency does refer to four levels in its strategy: three reflecting the journalistic process and the fourth covering collaboration with other actors (cf.

AP n.y.). The makers of *Wired* relate their remarks to two levels of content – text and images – subdivided into five and three points respectively (cf. WIRED 2023). Two news agencies have decided to break their guidelines down into five points (cf. DPA 2023; THOMSON REUTERS n.y.). Fittingly, the content of their guidelines focuses predominantly on the core area of news production. The dpa even provides an accompanying text that examines the selection of the scope of the guidelines, stating that the guidelines are intended to help »guide the way AI is handled without becoming lost in a jungle of rules« (dpa 2023). BR differentiates its guidelines in more detail and structures its document in ten points (cf. BAYERISCHER RUNDFUNK 2020). The most structured guidelines are those of the BBC, which does not limit itself to presenting general criteria, but has instead created a document as a recommendation for interdisciplinary teams with 47 individual points (cf. BBC 2021).

Hardly any of the guidelines are detailed and specific about how binding they are. We can therefore assume that each of the criteria set out is intended to apply in full at all times, regardless of how innovation progresses. Only BR uses a concept that staggers the guidelines' binding nature, stating that the closer an application comes to implementation, the more criteria need to be met (cf. BR 2020).

3. The art of self-limitation: Editorial guidelines between bans and opportunities

AI promises editorial offices almost unlimited opportunities for handling texts and images. Early on, researchers spotted that the new opportunities for personalizing journalism bring with them dangers for society – and that it is often possible to reduce distortions in public discourse when media houses subject themselves to guidelines (cf. MARCONI 2020: 46). Their voluntary guidelines are the organizations' attempt to account for this concern.

Each of the seven documents sets out different guidelines on different levels. Below, this paper examines the extent to which the rules are related to corporate goals and journalistic values, whether and which fields of application and limits are set, the extent to which the guidelines set out requirements for responsible AI, the situation when it comes to transparency and human control, the requirements to be set for journalistic collaboration, and the extent to which the documents are to be seen as amendable sets of rules.

Corporate goals and journalistic values

Any attempt to draft editorial guidelines builds on the question of what the authors want to be guided by. In many, but not all, cases, the media houses have made defining strategic goals or journalistic values a key feature of their guidelines. AI guidelines thus often provide a deep insight into the journalistic self-image of an editorial office or organization.

Some of the guidelines underscore the role of trust, with Thomson Reuters describing it as »one of our most important values« (THOMSON REUTERS n.y.). The principles that follow are thus intended »to promote trustworthiness in our continuous design, development, and deployment of AI« (THOMSON REUTERS n.y.). And there is good reason for those responsible in New York to underscore the importance of trustworthiness. According to its own representation, the agency feels obligated to pursue the »Trust Principles« – a set of rules intended to ensure that the agency's reporting is free and reliable (cf. THOMSON REUTERS 2018). The BBC takes a similar approach although, for them, the concept of trustworthiness does not go far enough. The corporation's guidelines set out its values as follows: »upholding trust, putting audiences at the heart of everything we do, celebrating diversity, delivering quality and value for money and boosting creativity« (BBC 2021: 5). The foundation on which the BBC bases its AI guidelines is thus much broader. The requirement to provide the best value possible given the fact that the BBC is funded by license fee payers is included in the document for good reason – its inclusion must be viewed in the context of the ongoing political debate on the future funding of the BBC (cf. WATERSON 2022). The guidelines state that AI in an editorial context should make a central contribution to the audience's citizenship education: »We will also seek to broaden, rather than narrow, our audience's horizons« (BBC 2021: 6).

Yet using efficiency and responsibility to society as arguments to justify the use of AI is not unique to public service broadcasting in the United Kingdom. BR published its guidelines six months earlier, with the concept of »added value« (BR 2020) being the key focus for those responsible. In its own words, BR uses AI »to make our work more efficient and to handle the resources that license fee payers entrust to us responsibly« (BR 2020). AI should also be used »to generate new content, develop new methods for investigative research, and make services for our users more attractive« (BR 2020). The future of license fee-funded broadcasting is the subject of regular debate in Germany, too.

Actors in the private sector associate the use of AI with different goals from public service broadcasters. The Deutsche Presse-Agentur quotes achieving journalistic competitive advantages as the reason behind their use of AI, stating that AI will »help to make our work better and faster – always for the benefit of our customers and our products« (DPA 2023). ANP is more cautious, emphasizing

their »pursuit of quality and reliability« (ANP 2023[1]) and noting the regulations on editorial status. These rule out external influences on the agency's journalism, while also emphasizing the values of impartiality and due diligence (cf. ANP 2023).

Fields of application and limits of AI

Around half of the media organizations who have subjected themselves to guidelines for handling KI also outline potential fields of application for the new technology. On the one hand, this means editorial offices defining the areas of the journalistic process in which they see the use of AI as particularly useful, thus creating a kind of positive list for AI in the newsroom. On the other, companies use the guidelines to define a negative list of applications whose journalistic integrity, they believe, should never be compromised by algorithms.

BR and the Deutsche Presse-Agentur limit themselves to abstract principles in their guidelines. The Associated Press is not much clearer in outlining possible fields of application: finding topics (»to break news and dig deeper«, AP n.y.), production (»to streamline workflows«, AP n.y.) and distribution. These examples remain comparably unspecific and are in line with journalistic common sense (cf. BECKETT 2019).

Wired's guidelines, on the other hand, are not limited to listing positive examples of fields of application – and are written in a very journalistic style. Instead, for dealing with both texts and images, the editorial office differentiates between cases in stating the extent to which they might want to use AI, they definitely do not want to use AI, or might experiment. *Wired* makes it clear that the magazine will not publish any stories whose text, or any part thereof, has been generated by AI (cf. WIRED n.y.). This is justified by the limits of current text generators, which appear unreconcilable with the editorial office's journalistic standards in both content and style: »The current AI tools are prone to both errors and bias, and often produce dull, unoriginal writing« (WIRED n.y.). Ultimately, the editorial office would see publishing a text based on an algorithm as an insult to their journalistic honor: »we think someone who writes for a living needs to constantly be thinking about the best way to express complex ideas in their own words« (WIRED n.y.). For the same reason, the magazine also rejects the idea of journalistic texts being edited by AI. Conceivable fields of application are instead limited to attempts to allow AI to produce headlines or short texts for social media, as well as for generating ideas for possible topics. Tools like ChatGPT could also help the editorial office during the research phase, albeit with limits. For example, language models could be used to read through large

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1   This and the following quotes from Dutch were translated with DeepL.

quantities of documents, in a role similar to that of the Google search engine or Wikipedia. *Wired* intends to take the same approach to images produced by AI – such as the Dall-E tool developed by OpenAI.

ANP in The Hague goes even further, stating that its journalists see »many opportunities« (ANP 2023) to use AI and be inspired by algorithms – for example when writing headlines and background information. The authors do not define clear limits on the use of text generators and, as a result, the use of artificial intelligence in the newsroom is »is up to the editors« (ANP 2023).

Features of responsible AI

The more AI instruments are used, the greater the influence of these systems on the life of humans. In order to prevent the increasing influence of algorithms from leading to »dependencies [...] or pressure to adapt« (DEUTSCHER ETHIKRAT 2023) among people, AI needs to be used in a socially responsible way. ›Responsible AI‹ generally relates to three dimensions of content: accountability, responsibility, and transparency (cf. DIGNUM 2019: 52f.). There is an international consensus in the Western world that people should be at the heart of such activities, as the German Ethics Council recently argued in its statement on AI (cf. DEUTSCHER ETHIKRAT 2023). IT experts note that good technical design of AI applications makes it possible to combine a high level of human control with working towards a high degree of automation (cf. SHNEIDERMAN 2022: 79). Given the ongoing debate about the criteria for and implementation of responsible AI, some media have extended their guidelines to include aspects of data protection and the quality of algorithms and of training and other data.

When it comes to data protection, the laws applicable in each case set the framework for all kinds of AI application, with the ANP among others referring directly to this (cf. ANP 2023). Thomson Reuters merely states that they want to »prioritize safety, security, and privacy throughout the design, development and deployment of our AI products and services« (THOMSON REUTERS n.y.). In Germany, where the European General Data Protection Regulation sets out a large portion of the legal limits, BR emphasizes the concept of data economy. The rule is, they explain, to collect »as little data as possible and as much as necessary in order to fulfil our role« (BR 2020). The BBC in the UK starts with a very general promise: »we will ensure that data is handled securely« (BBC 2021: 6), before moving on to describe more detailed points in the guidance for AI project teams. When it comes to the use of data, the principles refer to another of the Corporation's documents, the »privacy promise« last updated in 2023 (BBC 2023). This covers questions of transparency, selection options for the audience, and data use by the BBC. In addition, it requires that project teams in London document all data use and modification, correct potential errors in the data sets, and examine

the legal permissibility of the data used, including its compliance with the principles of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (cf. BBC 2021: 15f.).

When it comes to the quality of the algorithms, the guidelines are very general in their statements. The Deutsche Presse-Agentur, for example, merely promises to use »lawful AI« (DPA 2023) »that adheres to applicable law and legal provisions and that is in line with our ethical principles, such as human autonomy, fairness and democratic values« (DPA 2023). Thomson Reuters is even more general in its principles, formulating them as a declaration of intent that the agency is striving for a human-centered approach. The aim is to develop and use tools »that treat people fairly« (THOMSON REUTERS n.y.). This is similar to the standard that the BBC sets itself, namely to »serve our audiences equally & fairly« (BBC 2021: 6).

In practice, the criterion of fairness describes an algorithm that has been trained using balanced training data, which prevents it from producing overly distorted results. Both BR and the ANP address the problem of algorithmic distortion in their guidelines, although the latter does no more than name the risk and take it into account when assessing tools (cf. ANP 2023). In general, it relies on »reliability« as a criterion (ANP 2023). BR takes a more sophisticated view of the topic, demanding that service providers deliver »reliable information on the data sources (BR 2020) and discussing the »integrity and quality of the training data« (BR 2020) as a matter of principle, even for internal developments. According to them, minimizing algorithmic distortion helps to »reflect the diversity of society« that the broadcaster highlights in its guidelines (BR 2020). The BBC, too, instructs its project teams to examine the underlying training data for possible »bias« (BBC 2021: 19) and to correct this if necessary. BR is the only organization to go further than addressing only the quality of the training data, also looking at the quality of the other data with which the model works. The Munich-based organization undertakes to maintain employees' »awareness of the value of data and consistent data maintenance« (BR 2020), since reliable AI applications can only be developed with »reliable data« (BR 2020).

Transparency in the journalistic end product

Whenever AI plays a significant role in creating a journalistic text, a crucial question arises: »Who should get the byline?« (MARCONI 2020: 97). While language models like ChatGPT or Bard have not commonly been included in the byline until now, many editorial offices – including AP, British daily newspaper *The Guardian* and America's *Wall Street Journal* – have at least begun, in various ways, to identify the contribution that AI has made to the creation of a piece of journalistic work (cf. MARCONI 2020: 97f.). It thus comes as no surprise that the question of transparency comes up a lot in the guidelines, always in the context

of arguments for the greatest possible visibility. However, the guidelines rarely state how exactly AI's contribution should be flagged.

Three quarters of the news agencies investigated undertake to label the use of AI. Thomson Reuters promises a desire to make its use »explainable« (THOMSON REUTERS n.y.). The dpa expresses its self-obligation in similar terms: »Where content is generated exclusively by AI, we make this transparent and explainable« (DPA 2023 [translation: SC]). The Netherlands' ANP, too, vows to be »open to our customers about our methods and the use of AI or other technical systems« towards its customers (ANP 2023). However, ANP's promise to make efforts to achieve »transparency« (ANP 2023) is diluted later on, the guidelines stating that »we mention where we as editors deem appropriate the extent of AI use« (ANP 2023).

The magazine *Wired* obligates its authors to flag the contribution AI has made to creating the respective piece – if not, this is considered equivalent to plagiarism (cf. WIRED n.y.). The magazine also intends, where possible, to disclose the sources of the AI. Bayerischer Rundfunk undertakes to be transparent about »which technologies we use, which data we collect and which editorial offices or partners bear responsibility for this« (BR 2020). And those responsible in Munich even go one step further, stating that, where problems occur in dealing with AI, the intention is to make this »the topic of self-reflective reporting« (BR 2020). Although the BBC does not go as far as this in its recommendations, it shines elsewhere when it comes to transparency: The London-based organization instructs AI teams to enter their project in a special register for internal AI applications (cf. BBC 2021: 21). Furthermore, the way the application works is to be made clear not only to BBC employees, but also to the audience »in plain English« (BBC 2021: 21), i.e., straightforwardly and without jargon.

It is worth noting that academia, rather than journalism, has recently paid more attention to the question of whether AI justifies a mention in the byline of a piece. At the start of the year, the journals *Nature* and *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* (PNAS) published editorials making it clear that language models like ChatGPT do not qualify for being named as an author, as they cannot be held accountable for the results (cf. NATURE 2023; PNAS 2023).

Human control

Many considerations currently center around the question of the extent to which the use of AI in the production of journalistic content should be subject to human control. From its early stages, AI enabled editorial offices to create automated texts based on structured data (cf. DIAKOPOULOS 2019: 96f.). Large language models have now expanded these possibilities enormously, at least in theory. In practice, problems often arise from content errors in the texts generated. Journalism

research is therefore not the only field to have warned of the importance of human control in the use of text blocks written by AI (cf. MARCONI 2020: 49) – editorial offices are also working intensively on this issue (cf. WOLFNAGEL 2023).

It therefore comes as no surprise that all seven sets of guidelines address the question of human control of AI contributions to final journalistic products – albeit to varying degrees and categorizing the content in different ways. *Wired* is once again the most restrictive, its guidelines stating that absolutely no texts are published in which any part has been written or edited by AI (cf. WIRED n.y.). This restrictive attitude makes the American magazine an outsider. Five of the seven sets of guidelines stipulate that, under certain circumstances, people conduct editorial control of text blocks created by AI. Some make inspection of the respective content mandatory at all times, others only under certain conditions.

The guidelines of the two news agencies dpa and ANP stipulate that a person has to inspect all journalistic content created by or with the support of AI before publication. The Deutsche Presse-Agentur states that, »The dpa uses AI only under human supervision« (DPA 2023), with the editorial office emphasizing that a person makes the »final decision« (DPA 2023) on the use of AI. The ANP has chosen similar conditions: »We can use AI or similar systems to support final editing, provided a human does a final check afterwards.« (ANP 2023). They go on to specify that AI can be used predominantly in intermediate editing steps: »In our production chain, we stick to the line already in place man-machine-human« (ANP 2023). Content generated by AI, they continue, is not used »without checking this information by a human being« (ANP 2023).

The news agency Thomson Reuters and the two broadcasters in this investigation are not quite as strict. Their guidelines stipulate mandatory control of journalistic end products only under certain conditions and not, unlike the two agencies from Germany and the Netherlands, always. Thomson Reuters not only gives a less binding definition of the role of humans, but also dresses it in the weaker language of a declaration of intent: »Thomson Reuters will strive to maintain a human-centric approach« (THOMSON REUTERS n.y.). The document does not show exactly what makes up this approach. The same goes for the comparably vague guideline that the organization bears responsibility for the products and services in which AI is used: »Thomson Reuters will maintain appropriate accountability measures for our AI products and services« (THOMSON REUTERS n.y.).

The BBC describes the role of deskmen under the heading »Human in the loop« (BBC 2021: 6) – although this does not come with a clear definition of the fields in which a human needs to check and approve the work of AI. With development continuing, the BBC wants to experiment. »Algorithms form only part of the content discovery process for our audiences, and sit alongside (human) editorial curation« (BBC 2021: 6). This statement can be read as fundamentally

involving the editorial office in the use of AI, but is in need of more precise definition.

BR succeeds in putting together an opinion on the role of human control that is as clear as it is sophisticated. The broadcaster first makes editorial AI content subject to a general inspection requirement, before adding a dynamic escape clause: »Even in the case of automated journalism and data journalism, the journalistic responsibility lies with the editorial offices. The principle of approval thus remains in place for content created automatically« (BR 2020). »But development is ongoing: The principle of individual inspection becomes a plausibility check of causal relationships in the data structure and a rigorous integrity test of the data source« (BR 2020). Instead of editors individually approving each piece in whose genesis AI was involved, BR opens the door for editors to limit their checks to the technical function of the AI instrument in question.

Requirements for editorial collaboration

When AI is used in the newsroom, it is usually the result of collaboration between different specialist departments: journalists and IT experts, data specialists and product managers working hand in hand. It is also common for them to be joined by external service providers. After all, not every editorial office has all the expertise needed to roll out an AI application. Some organizations' guidelines for dealing with AI therefore include not only journalistic issues but also aspects of interdisciplinary collaboration both within the organization and with external actors.

When it comes to the distribution of roles within the organization, none of the guidelines investigated are more detailed than the BBC's. Firstly, the document names various roles that might be involved in each case, including product managers and employees in the specialist Quality, Risk & Assurance department (cf. BBC 2021: 21). Above all, however, the document is aimed at employees outside the newsroom, with detailed guidance questions clearly targeted at technical and documentary processes (cf. BBC 2021: 17f.). BR is less clear on this point, stating that AI projects should be made possible by »the most diverse teams possible« (BR 2020). The dpa is similarly unspecific in setting out its requirements for collaboration. Its guidelines state that »all employees« (DPA 2023) are encouraged to be open to the topic of AI – this presumably means especially, but by no means exclusively, reporters and editors.

Media organizations whose guidelines govern the extent to which they collaborate with external actors on AI projects are the exception. The AP reports that it works with start-ups in order to benefit from »external innovation« (AP n.y.) at comparably low cost. The New York-based agency also claims to be forming partnerships with further institutions, including the investment companies Social

Starts and Matter Ventures and the NYC Media Lab, a collaboration between various universities and companies in the city (cf. AP n.y.). Collaboration with universities is also covered by Bayerischer Rundfunk's guidelines, which state that »exchange with academic institutions and AI ethics experts« (BR 2020) is intended to define the interdisciplinary approach to the topic of AI.

Dynamic nature of the guidelines

The emergence of new text generators and other tools has rapidly altered the possibilities for using AI in an editorial context. In order to make it possible to provide appropriate orientation for the foreseeable future, media organizations can make the content of their guidelines as broad as possible, as Thomson Reuters, BR and others have done. The other option – often used in addition – is to describe the guidelines deliberately as a temporary set of rules.

Some of the editorial offices have integrated a dynamic component into its AI rules. *Wired* addresses the ongoing transformation of AI and predicts that it »may modify our perspective over time« (WIRED n.y.). Any changes would be shown transparently in the document, they continue. The news agencies are also aware that the current rules on dealing with AI cannot be set in stone. »These AI principles will evolve as the field of AI and its applications matures« (THOMSON Reuters n.y.), writes Thomson Reuters. Similarly, the ANP makes it clear that their guidelines are a »living document« (ANP 2023) »that can be modified by the chief editors if the developments call for it« (ANP 2023).

BR notes the requirement to amend the guidelines to cater to the general dynamic nature of journalistic AI applications. »Experiments are part of the process,« write the authors (BR 2020). In a similar vein to this potential amendment of the guidelines, BR is the only organization among those examined to have designed a graded model for the binding nature of its guidelines. According to this model, the closer an AI application is to the public, the more of the requirements as set out in the guidelines it needs to meet – the maximum being all. The guidelines also account for the fact that the application of AI can lead to »ethical borderline situations« (BR 2020). »We evaluate the experiences from the perspective of the State Media Treaty and the guidelines set out here« (BR 2020).

The BBC also addresses the fact that the use of AI changes over time in its guidelines on machine learning. »ML is an evolving set of technologies, where the BBC continues to innovate and experiment« (BBC 2021: 6), they say, offering the opportunity to revise the issues using the BBC checklist. One of the guiding questions is: »What important changes (or revisioning / redeployment of the model) would trigger a MLEP checklist review?« (BBC 2021: 26).

4. Discussion of results: Everyone sets their own regulations

How does one approach something that is new and unknown? This investigation into the guidelines that international media organizations have subjected themselves to as initial rules for dealing with AI has shown that, in the first instance, every editorial office makes their own decisions. The guidelines differ widely from one other in both form and content. A kind of standard model for the guidelines is yet to emerge.

The AI rules that international media set themselves

When it comes to form, the organizations investigated – one magazine, four news agencies and two broadcasters – have largely chosen concise, matter-of-fact guidelines in which they set out how they want to deal with AI briefly in a defined number of points. A few of the guidelines have also been formed into a text in language based on magazine journalism, or developed into a tool that uses guiding questions to direct interdisciplinary project teams towards key points on dealing with algorithms. Some links emerged between the journalistic style of the organization in question and the form chosen for the guidelines: The news agencies present their guidelines briefly in a news-like style, while the magazine chose a more narrative form, and a British broadcaster known for its structural complexity selected the form of detailed guidelines. Almost all of the guidelines were recognizable as such; in only one case was the approach embedded in a general representation of the organization's AI activities. Six of the seven organizations also chose not to make the rules more or less binding in different situations; only one German broadcaster linked the level of fulfillment of the guidelines to the development progress of an AI project. All in all, the investigation included two media organizations each from Germany and the United States, and one each from the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Canada.

When it comes to content, comparing the seven international guidelines throws up significant differences. The content produced by the editorial offices can be roughly divided into seven categories. Table 2 below shows an overview of which media organizations set out rules of any kind for which aspects in their guidelines.

As an arithmetic mean, the organizations investigated took into account 4.9 of seven content dimensions in their AI guidelines. The broadest were the guidelines from Bayerischer Rundfunk, which cover all seven points, followed by the documents from the news agencies Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau and Deutsche Presse-Agentur, with six dimensions each. The British broadcaster BBC achieved the same number. With four of the content points each, the rules of the Canadian news agency Thomson Reuters and the American magazine *Wired*

Table 2
Content of regulations in AI guidelines of international media

	Jour- nalistic goals and values	Fields of applica- tion	Responsi- ble AI	Transpa- rency	Human control	Forms of collabora- tion	Dynamic nature of the rules
ANP	+	+	+	+	+	−	+
AP	−	−	−	−	−	+	−
BR	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
BBC	+	−	+	+	+	+	+
dpa	+	+	+	+	+	+	−
Thomson Reuters	+	−	+	+	+	−	−
Wired	−	+	−	+	+	−	+

Table compiled by author

are slightly below average. And covering just one of the seven dimensions, the American news agency Associated Press has chosen a comparatively low level of self-regulation. That may be linked to the particular character of the guidelines, which are the only ones not described explicitly as such.

Taking a closer look at the individual fields quickly reveals focus areas in the content. As an arithmetic mean, each individual sphere of self-regulation is covered by 4.9 organizations in their guidelines. Nonetheless, almost all of the editorial offices investigated – six out of seven – say something about the role of human control when AI is used for journalistic end products. This would indicate that most media houses are currently examining the question of whether and when a journalist is to check or approve the contribution of AI from an editorial point of view. Just as often, the guidelines have something to say on the extent to which the contribution of AI should be made transparent to the audience. Five of the seven organizations indicate strategic corporate objectives and journalistic values as reasons behind their AI activities. Just as many placed requirements on trustworthy AI. Less frequently, the guidelines examined addressed the definition of areas of application, forms of interdisciplinary collaboration, and potential updating of the guidelines. All of these cases were covered by just four of the seven editorial offices, in various compositions.

There is a general consensus across all of the guidelines examined that, even in an age of AI-supported journalism, people should still be at the heart of the profession. Among the six guidelines with specific commitments on this, the BBC and Thomson Reuters remain vague. The other four guidelines prescribe a comparably strong position for editors. *Wired* forbids the use of AI text blocks and AI-supported editing completely, while the guidelines from the European

news agencies dpa and ANP provide no exceptions to the obligation for a human to check the relevant texts. Only BR notes that the principle of control can be relaxed if it is replaced by strict examination of the way the algorithms work. Most of the organizations included in the investigation thus completely rule out the idea that text material created or significantly shaped by AI can be used without reflection or critique.

Three of the four news agencies undertake to label the use of AI and thus to make it transparent to users. These agencies include Thomson Reuters, dpa and ANP. Wired, which generally takes a restrictive approach to AI, also has rules on this. The two European broadcasters investigated – BR and the BBC – also commit to transparency. This clearly demonstrates that transparency is an almost universally uncontroversial criterion, at least among the media examined.

Around half of the organizations include possible fields of application for AI in their guidelines. BR and the dpa keep their representations on this comparably abstract, while AP names selected examples from throughout the journalistic production process. American magazine *Wired* is the only organization to address the use of AI-generated images specifically, rejecting the publication of such results in the same way as it does for texts.

It is notable that just five of the seven editorial offices examine in their guidelines the question of which requirements need to be set for responsible AI and what that means for the editorial use of the new technologies. This question is particularly significant given media organizations' potential dependence on the providers of high-performance AI engines, which has already been addressed by researchers (cf. SIMON 2022). The key content-related dimension can be further broken down into individual elements. Four media – ANP, Thomson Reuters, BR and the BBC – set out data protection requirements. The quality of algorithms is explicitly an issue for the dpa, BBC, BR and Thomson Reuters. Only the two broadcasters mention potential problems that can arise from algorithmic distortion.

Outlook

The investigation into seven sets of guidelines for dealing with AI shows that international media organizations are already focusing intensively on key questions thrown up by the new technology. While the documents' authors have focused their attention mainly on human control and transparency for the audience, analysis of the content highlights some sometimes major omissions. By the end of April 2023, only a minority of the media address problems in connection with a possible ›algorithmic bias.‹ And it is not always clear from the guidelines whether all the editorial offices investigated require a critical examination of the quality of the algorithm's training data, especially for journalistic use. The investigation clearly shows that further investigation is needed as the use of

AI continues to spread in journalism. If more media organizations decided to develop AI guidelines and publish them or make them accessible to researchers, this would allow further points to be addressed in a larger sample. These points might include the extent to which the breadth and depth of the rules differs between different types of organization, or the extent to which possible professional and cultural differences between the editorial offices arise in different countries when it comes to the way the guidelines are set out.

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Research Paper

Fred Vultee

Fear and balanced

The world according to the foxnews.com homepage

Abstract: This discourse analysis draws on a database of foxnews.com home-pages from 2022-23 to assess the issues, stories, and actors that help form the worldview of the Fox audience. The thematic assessment is complemented by a study of text features that address licensing: Who speaks and how, and under what conditions? Results address a question that has drawn attention for more than two decades: »What is Fox News?« (BAUER et al. 2021).

Keywords: Fox News, right-wing media, news routines, media agenda, discourse analysis

Introduction

A first-time reader of the midcentury *Chicago Tribune*, press critic A. J. Liebling wrote in 1950, encounters »a land of somber horror« in which some actors and events »superficially resemble« their counterparts in the real world, but one can never be sure. After this initial shock,

> »The Tribune reader issues from his door walking on the balls of his feet, muscles tense, expecting attacks by sex-mad footpads at the next street corner, forewarned against the smooth talk of strangers with a British accent, and prepared to dive behind the first convenient barrier at the sound of a guided missile approaching -- any minute now -- from the direction of northern Siberia« (LIEBLING 1975: 234-235).

Liebling's fanciful encounter with the *Tribune* reflects the intersection of news judgment and public opinion that underlies the agenda-setting process. An issue like the economy might look familiar but is yet unfamiliar because different attributes – its leading actors and its causal factors – structure its narrative

elements differently, while another issue (British treachery or »go woke, go broke«, which appears in seven unique headlines across the study period) looks to the newcomer as if it came from a different planet. A visit to foxnews.com, the home page of the popular right-wing Fox News Channel, provides a rough equivalent today. A vice presidential meeting with allies during an international crisis is a leading story, but it is presented as a repeat-offense example of political misbehavior: »Harris again laughs when facing difficult question« (»Kamala Harris ripped« 2022). Issues that look fanciful, like a purported campaign to insert equity-oriented legal theories into primary classrooms across the nation, become top stories as they take on familiar hero-villain dramatic structures (»Youngkin's CRT tip line in Virginia triggering Dems« 2022). This paper applies discourse analysis to a database of foxnews.com home pages to reconstruct a Fox agenda: not just a place where voters and potential voters absorb information about issues and candidates, as in the original agenda-setting study (MCCOMBS/ SHAW 1972), but a place where they are reminded that what they knew yesterday is still true today. In James Carey's terms, this ritualized form of communication is less about the information itself than »the construction and maintenance of an ordered, meaningful cultural world« (2009: 15). The vice presidential visit is news not because it adds to a store of knowledge about alliance behavior in crises but because familiar authorities on Twitter are called in to police the behavior of Black women who have stepped out of line.

Theory and practice: ›What is Fox News‹?

The Fox News phenomenon has been explored under many perspectives: Classic propaganda studies (CONWAY et al. 2007), comparative framing and sourcing practices (ADAY 2010), influences on COVID compliance (SIMONOV et al. 2020) and voting behavior (DELLAVIGNA/KAPLAN 2008), and as an »ideological clearing-house« for stories of the menacing Other (VULTEE 2009). Aday (2007) suggests that even accounting for standard US media biases toward negativity in selection and authority in sourcing, Fox's partisanship puts it outside the mainstream, but in its time, the conservative America Firstism of the *Tribune* that Liebling remarked was not only mainstream but dominant.

Bauer and colleagues (2021) raised the »What Is Fox News?« question but did not set out to settle it, instead offering a range of perspectives for analyzing partisan news while cautioning scholars not to dismiss it out of hand as mere propaganda. Nor, despite its shrill headlines about episodic deaths, celebrities' romantic lives and crimes against social order, is Fox simply a latter-day tabloid. In classic tabloid style (KOBRÉ 1995), the Fox website makes liberal use of composite images as storytelling devices, but it also adheres to established routines

of »objective« practice: displacing opinions through the use of quotation marks or »expert« opinion or adherence to gatekeeping routines that allow even disfavored actors an appearance (TUCHMAN 1972; WHITE 1950). At the top of the Fox homepage, at least, opinion is carefully labeled to distinguish it from news, regardless of the partisan tilt of the news itself. And if Fox's routines of salience, selection and sizing yield a consistent, natural way the world looks to the regular viewer (ENTMAN 1991; 1993), why is that any more propagandistic than a Vietnam-era US press in which journalists were both »ceremonial protectors of consensus values« and guardians of those values against »those who violate or challenge the political consensus« (HALLIN 1984: 21)?

As Entman (1991) suggested, no single story – or headline, quotation or other framing choice – establishes a news outlet firmly on one end of a political spectrum or another. This project seeks to add to the discussion of partisan news with a large-scale analysis of the Fox homepage as a site of gatekeeping and agenda-setting: the processes by which events are guided into the public arena and then placed in a hierarchy reflecting the salience of the issues they represent and the elements – identifying problems and their causes and implying appropriate moral judgments and solutions (ENTMAN 1993) – that place them in context.

It is the second level of agenda-setting – the framing level (KIM et al. 2002) – at which attributes of these issues or the actors that populate them give Fox its distinctive look. McCombs and Shaw (1993) describe the agenda as a metaphor that applies to any number of communication processes in which issues or objects compete for attention. While the salience of rival candidates in a campaign story will generally be carefully balanced, the issues on which they are assessed and the building blocks from which those issues are assembled will reflect different priorities and are likely to have different effects on different parts of the audience. The 1972 agenda-setting study noted that although news outlets do have points of view (and »sometimes extreme biases«), widely shared professional norms about news values underlie the consensus that forms around the salience of macro-level issues (MCCOMBS/SHAW 1972: 184). The numerous places below that level at which the agenda metaphor is applied – the actors and their roles, the nature of the problem and its solutions, and the moral lessons entailed – help account for the different maps that news organizations present to their audiences.

Those distinctions were not new to the 1968 election examined by McCombs and Shaw (1972). In March 1941, nearly a decade before Liebling sketched the world of the *Chicago Tribune* reader, the issue of providing aid to Britain against Nazi Germany – despite official US neutrality – was salient across the country, but the program known to its advocates as Lend-Lease was the »dictator bill« in the *Tribune*. Those are the moving parts that, in securitization theory (BUZAN et al. 1998; VULTEE 2022b), allow the threats of a culture war to act like those of

a »war on terror,« or like the domino theory in 1968, or a looming world war in 1941. They are identified in the texts and practices that make up news discourse.

Methods

Discourse analysis is best conceptualized as a set of methods used, among other things, to identify »ideological and political dimensions of media messages« (VAN DIJK 1993: 109). It can encompass qualitative and quantitative approaches, draws meaning from both grammar and word choice in news presentations, and can even address meanings created from the words that are not spoken (e.g., CAMERON 1998). This project draws on a database of captures of the foxnews.com homepage from 2022 and the first two months of 2023: 3,064 pages for a total of 15,320 stories, though it also uses other Fox stories not catalogued in the database.

The Fox homepage in this period presents a consistent hierarchy: five main stories are displayed, with the top story twice the width of the others and four stories reflecting the »reading diagonal« of 20th-century journalism textbooks, before a list of secondary stories begins. (The design was changed at the beginning of March 2023, with seven main stories displayed before promotions and sponsored content.) Pages were captured six to eight times a day, allowing for analysis of consistent themes as well as »stickiness«: the persistence of unique stories among the top five from one screen capture to the next. (A story is considered »unique« if the text remains the same, even if the headline and illustration are changed, allowing a more precise measure of how many stories an event might generate in a day or week.) Each story has a main headline – often used to represent the mood or moral lesson of the story – inset in its illustration and a subhead that explains or suggests the elements of the story. Variables recorded for the stories included time and date, position on the page (1-5), image, source of the story, headline and subhead, and whether the story appeared to violate the theatrical »fourth wall« and tell the audience how to interpret the story: for example, a main headline reading »Empty promises« on an article about border-control measures announced by the Biden administration. Because a »sticky« story might appear on the page from afternoon through early morning, multiple occurrences of a phrase with the same story are often collapsed into one unique case.

Provalis WordStat software was used to extract initial issue themes through topic modeling and for keyword-in-context searches that identified key actors, propositional structures and syntactic elements of licensing: which actors are allowed to blast or slam, for example, and which must be passively ripped or mocked.

Stories and actors at foxnews.com

Topic extraction with a limit of 20 themes, based on main headlines and sub-heads, produced sets of keywords that clustered into issues, all with eigenvalues higher than 2. This list was not a measure of topics' frequency but of their coherence. The most coherent topic comprised just five keywords related to the federal search for classified documents at former president Donald Trump's Florida estate: ›Lago‹, ›Mar‹, ›raid‹, ›Trump‹ and ›FBI‹. A similar but less coherent theme about Democratic President Joe Biden included »classified,« »scandal« and »documents« but ranged as far as the president's son, Hunter, and the White House press secretary. Two other Biden-related themes emerged, one concentrating on a plan to relieve student loan debt (28 unique stories across the study period use »student loan handout« in a headline) and one on economic issues (including (»prices,« »gas,« »inflation«,« »oil,« »record,« »Americans,« and the general term »admin«; «Biden admin,« indeed, is the third most frequent phrase in the data set, with 224 occurrences in headlines and subheads).

Other topics reflect issues McCombs and Shaw (1972) identified, such as foreign affairs and »law and order.« The second most coherent topic is the Russia-Ukraine war, followed by a topic that incorporates mass killings (dominated by the knife murder of four students at the University of Idaho, it also includes keywords like »shooting« and »school«) and another law-and-order issue with a distinctive Fox flavor: It includes not only »crime,« but »mayor,« »Dem« and »city« – and, reflecting a trend of conservative southern states sending migrants by bus to northern cities, the keywords »illegal,« »immigrants,« »border« and bus.« »Dem-run« and »Dem-run city« are the 10th and 13th most frequent headline phrases in the dataset.

»Elon Musk« and »Supreme Court« are the fourth and fifth most frequent headline phrases, and Musk's off-again, on-again purchase of Twitter and the US Supreme Court's decision to overturn a fundamental abortion-rights precedent also emerged as strongly coherent topics (»Supreme« by itself is a frequent headline signal: »Supreme battle,« »Supreme slapdown,« »Supreme shockwave,« »Supreme protests,« »Supreme anticipation« all identify stories about the court). The 2022 election is also a coherent topic, though no frequent phrases are associated with it. Several coherent themes represent episodic tabloid fodder: the Johnny Depp-Amber Heard lawsuit and the professional and romantic travails of the American football star Tom Brady. In other themes, though, Fox's ideological orientation stands out more clearly, particularly in the culture wars (including COVID mask requirements, the »war on parents« and lingering resentment from the 2016 election). The death of Elizabeth II and the transition in the British royal family was a story everywhere, but at Fox it is a separate and less coherent topic than the doings of Prince Harry and his American wife, the actor Meghan Markle

(»Prince Harry« and »Meghan Markle« are the 28th and 29th most frequent phrases). Musk's purchase of Twitter is part of a larger theme also drawing on the »Twitter files« (the 30th most common headline phrase), portrayed at Fox as evidence of the Biden camp's collusion with private industry to censor and suppress Fox's heroes. Gender identity also emerges as a coherent topic, with its keywords pointing to a culture-war theme that was already emerging in the third Trump campaign in 2023: »trans,« »swimmer,« »athletes,« »sports,« »women,« and »school.«

»Foreign policy« was salient for all three presidential tickets in the 1968 campaign, and it too outlines a distinct Fox agenda. A China topic comprising »spy,« »balloon,« »China,« »Pelosi,« »Taiwan,« and »missile« suggests what sort of China event does not become a story. A joint press conference March 13, 2023, by Biden and the UK and Australian prime ministers of details on the AUKUS treaty, aimed at countering Chinese influence by (among other things) providing Australia with US nuclear submarines, appears briefly as a »Watch live« video clip whose headline mentions the Chinese »threat« but not the countermeasure. (The homepage on March 13 and 14 did carry two stories about UFOs and one about a truck driver photographing a »ghost-like figure« on the roadside.) A presidential election in France, a nuclear-armed NATO ally, did not appear among the top five stories on pages captured between April 9 and 24 (the election was April 10, with a runoff April 24), though it did reach the No. 4 position on April 25, when the victor was out celebrating: »Biden's call to Macron goes unanswered on election night.« Among the stories that did find a place in the top five during that period were two stories about Hunter Biden (the seventh most frequent headline phrase) and two about his wife, four stories about Biden not going to Ukraine, and stories about COVID hypocrisy, media meltdowns, and textbook restrictions in Florida, along with 10 unique stories about Elon Musk and 19 about the Depp-Heard libel trial. Scholars of international politics have lamented that the US press is a »realism-free zone« (WALT 2008) when it ventures overseas; it is hard not to conclude that national interest is less salient to Fox's news determinations than whether an event might make its political enemies look good or bad.

Some news, of course, is simply news. Fox's early coverage of the invasion of Ukraine looks like US coverage of an international conflict. It is heavily personalized, but the news presentation suggests a clear delineation between aggressor and victim, in contrast to some of Fox's commentary (for example, CARLSON 2022). But Ukraine's decline in salience across the study period is dramatic. Only three unique stories (one about a Twitter poll by Musk) with »Ukraine« in the headline appear in October 2022, with two in November, four in December (the month Ukrainian President Zelenskyy visited Washington) and eight in February 2023, the month Biden visited Ukraine. There was at least one Ukraine story among the top five every day of March 2022.

Attribution and aspects: How events become stories

As Liebling noted of the *Tribune*, an issue can look familiar even though the actors seem to be doing radically different things for radically different reasons than at a competing outlet. The COVID pandemic, identified in a mid-2022 assessment of the data as part of a »culture war« topic that included education and Florida's battle with Disney World, reflects that pattern. A distinctively valenced attribute of COVID is hypocrisy, which is exclusively a property of Fox's villains. The phrase »rules for thee,« or its longer version »rules for thee, not for me,« shows up in nine unique headlines across the study period. Anthony Fauci, then director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, is a frequent actor in COVID stories, but mostly as a foil for right-thinking critics in appearances at the Senate, as an arrogant flip-flopper who ignores the science (»Fauci wants everyone to follow the science even though he doesn't«), and as an overpaid civil servant whose power needs curbing. He appears in 60 unique stories across the study period, sometimes identified as »Dr. Flip-Flop« or »Spin doctor« (which appears in four headlines). Headlines mentioning COVID itself often rely on failed strategies, changes of mind, or misrepresentations of data by the Biden administration or by liberal leaders in cities or states, or the supposed misdeeds of the media. Given the consensus professional norm of holding the powerful to account, none of these cases individually are surprising, but their centrality as aspects of events that drive stories is indicative. The attributes of education as an issue – the stories that are told, the characters who animate those stories and the moral tales that are told – also form a novel world: a »war on parents« in which arrogant school boards refuse to allow debate, tales of adult sex habits, or »critical race theory« are forced into the elementary school classroom, and the federal government pursues parents as if they were terrorists.

Not all law-and-order stories are ideologically valenced. The University of Idaho murders, occurring in a heavily Republican state, were a dominant topic at the end of 2022, appearing among the top five stories at least once a day from Nov. 14 through Dec. 18 (as the lead story at least once on 29 of those days), but partisanship is not mentioned in those headlines. The attribution of leading issues to the failings of political leadership is clear elsewhere in the crime issue. Of 63 unique headlines mentioning »Dem-run« or states, 39 dealt with crime, six with homelessness, and six with migration.

Another consideration in how events reach the top of the homepage is how Fox learns about them. Overall, about half the stories that appear among the top five during the study period are coded as staff-generated (the default when no outside source is indicated or if material from other media complements original reporting). The second-largest category, about 26 %, was sourced to other media outlets, including the traditional prestige media, prominent and obscure new media

outlets (some of them recalling the far-right »vermin press« of the pre-WWII era), and local news organizations – particularly local Fox stations, from which episodic local crime coverage is frequently sourced. Separate coding categories are used for stories with a Fox byline that credit a news agency like Reuters or AP in a note at the end (about 5 %) and stories from other sources that Fox »confirms« or »can confirm« (about 2 %). The third most frequent source, around 11 %, is social media, which can include celebrity confessions, the doings of »influencers« or – more commonly – social media reactions to events or actors (Twitter »erupts« or »explodes« in 15 headlines across the study period.) Around 4 % of stories are sourced to Fox programs, primarily talk shows, and about 1 % are commentaries, almost always clearly labeled as »opinion.« There are only fractional differences between stories that appear once and stories that appear more than once.

Staff-generated stories make up nearly two-thirds of stories in the lead position, followed by stories sourced to other media (about 16 %) and social media (around 9 %), and stories with a news agency contribution noted (around 5 %). Fourteen lead stories, for example, are sourced to the website *Politico* across the study period, and Fox regularly draws on the traditional media outlets it derides. Articles from all sources frequently move up or down the page as the day wears on. In November 2022 alone, 25 articles in the lead position are attributed to social media. Those articles reflect a range of favorite Fox topics, including liberal media misbehavior, the »student loan handout,« Hunter Biden, and especially Elon Musk, who appears in seven. In some of these, »Twitter users« join in to echo Musk (a Google site search indicates that »conservatives on Twitter« was used for attribution in 12 stories that month); in others, a single Musk tweet – even just a single emoji – is enough for a story. Local news reports that month also helped populate the cast of characters that make up the continuing drama at Fox: not just heroes and villains (»Armed men targeted wrong woman in Chicago and now one may not survive«) but victims of the culture wars as well (»Catholic archdiocese under fire for religious beliefs on gender.«).

Repeat appearances, not just by experts (the same Russia expert appears in 21 stories in March 2022) but by the »real people« who add authentic voices to stories, also help strengthen topics like crime, schools, and homelessness. An 83-year-old Vietnam veteran felt safer in the streets of Saigon than in Portland, Oregon, four times between February and May 2023; the same drug counselor appears in 10 stories about homelessness in Seattle from January to March 2023; the same advocate for parents discusses school misdeeds in 13 stories from April 2021 through March 2023.

›Villains, victims, and the virtuous‹

Examining the cast of characters in »Talking Points Memo« editorials by then-Fox commentator Bill O'Reilly in 2005, Conway and colleagues used the framework of pre-WWII propaganda studies to categorize the players in the »the battle between good and evil« (2007: 197). That drama and its cast of »villains, victims and the virtuous« continue today. Terrorism is much less salient than in 2005, and the justice system – particularly »Soros-funded prosecutors« or the federal agencies that investigate Donald Trump – is counted more often among villains, but the military and first responders in general are still virtuous (»Family thanks firefighters for rescuing American flag from devastating inferno«). In some cases, such as the »war on cops« or the battle to keep wokeness out of the military ranks, they qualify as victims. Ordinary Americans can rank among the virtuous too (»Thieves in Dem-led city ransack bands van, fans come to rescue«), particularly when they speak up at school board meetings or when the »good guy with a gun« foils an assault or a robbery. Fox also renders individual Americans as villains, though, singling out individual professors, K-12 teachers, or physicians who transgress culture-war boundaries: speaking about systemic racism or advocating so-called »gender ideology« in schools.

In its dispute with Florida, Disney World provides an example of a nongovernment institutional villain: enjoying supposedly unfair tax advantages, disappointing parents with its wokeness, spreading sexualized messages for children and suppressing its conservative employees. The national salience of the dramas in which Disney found itself was clear between March 30 and April 5, when Disney was among the stop stories every day but one – indeed, producing three unique lead stories on April 1 alone.

Media actors are also frequent institutional or individual villains. *The View*, a daytime talk show on the ABC network, was mentioned in 51 unique headlines/subheads across the study period (»Dim ›View,‹« »Radical ›View,‹« »Violent ›View,‹« »Bad ›View‹«). It is a regular target of conservative slamming, blasting or roasting, and villainous liberal behaviors (panicking, being flustered, descending into chaos) are attributed to its hosts. Similar behaviors are attributed to rival cable network CNN (panicking, being triggered, spiraling into chaos). One of its former hosts, Don Lemon, appears in 26 unique headlines, often as »sour« (5 cases), »bitter« (2 cases) or »seedy.« Developments or doings at CNN, including transgressions like criticizing the virtuous Ron DeSantis, provide five unique stories across the study period, but CNN's reporting or interviews are used for the lead story 15 times. *The New York Times* appears in 27 unique headlines, sometimes for what its opinion writers say or for causing Twitter or the »left-wing media« to »melt down«; the *Times*' reporting is used in 10 Fox lead stories across the study period.

Performers, athletes, and other celebrities can fill multiple roles in top Fox stories. Athletes are villainous when they decline to stand for the national anthem; women athletes are victims of a »gender ideology« that forces them to compete against trans opponents but virtuous when they speak out about their complaints. Actors can be victims when »blacklisted« for their religious beliefs or »silenced for their values«; when they leave Hollywood for a »simpler« or »Christian« life or battle the »parenting police« (six stories across the study period).

The behavior of athletes or fans is sometimes more relevant than the game itself. Players and fans can be enraged or outraged by a referee's call (as consecutive headlines on the same page noted in January 2023), even if neither story mentions the outcome of the game. Similarly, a »basketball brouhaha« (a fight in which two players were ejected during the third quarter) can make the top five without needing to mention the final score. Neither Fox nor the readers who left comments on the article needed to specify the players' ethnicity:

>»Can we just throw them some peanuts«

>»Why do they need a full month for their history? A minute is more than sufficient« [The game was played during Black History Month.]

>»NBA. NOTHING BUT ANIMALS«

Lexical choices can also make it easier to identify regular actors. Twenty unique stories have »gaffe« in the headline; 11 of the gaffes belong to Biden (with two by his wife, Jill Biden) and four to Vice President Harris, with two of the remaining ones from organized labor and a TV program. »Word salad« in headlines is uniquely attributed to Harris. Developments are »bombshells« in the headlines of 80 stories. The largest single proportion of these represent crime or court proceedings; counting the Depp-Heard civil trial, 25 % of cases concern crime and courts. Other instances track with salient issues even as they illuminate the characters: Hillary Clinton and the investigation of Trump's often-proclaimed »Russia hoax« produced nine bombshells; Musk/Twitter and celebrities in general, eight each; the Biden administration, seven (10 if Hunter Biden bombshells are included); the UK royal family, six; and the Supreme Court, five.

Blasting, slamming, roasting: How participation is licensed

The villain-victim-virtuous distinction also explains how actors are licensed to enter the conversation in stories at the Fox homepage. Grammar – the ways in which sentences are assembled, not the prescriptive howls of the journalism textbook – helps fill out that explanation further. Verb voice suggests who can speak and under which conditions: who is allowed to slam or blast a political actor or policy, and which actors and policies must passively submit to being mocked or roasted. Broadly, victims and the virtuous do the bulk of the slamming and

blasting, while villains – the media, the Biden administration, liberal prosecutors – are the recipients. The main distinction between 2022 and similar findings from 2021 is the large presence of an international actor, Russia, as a slam target. Because blasting and slamming are among the beloved »action verbs« of news textbooks and style manuals (e.g. MENCHER 1993), they are common across professional media, but the license to blast is an indicator of the partisan leanings underlying a news outlet's agenda: the degree to which all bureaucratic practices are slammed, rather than just those of one party or inclination. Discounting literal uses (storms slamming the coast or blasts ringing out), slamming and blasting are used broadly passive, with mocking and roasting much more so.

The primary targets of active slamming are liberal or Democratic political figures or institutions and the media; those are also the most frequent targets of passive slamming, though the relative positions can change across time. Active slamming is predominantly the role of virtuous actors. These can be political elites (members of Congress, former governors, a »GOP Senate hopeful«) or officials or organizations representing public safety or perspectives or the general »virtuous« position of Fox News favorites (police departments or unions, prosecutors, the National Rifle Association, »pro-life« groups), but occasionally ad hoc social groups (Canadian »freedom convoys«). From the supposedly liberal perspective, active slamming is most often licensed in cases of apostasy: a writer for *The Atlantic* can slam CNN for how it quotes the president, a »progressive journo« can slam Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (a frequent target of blasting, slamming, and mockery) for attending the Met Gala, a supposedly liberal *New York Times* columnist can slam »crazies« advocating sex education, and the ubiquitous liberal commentator Bill Maher can slam cancel culture and hypocrisy. The White House and more liberal Democrats can slam each other at will. In a rare exception in this data set, pro-choice activists were allowed to slam the leaked Supreme Court decision to abolish Roe v. Wade in one headline. An unusual exception created by the war in Europe is the licensing of disfavored actors to slam. Biden, for example, can slam Vladimir Putin, and the US and NATO can slam Russian disinformation.

Active and passive blasting follow similar conventions but with different exceptions. Professional sports organizations are usually among the virtuous, but when they turn against their supporters (NASCAR rescinding approval of a sponsorship by a cryptocurrency website that had repeated an anti-Biden slur), they can be passively blasted. Villainous actors can be targeted actively and passively (»Candace Owens blasts AOC for bratty response« and »AOC blasted for bulls--- answer«), and active blasting is open to a wider range of nonelites: for example, a lone dad can »blast CRT in scathing speech« as he takes on a school board, or an individual restaurateur can blast a »high-profile Dem« who ignores COVID rules.

Mockery follows similar rules. The conservative ranks can be policed in a process that resembles blasting. Like the police, the military is usually unassailable as a revered institution, but when (under Democratic leadership) it considers »diversity, equity and inclusion« to be »necessities,« it too can be mocked.

Though this analysis generally excludes subordinated forms of mockery (in which the mocking takes place in a subordinate or relative clause), some of those cases are relevant: »Doctor tears into hosts after they mock easing of COVID-19 rules« and »Kamala's off-script moment becomes social media field day for mocking her« both suggest that mocking follows similar rules even when it is not the motive force of the main clause.

Speech acts: Speaking out and breaking silence

A »Disney employee« appears to be an apostate in headlines from March 31 and April 1: »Disney employee's surprising message on what workers really think of Florida's parental rights law«; »Disney employee breaks silence on how workers really feel about FL law«; and »Disney employee's dire warning about economic fallout from ›leftward lurch‹.« The reader who clicks through from the homepage to the story would learn that the employee is also seeking the Republican nomination for a Florida congressional seat. That observation points to another practice that is common to the environment of interactive journalism but contributes to – or cannot be ruled out as a factor in – the agenda of attributes at the Fox homepage.

To »break silence« describes an action and assumes a prior silence. While this often is not borne out in the text – the »silence« can be a matter of hours – the implication is that a corner has been turned. Similar verbs include speaking out, sounding the alarm, and getting brutally honest (most often applied to Democratic figures).

Silence-breaking is repeatable as well as accessible to multiple actors. Consider the case in which the actor Will Smith slapped presenter Chris Rock during the March 2022 Academy Awards ceremony. Although Smith had apologized to his colleagues while accepting an award later in the ceremony, and addressed the matter after his resignation from the academy, he again broke his silence on July 29. Rock broke his own »silence« in the lead article shortly after midnight on March 31; three of the top five stories in this capture addressed the slapping incident.

Other reactions to that event highlight the villains/virtuous distinction. »Woke media« blamed »White supremacy« for the outrage that followed the slap, and a CNN anchor was »mocked for who she blames,« but a favored actor – commentator Maher (whose comments made the top 5 stories 32 times during the study period) – »destroys Hollywood libs« for their response.

Silence can also remain unbroken, and this is a convenient way of policing disfavored actors: the Black basketball player LeBron James and the Disney corporation can both be criticized for not speaking out on China. But a Black performer who speaks about »cancel culture,« like Dave Chappelle, remains on the side of the virtuous. Similarly, matters of news practice that might be invisible to the naked eye can contain suggestions about how the value of news is determined.

Markers of practice

The investment of staff time (a zero-sum commodity) and the perceived value that a news organization can add above what the audience could get from any other news outlet are among the indicators of news value hierarchies at Fox. Thirty years ago, this might have looked like the local newspaper that subscribed to a supplemental news service (from the *New York Times,* the *Los Angeles Times*, or *Washington Post*), giving it a product that set it apart from competitors relying solely on a general service like the AP.

A news organization's own survey research represents a substantial investment of time and effort, yet Fox's own monthly polling on presidential approval does not provide headlines for the top five stories. That is not to suggest that presidential approval is not a salient issue. A January headline, for example, contended that »Joe's poll numbers are getting so bad, McEnany had to ›double-check‹ them,« reflecting a Quinnipiac survey in which 35 % of respondents approved of the president's job performance; Fox's poll that month had the approval figure at 47 %.

»Biden's approval dives into uncharted territory for the first time in his presidency« was a February headline reporting the Real Clear Politics »average« at 39 % approval; Fox's survey showed 43 % approval. Similarly, in March, »Biden approval rating sinks to new low as Americans doubt his ability to handle Russian invasion« (NBC poll with approval at 39 %; Fox's March poll, 44 %; in May, »Joe's new low: Biden's abysmal approval rating plummets again in new poll« (Associated Press poll with 39 % approval; Fox's May poll, 45 %); in June, »Joe's woes: Biden's approval rating plunges as doubts fester among Democrats« (USA Today/Suffolk poll with 39 % approval; Fox's June poll, 43 %).

Many news organizations do a poor job interpreting public opinion surveys. Fox's reporting on its own polling (as opposed to interpreting others' work) stands out for its caution; for example, it applies a »margin of error« to both points in a sample when discussing whether a candidate or issue »leads« in a poll. A quality national survey is expensive; the congruence of a poll's findings with the institutional agenda, even if approval plummets or plunges to the

same point month after month, clearly outweighs the value of promoting that investment.

The role of public opinion is also reflected in another development that, if not unique to Fox, plays out distinctively there. »Digital Originals,« an update on the old »man in the street« or »inquiring photographer« format of the *Tribune's* glory days, touches on two key matters: how opinion is represented, and what sort of sample is allowed to represent it. »Digital Originals« appear in 73 unique stories across the study period; here are some example headlines, subheads, and data:

»Free fall: Americans asked to grade Biden as president's poll numbers plummet« (Jan. 19; 6 people identified by first names, one with no names)

»Do your job: Southern voters get very blunt about what they want from their president« (Feb. 22; five interviewees identified by first name only, one as »the Atlanta woman«)

»›A bunch of bull‹: Frustrated Americans getting crushed at the pump aren't buying Biden's response« (March 10; four people identified by first name only)

»›He's killing this economy‹: Americans sound off on inflation struggles after Biden claims his administration is changing lives« (June 18; seven grocery shoppers in New York and Virginia, all identified by first name only)

»›Marching in place‹: Americans get brutally honest when asked about state of the country« (March 24; five people in Washington, DC, all first names only)

»›A lot of people struggling‹: Americans get bluntly honest about Biden as inflation surges to record highs« (April 15; six people in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, all first names only)

The quotations, usually on camera, are easy to verify and reflect a familiar practice of objectivity; just as a story reporting on a random-sample survey, they usually reflect a balance of viewpoints. But the »brutally honest« story they tell is shaped by the headlines.

Conjunctive propositions

Van Dijk (1993) refers to the proposition as »the conceptual meaning structure of a clause«; Huddleston and Pullum (2002) suggest that the proposition is the abstract element that carries a truth value and thus allows a clause to assert a claim about truth. This abstract-seeming excursion into the grammatical side of discourse analysis becomes more concrete when considering a standard practice of connecting ideas in headlines. Because headlines need to be both wide-reaching and concise, it is common to join two propositions that express similar truth values: »Red Sox win as Yankees lose on the road,« for example. The sleight of hand arises when the conjunction joins propositions of unequal weight, such as a measurable event and a surmise: »Educator speaks out as community explodes over critical race theory,« for example, connects an event with a surmise: A way

things should be, even if not a way things are. This process allows statements about how the way things ought to be – gasoline prices should still be soaring, and the president's approval rating should still be plummeting – to reinforce the attributes contained in the statement of how things are.

A headline like »Heroic firefighters praised as cause of deadly high-rise inferno revealed« looks perfectly normal because it is. Both propositions – the praise and the revelation – can be connected to concrete, measurable events. The modifier »heroic« breaks the fourth wall in favor of the virtuous (first responders are presumptively heroes in Fox articles), but that sort of evaluation is also routine in news stories. »Biden walks on eggshells as approval sinks, far-left loses confidence« (under the main headline »How low can you go«), on the other hand, relies on the fact of sinking approval, which is not borne out in the data: Biden's approval, at 43 % in one survey that was in the field when the headline appeared, had been consistent between 40 % and 44 % in the two weeks preceding.

A similar pattern can be observed in headlines about crime (»Legally armed drivers in liberal city take action as carjackings surge across US«), international issues (»World holds its breath as ›weak‹ Joe contemplates deploying troops, shifting restrained NATO stance«), and relations with the conservative press (»Raging Biden curses out Fox News' Peter Doocy as he takes his bitterness towards press to a new level«).

This situation can also occur when both propositions are hypothetical, as a subordinated clause creates the truth of the independent clause. In »New Harris staffer already on defensive as old tweet comes back to haunt him,« the old tweet's function is still a supposition, but it establishes the correctness under which »on the defensive« operates. (Liberals, again, are the primary targets when the past »comes back to haunt« someone.)

Discussion

Fox News's website is a distinctive product, much like the *Tribune* that landed on Liebling's breakfast tray: idiosyncratic, party-aligned, and in no doubt about who its enemies – and its heroes – are. Whether or how those characteristics distinguish either Fox or the *Tribune* from partisan journalism, or even from journalism as a whole, is the core of the »What is Fox News?« question raised by Bauer et al. (2021). Their call is for a »richer vocabulary« through which these gradations can be made clearer and for more attention to the different meanings that a news presentation can make for different audiences: lay, professional or scholarly. This paper has tried to identify the themes and actors that make the day's news into such different plays on different stages.

Any single moment of partisan or post-partisan news is hard to distinguish from »regular« news because, in isolation, hostility toward official actors or suspicion about their actions is impossible to distinguish from a professional consensus on the press's »watchdog« role. Sourcing practices that devalue the news organization's investments of time and effort – ignoring in-house surveys in favor of external surveys that support a broader issue of presidential failure and weakness – might in isolation appear to be no more than careful surveillance of the media environment to bring audiences the latest in relevant news. Any day's Ukraine news might call for an in-house expert to assess Vladimir Putin's psychological state, rather than the effect of NATO munitions on Russian resupply lines.

Only in context do these cases form attributes that veer from the professional ideologies that painted such a congruent picture for McCombs and Shaw's Chapel Hill audience. Narratives in which the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention change its COVID guidance because »the science,« or a recognition that science is inseparable from cultural concerns in risk communication (DOUGLAS 1992), has changed never become part of the discourse. There are no cases in which Twitter explodes in favor of a policy aimed at reducing carbon emissions. The vice president is never a figure of policy, only a figure of ridicule; presidential approval is forever plummeting, even when it is rising. As Carey (2009:16) put it, the Fox agenda presents »a situation in which nothing new is learned but in which a particular view of the world is portrayed and confirmed.« Rather than being a right-wing fabrication that functions to separate the angry from their money (WALLACE-WELLS 2021), the supposed insertion of critical race theory into primary schools becomes a threat to the future of society itself: »the sustainability [...] of traditional patterns of language, culture and religious and national identity and custom« (BUZAN et al.1998: 119). Again, though, step forward the news organization that did not make space for *Saturday Night Live's* re-creation of the bed-fouling tale from the Depp-Heard trial or otherwise presented a »dramatic action in which the reader joins a world of contending forces as an observer at a play« (CAREY 2009: 16-17). Fox is eager to speak truth to power, as long as it does not have to speak truth to its own allies in the process.

The repetition of these narratives and their seeming urgency – critical race theory looms over the opening of a new school year, presidential fecklessness is moving China closer to world dominance by the day, cities will collapse under the self-induced burdens of crime and homelessness – support the suggestions of securitization theory (BUZAN et al. 1998) that cultural security calls for immediate corrective action because otherwise the possibility of action is lost forever. A challenge with the Fox news diet is that it contains no servings smaller than extra-large; whichever side is winning, there is no respite from the ultimate battle of good and evil.

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Research Paper

Horst Pöttker

Separating advertising business from journalism

How pertinent is Karl Bücher's 1919 concept for press reform today?

Abstract: **The purpose of this article is to raise awareness for fundamental problems of journalistic quality assurance. To do this, we analyzed Karl Bücher's largely forgotten reform concept of 1919 against the backdrop of current media developments for its sociopolitical relevance, its merits and flaws compared to other concepts of journalistic quality assurance (most of which Bücher himself already mentioned at the time), its applicability to various media, and its political, legal, and economic viability. Our hypothesis is that the most promising and viable approach is to extend the principle of public broadcasting to other media.**

Keywords: Karl Bücher, journalistic quality, local media, public media, ideology of economic growth, ad free

During World War I, the press largely forfeited the achievements in journalistic-professional qualities that it had attained by the end of the 19th century in certain places, especially in the U.S. and Scandinavia (cf. HOYER/PÖTTKER 2014: 7-136). In every country involved in the conflict, the press was reduced to little more than a propaganda tool of the warring governments and militaries. Moreover, in a capitalist structure, »a newspaper [is] a profit-making enterprise that produces and sells advertising space and whose selling point is the editorial section« (BÜCHER 1926: 397). It had become clear that in this situation it was difficult, indeed impossible, for the press to guarantee a thorough political discourse. Now that digitization has plunged advertising revenues into a dangerous

demise, many would be thrilled if they still could cross-finance journalistic media through advertising. Yet back then, when military defeat and the November Revolution in Germany had exposed the urgency of fundamental reforms in many areas of social life (cf. e.g. GEIGER 1920), Karl Bücher, a world-renowned economist with proximity to the Social Democrats, founder of newspaper studies as well as of university-based journalists' training in Germany, presented a concept for a »press reform« with the objective of limiting the harmful influence of the advertising business on journalistic media. His concept did not entail a »fundamental transformation of private capitalist production into social production« (BÜCHER 1926: 394), but instead, merely meant to solve »a pure question of expediency« which »the old state should have solved already if it had understood what was its own best interest« (BÜCHER 1926: 394).

1. Karl Bücher's 1919 Concept of a Sweeping Press Reform

Bücher, who mocked Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' »wisdom [...] as dark and ambiguous as the Delphic oracle in antiquity« (BÜCHER 1926: 394), took his cue from Ferdinand Lassalle's 1862 program »A Concept for a Daily Press in a Democratic State« (BÜCHER 1926: 395), a work which had also already sunk into oblivion at the time. He agreed with Lassalle that the economic interconnection of advertising business and journalism in the newspaper industry was the »true root of the problem« (BÜCHER 1926: 404). Even if the ad section and the editorial section are separated in the physical paper, as professional ethics prescribe, the press is unlikely to represent the »interests of mankind« (BÜCHER 1926: 397), not least those of workers and wage earners, but will instead prioritize the interests of capital and its owners. That is because the editorial section, »by default, would have to exclude anything« that might »damage the advertising section, the economic lifeblood of the newspaper« (BÜCHER 1926: 397). In order to free journalism from this economic constraint and empower it to fully pursue its task of unbiased, accurate, and fearless reporting, Lassalle and Bücher called for a separation of the advertising business and journalism in a way that was ethically sound as well as legally, economically, and organizationally sustainable.

Bücher quotes from Lassalle's 1863 speech »Die Feste, die Presse und der Frankfurter Abgeordnetentag«:

»»A social democratic state needs to legally prohibit any newspaper from advertising and make it the exclusive purview of official gazettes published by the state or the municipalities. [...]. From that moment on, newspapers will cease to be a lucrative monetary speculation. [...]. From that moment on, journalist will no longer be a job, it will be a vocation. [...]. This [...] measure will benefit all, and in a social democratic state, it would bring about a total transformation of the press in its innermost essence.«« (BÜCHER 1926: 409)

Bücher first mentions that Lassalle's basic idea of a state monopoly on advertising had been discussed several times before, including by Heinrich von Treitschke and Eduard von Hartmann (cf. BÜCHER 1926: 411). Since Bücher deemed these previous proposals unrealistic and therefore impracticable (cf. BÜCHER 1926: 410-416), he formulated his own legislative proposal based on Lassalle's basic ideas on behalf of the current Bavarian Finance Minister Jaffé in early 1919. He was under no illusions regarding its media-political feasibility. Even though his draft ran aground and was largely forgotten, Bücher's concept of a public monopoly on advertising in order to separate advertising and journalism is worth a closer look.

Lassalle already stated that ads should be allowed »only in the official gazettes published by the state or the municipalities«. This was a continuation of an earlier mandate to post certain information in state-run »intelligence papers,« which had been abolished 13 years earlier (1850) (cf. PÜRER/RAABE 2007: 64). The fact that the mandate had been dropped suggests that it could not have been all too vital a source of public revenue. In his proposal, Bücher sought to create

> »an advertising monopoly that should not be operated [...] by the state, but by the municipalities. This is based on the fact that the German press has always tended to be a local press« (BÜCHER 1926: 418),

which is still true today compared to France or England. The concept practical-mindedly also called for municipal gazettes, which were delivered free of charge to all households, to appear more frequently in larger municipalities than in smaller ones, according to the number of inhabitants; ad pricing was to be based on print runs, as was customary; and in addition to »private, locally relevant ads« and »state and municipal announcements,« these municipal gazettes were to feature an »editorial section« limited to »the latest news as well as instructive and entertaining articles« (BÜCHER 1926: 421). Experience had shown that »it was impossible to run a profitable business with advertisements alone« (BÜCHER 1926: 421), because ads-only papers would not be appealing »without an instructive and entertaining section« (BÜCHER 1926: 417), and consequently attract no or not enough advertisers. According to Bücher's concept, these editorial sections of the local and regional gazettes, which several municipalities could publish jointly, were to contain notices, preferably with »the news of the telegraph bureau,« but also be open to »pieces of instructional and entertaining content,« for which »the state [...] must maintain a uniform correspondence bureau« (BÜCHER 1926: 422).

»The entire political press,« on the other hand, by which Bücher meant private-sector and, above all, national newspapers, was to be »prohibited from taking out any kind of advertisement« (BÜCHER 1926: 420). According to Section 9 of his draft, these newspapers would have to »pay an appropriate fee« in order to be »permitted to print official announcements« (BÜCHER 1926: 424). His

explanation of this point reveals the renowned national economist's unconventional mindset:

>This is virtually a reversal of the present situation, because right now, authorities have to pay to place such notices in the newspapers. But it should be obvious that such notices are, as a rule, matters of public interest, and it is indicative of an unhealthy development that state and local governments aren't even able to publicize their own announcements for free in the same way they secured free carriage of letter mail on the railroad trains.« (BÜCHER 1926: 424)

Bücher then elaborates on how the existing private press would evolve under his concept, which once again shows that the ultimate goal of his reform proposal was to liberate the journalistic profession, and thus public discourse, from the influence of powerful, primarily economic, special interests.

The press will be »freed from the pressures of the publisher's interests, which are tied to the advertising section. Lassalle already spelled out what this means for editorial work. Certain types of material will be unavailable to it, but with regard to instructive and entertaining content and local news, it will be able to compete with the municipal gazettes, and with regard to political matters, discourse will have to take the place of mere news reporting. [...]. Public opinion will still be able to express itself in periodical publications, unfettered by the considerations that restrain it today.« (BÜCHER 1926: 424f.)

2. Socio-political relevance

Without any claim to completeness, I will focus on three problem areas that illustrate the socio-political relevance of a stricter separation of professional journalism and advertising in or similar to the way Karl Bücher envisioned it in 1919: *the ideology of growth*, *the loss of credibility*, especially in politics, and *the precarious future of the journalistic profession*.

In Western industrialized countries, we have been living in material abundance for a century, which means that the needs of the population have to be adapted to the profit-oriented production of goods and services, and not vice versa. This phenomenon has long been the subject of critical social analysis and social philosophy. In an economy and a society of abundance, advertising becomes a system-relevant factor that drives the inevitable growth of consumption and production that is the declared tenet of capitalism, as social science classicist Theodor Geiger soberly noted and analyzed in his 1940 »Critique of Advertising« (Danish: Kritik af Reklamen) (cf. GEISSLER/PÖTTKER 1987). Criticism of advertising was a core point of the Frankfurt School's system critique (cf. MARCUSE 1969).

Considering the historically evolved systemic relevance of advertising, we might initially assume that municipal advertising monopolies would be financially worthwhile for the public sector. In 1850, when mandatory posting of ads

and information seemed to have become obsolete, Germany was still ruled by a demand-based economy in which goods were scarce. The transition to an advertising-driven economy of abundance, which brought with it a highly lucrative private advertising business, did not begin until the second half of the 19th century.

Since the late 1960s[1], a new concern has arisen: the conservation of Earth's limited natural resources. A movement against the destruction of natural resources is on the rise, still obscure in Germany's political spectrum, but growing around the world, which ultimately also endangers the capitalist economy. The proponents of this movement voice compelling doubt about the delusion of compatibility of environmental and climate protection and unbridled economic growth (which the parties of the German governing coalition still share, albeit *cum grano salis*) (cf. JACKSON 2011, 2021):

> »The relentless pursuit of perpetual growth has brought us ecological destruction, financial frailty, and social instability. Did this myth ever serve its purpose at all? That is not entirely clear. Its fatal fallacy lies in the assumption that more is always better. In a world of scarcity, this may be justified to a certain extent. But in a world of abundance, it is categorically wrong.«[2]

Similar sentiments are now also being voiced in Germany, at least from an economic and climate science perspective, among others by renowned authors such as Ulrike Herrmann or Toralf Staud (cf. HERRMANN 2022; REIMER/STAUD 2021).

One step away from growth mania and towards truly reining in superfluous, ecologically destructive growth could be to contain and isolate the blind, unfettered, interest-driven force of advertising. While it should not be banned from the public sphere, since that would conflict with the principle of free expression, it should be governed and set apart in a way that the public can better gauge its questionable promises. If, as Bücher suggested, advertising were confined to community-based media only, communities would not only enjoy a lucrative new source of revenue, but readers, listeners, and viewers could be more conscious and methodical about their media consumption and how they satisfy their own information needs. This may foster more cautious, economical consumption patterns.

There might be similar effects on the credibility crisis suffered by the ruling classes in politics, the media, or the economy, which threatens to grow into an outright rejection of liberal democracy and the social market economy. For decades, communication scholars have been pointing out, rather inconsequentially, that the creeping loss of legitimacy has also been caused by the media system itself and its entangled mesh of private and public interests, advertising, and journalism (see, for example, PÖTTKER 1988). Its inherent problem is that the public has come to measure political and economic reality against an unrealistic

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1 On St. Patrick's Day in 1968, Robert F. Kennedy gave a groundbreaking speech on the subject. In 1972, the Club of Rome issued its cautionary report »The Limits to Growth«.
2 Tim Jackson, economist, University of Surrey, speaking on the radio.

benchmark: an embellished reality created by persuasive public communication – advertising and corporate or political PR (»propaganda«). This creates overblown expectations which our experienced reality can hardly meet, and even less so the world that the media construct (and have good reason to do so): a world focused on grievances, problems, and failures (cf. PÖTTKER 2021).

The legitimacy of political, corporate, and media elites (cf. PÖTTKER 1996) is dwindling, and significant, expanding sections of the population now mistrust the system as such. This can be attributed, among other things, to excessive credulity vis-à-vis advertising versus the poor credibility of journalism, as the two are entrenched in an economic and organizational mesh that is difficult to unravel. So perhaps we must take legal and economic reform steps to disentangle the two spheres in the way that Karl Bücher envisioned, and thus counteract further delegitimization of the political-economic system – in our case in Germany and the EU, liberal democracy in conjunction with a social market economy – since people could better assess information values and better discern the illusory nature of persuasive communication.

A third area in which the current sociopolitical relevance of Bücher's concept is particularly evident, if only indirectly, is the future of journalism as a profession, which has been made precarious by digitization and the resulting collapse of the profession's economic foundations. If advertising were the exclusive domain of community-based media, as Bücher spelt out in detail, the advertising industry would reap no economic advantages, but rather be disadvantaged because ads would be distributed to everyone free of charge, which would cause the advertisers considerable, and perhaps even greater than normal, scatter losses. This is an opportunity to reduce advertising and its associated overproduction, which is an urgent imperative from an ecological perspective. Above all, however, an ad-free press system is an opportunity for the journalistic profession to better focus on its task of generating a public sphere, uninfluenced by private interests, which is essential for modern societies to perceive and regulate their problems (cf. PÖTTKER 2010). This would not mean abandoning the objective of increasing circulation, ratings, and clicks; the objective of publicity would still be to provide as much correct and essential information as possible to as many people as possible. It would merely mean that journalists could strive for this goal unconstrained by the demands of advertisers, driven only by benchmarks of journalistic qualities, such as accuracy, relevance, and clarity, even when sharing inconvenient information (cf. PÖTTKER 2000). Bücher's concept is thus a proposal to strengthen quality journalism.

For some time now, journalism scholars, in their critical support of the journalism profession, have been emphasizing the changing role of journalism in a flood of digitized news that is swamping media users unsolicited and free of charge. Today, they argue, quality journalism must be less about communicating

facts and more about explaining, classifying, and assessing them, which could be called explanatory or guiding journalism. Mitchell Stephens speaks of »wisdom journalism« (cf. STEPHENS 2014; PÖTTKER 2018). Karl Bücher recognized these connections a century ago when he wrote, in support of his own reform concept:

> »It seemed expedient to create a monopoly for all the latest news [...] and to make their publication . [...] the exclusive purview of the municipal gazettes. This would relieve the [...] free daily press of the need to feature such news in their own media. They could still obtain ›private telegrams‹ and keep correspondents in foreign capitals, as some larger newspapers have been doing. But primarily, privately published newspapers would be limited to discussing topical political issues, and they would look more like magazines. Regarding instructional content, entertainment, and local news, they would be free to compete with the community gazettes.« (BÜCHER 1926: 422)

Concentration and a reduction of vast amounts of repetitive news on the one hand, and deeper research, more background, better versed correspondent reports on the other hand: Bücher outlines the very direction where the profession might still find its future today. The fact that weekly newspapers like *Die Zeit* tend to struggle less with (circulation) problems than the daily press proves that this is no illusion.

3. Comparison with other media policy reform concepts

In our search for other, and perhaps better media policy reform concepts, Karl Bücher very helpfully identifies, examines, and criticizes alternatives in his essay before presenting and justifying his own concept. I will limit myself to four concepts, which have been tested in varying degrees in the century since Bücher's proposition: *nationalization of the media*; *separation of non-political and political media*, with political media being published by political parties only, possibly with an obligation to correct errors; and *controlling access to the profession* by way of institutionalized training. I will also discuss one other model Bücher did not mention: the *public media model*, the one with which we have the most real-life experience.

Bücher is very clear on nationalization:

> »It has been suggested by other parties that the publication of newspapers by private individuals be banned altogether. The press should be nationalized, just like the railroads. I don't need to enter into a lengthy argumentation to say that this would place the tremendous power of the newspapers entirely in the hands of the government. Editors and journalists would become state officials who would have to reign in their expressions of opinion and follow the directives of the supreme power of the state. There is no doubt that all the advantages of freedom of the press would be destroyed in one fell swoop and that all freedom of expression would be suppressed. Of course, such a press would also immediately lose the confidence of the public [...]« (BÜCHER 1926: 399)

We fully agree with this, and it is almost superfluous to mention that nationalization could also be passed off and legitimized as »socialization« by the powers that be, as Bücher discusses elsewhere. The potential counterargument that scientists in state-run universities, for example, don't (have to) say what the ruling class wants is invalid because scientific statements in specialist organs do not carry nearly as much political weight as journalistic headlines that reach a wide audience.

There are only few counterexamples that would speak for media nationalization as an alternative to a capitalist media structure. One is the *Wiener Zeitung*, now discontinued after three centuries. This paper showed that even when a medium is in the hands of the state, its editorial staff can safeguard its relative independence if appropriate legal and economic organizational precautions are taken.

Bücher is also no proponent of Wilhelm Feilinger's concept, offered in 1915 in the journal *Die Tat* entitled »The Problem of the Newspaper«. He proposes a strict »separation between political and non-political newspapers«. Under this concept, non-political papers would be private companies and not allowed to publish anything political. Political media »are only published by the political parties« (BÜCHER 1926: 400). Bücher's main problem with this approach is the threat to internal freedom of the press visa-vis media owners and their controlling bodies. Feilinger did not go into any detail about the »internal organization« of his »exclusively political party press,« but he seems to presume that

> »following the pattern of social democratic papers, the newspapers in each community would be placed under the control of a press committee. The editorial offices would depend on and be controlled by this committee. However, it is clear that this would not improve their situation much, since such supervisory committees would ensure that newspapers toe the party line. Anything that makes the party appear in a good light would be favored, anything that might harm it would be suppressed. Personal opinions would be given just as little space as with a private publisher who demands protection of his business interests.« (BÜCHER 1926: 400)

On this, Bücher was in line with Friedrich Engels, who told August Bebel that he and Marx had always agreed that they wanted newspapers to be financially independent of the (socialist, communist, social democratic) party so they could serve as a critical corrective (cf. MARX/ENGELS 1969: 234).

Bücher also considered this concept incompatible with the parties' limited representativeness of the population and the legitimate information needs of the many citizens who do not align with any party:

> »Like the proportional representation system that has since been introduced, Feilinger's proposition completely disregards the fact that the population of a country cannot be fully aligned with its political parties and that there are countless people who want to read newspapers without aligning with any party.« (BÜCHER 1926: 401)

A third reform option that Bücher critically examined is access control to the journalistic profession by requiring aspiring journalists to complete institutionalized courses and to be aware of and consent to a sanctioned professional standard of conduct. The state could sponsor such journalistic degree programs and codes of conduct as well as act as the instance that verifies proof of professional competence. Alternatively, or in addition to this, journalists could have their own professional associations and chambers, similar to doctors, lawyers, or architects. This latter point is a key aspect for Gustav Maier, whose proposals Bücher is quoting here (cf. MAIER 1915/16). Nonetheless, Bücher remains skeptical, pointing out that

>one [might] conclude that the state should set the standards for initial training and prescribe examinations for admission to the profession. Anyone who fails the exam would not be allowed to be employed as an editor or journalist.« (BÜCHER 1926: 402)

Although he had already created a concept for university-based journalistic training prior to World War I (cf. KUTSCH 2010), Bücher also makes a plea for journalism as a talent-based profession:

>Also, exams alone do not guarantee good journalistic quality. We definitely should not fall into Chinese Mandarinism here. Rather, we should be pleased to have a profession that values personalities according to their achievements, and where the gifted can rise to well-respected positions, even as autodidacts.« (BÜCHER 1926: 403)

While I understand Bücher's sensitivity to the risks, especially of state-imposed, mandatory access conditions for the journalistic profession, as implemented in the National Socialist Schriftleitergesetz of 1933 (cf. BUNDESZENTRALE FÜR POLITISCHE BILDUNG 2018) or in the quasi-monopoly held by the department of journalism at the Karl Marx University of Leipzig in the GDR, it is legitimate and, in liberal democracies, also productive for the public sector to provide journalistic training opportunities, e.g., at universities, as long as they are not a mandatory prerequisite to enter the profession. In the U.S., a large proportion of journalists have been trained at public universities since the 1920s (cf. HARNISCHMACHER 2010), and its shows in the quality of U.S. journalism[3]. In Germany, too, free access to the journalism profession, as guaranteed by the German Supreme Court, has not prevented quite a few federal states from establishing training and continuing education opportunities for journalists at public universities since the 1970s.

But Bücher is undoubtedly right about one thing. He expected newspaper publishers would »find it difficult to agree to such a change« (BÜCHER 1926: 403) towards mandatory training and thus a narrower selection of journalistic staff. German publishers of his time, who were closely tied to party politics, were also

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3 Even U.S. tabloids like *USA Today* observe the rules for presenting poll results prescribed in the German Press Code of Guideline 2.1, which are largely ignored by the German media. It was journalists, along with members of the legal profession, who stood up against the de-democratization tendencies of the Trump era.

reluctant to accept even voluntary public educational opportunities, while in the U.S., publishers such as Joseph Pulitzer even championed Journalism Studies at universities (cf. PÖTTKER 2020). The comparative averseness towards academic journalistic training in Germany in contrast to the United States has historical reasons. Media policy in German-speaking countries should take further steps to promote it. Expert vocational training and talent are not contradictory; as in other professions, only the combination of both elements unlocks true professional excellence. Who would want to be treated by a doctor who was an untalented healer, even if they met all the academic requirements? Talent and inclination alone are not enough to be a professional, neither in journalism nor in medicine.

Another alternative to an exclusively private-sector capitalist press, which Bücher does not mention, is a public-law structure, as was established in the UK in the 1920s and in Germany after 1945: A statutory mandate regarding content; supervisory bodies that are not appointed by the state, but instead represent society and which monitor compliance with the statutory programming mandate; not financed from tax revenue, but by fees paid by all households (allowing for an income-based fee structure akin to tax brackets). Public media, especially if they remain ad-free, can also help educate the public about what constitutes high-quality, credible journalism (cf. PÖTTKER 1991). An interesting, but rarely asked question is whether the public media concept with its wealth of practical experience can be transferred from broadcasting to other media?

4. Which kinds of media lend themselves to Bücher's reform model?

First, let me ask whether Bücher's concept of reserving advertising to community media is even an option in the age of worldwide digital communication and global corporations distributing branded goods. Such corporations and products did exist in Bücher's time already. As far as digital networks are concerned, the communication they convey can also be spatially limited and differentiated, both organizationally and structurally. The Internet can only be considered a medium under a technical-material definition of public communication, which is associated with specific possibilities as well as risks, just like the complex of printing, transport, telegraphy, and telephone technology that journalism harnessed during Bücher's time, or radio and television technology, which was also not yet available as a journalistic vehicle back when Bücher was exploring reform concepts.

Digital platforms are not media organizations like publishers or broadcasters. However, companies like Facebook, Twitter, Google, or Amazon, which have developed and make use of this technology, could, in principle, be regulated politically and legally at the national and international level, just like any other

media organization. When we fail to see this, it may be because we are not using a precise concept of what constitutes »media,« and we fail to distinguish between the technical-material conditions of (public) communication and the corporate organizations that use them. As digitization progresses, however, there seems to be a cultural learning process towards a more differentiated and precise concept of media. This is evident, among other things, in the numerous and increasingly vigorous media and economic policy efforts to enforce legal requirements upon Google and others.

Companies such as Coca Cola, Mercedes, or Gazprom don't depend on worldwide advertising; they could run their ads in many community-based media in parallel. So there is, in principle, no reason why Karl Bücher's ideas from a century ago should not also be applicable to the digital sphere or broadcasting, just as media-policy organizational models that first developed in these novel media-technological spheres are also worth considering for the print media sphere. It is quite possible that municipalities, or alliances of municipalities, could operate media organizations in all three of these technological areas – press, broadcasting, Internet – to disseminate paid advertising. It is also quite conceivable that a municipal media organization could do this in all three areas at once, which would yield production synergies.

Likewise, private media companies might focus on using one, two, or all three media technologies to produce relevant, reliable, and comprehensible informational content of high journalistic quality and distribute it ad-free on a supraregional, national, or even global scale for profit. We know such content from public media evening programs on radio and television, which is financed not by sales, but by mandatory fees collected from households.

Karl Bücher understood that if his concept were implemented, the number of private newspapers would dwindle considerably compared to ad-financed press, because »Of course, newspapers will become significantly more expensive than they are now, since their entire production costs will have to be covered by subscribers. And these will necessarily be much fewer than today.« (BÜCHER 1926: 425)

This would likely also apply to private broadcasting programs and online media with journalistic content if they can no longer carry advertising and generate revenue from it. That would make the development of payment models for purchasing journalistic content even more relevant than it is today.

To counter the concern that journalistic media would become more expensive if they couldn't be cross-financed by advertising revenues, one could point out that the cost for advertising is hidden elsewhere, namely in the advertised goods and services, paid for by the audience while media are cross-financed by advertising revenues. Theodor Geiger compellingly deconstructed the illusion that journalistic content is made cheaper by advertising in his detailed »Critique of Advertising« (cf. GEIGER 1988; PÖTTKER 2019: 450-452).

But we can assume that a concept such as Bücher's would drastically decrease the total revenues of private media while the revenues of local authorities would rise due to their monopoly on advertising. This would disrupt the entire media economy and would have to be enforced against the interests of private press, broadcasting, and online companies, including diagonal corporations operating in all three sectors.

But what we're trying to do here as we consider Karl Bücher's concept is explore alternatives to the socio-culturally harmful media structure and its delegitimizing and corrosive long-term effects on democracy and social market economy while also preserving freedom of opinion and freedom of the press. To achieve this, sweeping change would probably be inevitable. Karl Marx famously wrote in the *Rheinische Zeitung* that the paramount freedom of the press is not to be a commerce (cf. MARX 2001: 49). Bücher did not go that far; to him, a press that offers informational content, verified for accuracy, relevance, and comprehensibility according to journalistic practice, remains a trade with the commercial objective of reaching as many buyers and readers as possible. This commercial objective is the driving force to create publicity. Since the same applies to the objective of reaching the greatest possible number of listeners and viewers, broadcast and online media would also remain commercial operations, even if they become ad-free.

Since it is more in line with real developments than Bücher's disruptive concept, it would probably be easier to extend the principle of public media, which already exists in broadcasting, to the other two media sectors with their diverse (inter)national, regional, and local journalistic product offerings. This would first require reforming public broadcasters, which have come under political pressure for scandals and legitimacy problems, especially their supervisory bodies and the structure of their funding sources.

Due to the decline in advertising and circulation, today's private-sector press is struggling greatly to generate revenues or even profits with its traditional mix of journalism and advertising. Some companies are gradually withdrawing from the journalistic newspaper market, including their online versions, and instead focusing on business with digital ad portals without expensive editorial »frill«; others buy up ailing traditional papers, slash costs by merging editorial teams and centralizing editorial work, and then strengthen the online versions of the traditional papers.

Overall, the press and its online offshoots have an enormous need for consolidation (cf. WELLBROCK 2020). In this context, it does not seem all that absurd that a public platform for conventional printed and digital press, ad-free just like a reformed public broadcaster, could help ailing publishers meet this need for consolidation. Publishers might even like the notion of outsourcing at least part of their precarious journalistic operations, in return for benefits that they

would have to negotiate, and devote themselves more to their digital advertising business.

The result would be a structure complementary to the one presented by Bücher: Advertising revenues would continue to remain private, while the public would bear more of the cost for additional media production. Just like Bücher's concept, this would disentangle journalism from advertising, with similar effects on democracy and the social market economy. From an economic view of profit and cost distribution, however, the common good would lose out to private special interests, as it often does. Considering the influence of the media lobby on media policy, the economic factor would also lessen the prospects of implementation of Lassalle's and Bücher's concept.

5. Legitimacy and viability of Karl Bücher's model

It is therefore clear that a monopolization of advertising and its associated earning potential for the state, whether at the national or the community level, is not very likely to be viable. We could just shrug, declare such a project impracticable due to systemic constraints, and instead turn to radical systemic change as the way forward. This is how Karl Marx and his followers felt.

In my opinion, that is the wrong way, because all our historical experience shows – to use Bücher's terminology – that while post-revolutionary governments could monopolize the advertising business for themselves and the state, they are unlikely to tolerate a private press that is not only ad-free, but also ideology-free, a prime hallmark of quality journalism.

Our ample historical experience may lead us to swiftly conclude that models such as Karl Bücher's are incompatible with freedom of the press. But that would also be wrong. A law monopolizing the advertising business in the hands of municipalities, taking it away from private media, would not mean their expropriation. And even an expropriation of media companies, if properly compensated, would not put the entire state, but rather individual municipalities in the place of private company owners. That would not be an absolute negation of freedom of the press.

The German Constitution protects private property, but Articles 14 and 15 generally permit expropriation of private property for the common good:

»Art. 14

[...]

(2) Property entails obligations. Its use shall also serve the public good.

(3) Expropriation shall only be permissible for the public good. It may only be ordered by or pursuant to a law that determines the nature and extent of compensation. Such compensation shall be determined by establishing an equitable balance between the public interest

and the interests of those affected. In case of dispute concerning the amount of compensation, recourse may be had to the ordinary courts.

Art. 15

Land, natural resources and means of production may for the purpose of socialization be transferred to public ownership or other forms of public enterprise by a law that determines the nature and extent of compensation.«

These options are used all the time in transport planning and other public works. After their expropriation, media entrepreneurs would continue to enjoy freedom of expression, just like other citizens who don't own media; and a certain freedom of information of the public at large would also be preserved because the community-based media would contain editorial sections provided by many diverse communities. Even before digitization caused public expression to proliferate, media policy showed little concern for the press concentration that was occurring, leaving more and more districts with only one newspaper.[4]

The chances of achieving a stronger separation of journalism and advertising business at the economic and organizational level is therefore not so much a question of legality and legitimacy. It is rather about (media) politicians understanding the delegitimizing, democracy-destroying dysfunction of the current media order for the long term, and voters understanding the many economic, ecological, and cultural opportunities that would be associated with such a reform.

For the reasons mentioned above, it would make more sense to gradually expand the public media principle from broadcasting to the other media sectors. This would likely have better chances of implementation than the reform proposed by Karl Bücher a hundred years ago. However, transferring the principle of public media to the press would require that newspaper publishers and public broadcasters drop their dispute over copyrights to digital news offerings, which has led to a legal arrangement with which neither side is satisfied[5]. Instead, they would have to cooperate and embrace a more foresightful perspective for the future.

It is up to communication science and journalism to promote this long-term perspective and to offer insights into the harmful consequences of our existing media order, which Karl Bücher and others recognized a century ago. They must muster more media-critical and media-political ambition and be more proactive than they currently are. But in the interest of democracy, resource protection, and other aspects of the common good, we can no longer delay. We must act on this now. Karl Bücher's reform concept of 1919 is helpful because its author did indeed give thought to the viability of his proposals: »The path I propose here is not as far removed from the present state of affairs as it might appear at first sight.« (BÜCHER 1926: 425)

4   On the topic if media concentration, cf. KNOCHE 2005; 2013.
5   This is evident, among other things, in the establishment of an arbitration board specifically for this purpose, which is, however, barely used. Cf. MÜLLER-LANCÉ 2021; FRIES/BEHME 2022.

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Essay

Gabriele Hooffacker

How language AI could change journalism training

A workshop report by Gabriele Hooffacker

Abstract: There are already some indications of what generative language AI can and will be able to do. It will transform journalism, the »profession of the public sphere« (PÖTTKER 2010). What does journalism teaching look like under these conditions? Which competencies need to be taught? Which specific knowledge and skills? Instead of dealing with the topic in a theoretical way, this subjective debate piece attempts to approach it by exploring the topic together with students. It provides a workshop report, compiles possible learning objectives for both students and teaching staff, and inspires further thought about the competencies needed for the profession of the public sphere.

Keywords: AI language model, ChatGPT3, journalism training

»I need to discuss this with my first-year students!« Having explored ChatGPT3 a little myself since the tool was released in late November 2022, I put my findings into practice straight away on January 2, 2023. As always, I start the lecture series »Content development I« with a question for the class. This time: »Who has heard of ChatGPT3?« Three quarters of the media technology students raise their hands. »And who has tried it out already?« The same three quarters raise their hands again. The session was to be educational for all of us – but more on that later.

Two points to note: 1. The students are at least at the same level as us teaching staff, if not ahead. 2. The level of awareness, familiar knowledge and thus teaching about generative language AI depend on the day – developments made the knowledge from January obsolete by April, and the content I write on the

performance spectrum of ChatGPT3 today will be out of date by the time this piece is published.

Some things you might be expecting from this piece, but will not find:

- An overview of the services ChatGPT3 or 4 currently offer for journalistic texts
- A brilliantly written analysis of why life, media professions and journalists will never be the same again after the arrival of ChatGPT
- An absolutely logical argumentation of why, for mathematical reasons, language AI will never be able to replace journalism

The idea behind this piece is to show how language AI can currently be used in journalism teaching. There are already some indications of what generative language AI can and will be able to do. It will transform journalism, the »profession for the public sphere« (PÖTTKER 2010). What does journalism teaching look like under these conditions? Which competencies need to be taught? Which specific knowledge and skills? How can journalism be taught under these conditions?

This piece is designed as a workshop report. In terms of methods, I am guided in part by Bernhard Pörksen. In his book »Die Beobachtung des Beobachters« [Observing the observer], he calls on journalism teachers and students to see themselves as »participants in an expedition« (PÖRKSEN 2015). I also pick up on the concept of »students as partners,« which I first became aware of in a training course on university didactics held by Anita Sekyra and Marie-Theres Lewe at HDS Sachsen (SEKYRA/LEWE 2022). The concept is based on Donna Haraway's »situated knowledge« approach (HARAWAY 1988).

I am therefore writing this workshop report in the radical first-person form and attempting to reflect on my own position in line with the »teaching through learning« model (HOOFFACKER 2009).

I have taken my working hypotheses from the future theses of university didactics and information technology expert Doris Weßels and applied them to journalism teaching:

»1. AI chatbot systems are becoming a personal learning companion and therefore an individualized learning bot for the learners. [...] 4. We teaching staff are becoming architects and designers of the virtual (for example virtual spaces like the metaverse) and analog teaching space. The role of accompanying learning with a navigation function for the learners and designing the social space will become especially important here.« (WESSELS 2022)

I also draw on the work of Doris Weßels for my definition. She speaks of »generative language AI« (WESSELS 2022); most experiences are based on ChatGPT3 since this is currently freely available.

The competencies required for journalism teaching are derived from relevant publications on online journalism in journalism textbooks (HOOFFACKER/LOKK 2016; HOOFFACKER/MEIER 2017; HOOFFACKER 2020).

I have structured my workshop report into learning objectives:
- Checking facts
- Knowing and applying journalistic rules of separation
- Transparency regarding invented persons and facts
- Prompting is everything!
- ChatGPT3 cannot write biographies
- Social media and press texts
- Reporting and reportage through prompting in dialog

Almost all of the examples come from lectures and seminars at Leipzig University of Applied Sciences (HTWK Leipzig), with one from an advanced training course for journalists at Stiftung Journalistenakademie in Munich. I would like to thank the students who shared these experiences with me.

Checking facts

A lecture and seminar on January 2, 2023 focus on the »news item« as a form of presentation. After introducing the structure and selection of news items, I present a »news item« that I have had written by ChatGPT3. The students are then asked to work out whether it is a journalistic news item. The news item is about the »Long night of computer games,« a popular event at our university.

The students are quick to find the first point of criticism: incorrect facts. This was easy to discover by researching online. Learning objective achieved: Because the data basis on which ChatGPT3 was trained is from late 2021, it is important to check whether more recent data is available.

Knowing and applying journalistic rules of separation

It takes them a little longer to uncover the second error in the news item, but a student does notice it after a while: ChatGPT3 ended the news item with the sentence: »The »Long night of computer games« at HTWK Leipzig offers a varied program for visitors.« »That does not belong in a news item,« says the student. »Information and opinion should be kept separate.« Learning objective achieved.

Transparency regarding invented persons and facts

In February, as part of an advanced journalistic seminar on the topic of »reportage,« I ask ChatGPT3 to write a reportage on a German carnival prince and princess, both the joys and the challenges of their role, and the importance of carnival in Bavaria. I do not explain the task in the seminar. The seminar participants note that the features of a reportage (people, quotes) have been met. They immediately check whether the location really exists – it does. »The text is oddly

bloodless,« says one participant. »It could have been written without doing any research.« There is uproar when I tell them that ChatGPT3 is the author and that the prince and princess, Max and Lisa, are completely fictitious, including their quotes. Learning objective? Creating transparency in editorial offices about the use of generative language AI! See also the piece by Kim Björn Becker in this edition of *Journalism Research* (BECKER 2023).

What I learned: My knowledge gave me a slightly unfair advantage over the participants. I therefore adjust my approach slightly in the key qualification seminar »cross-media press and public relations.« The rest of the examples in this piece are from this course, held in the summer semester of 2023.

This seminar is partly about journalistic writing, but also about text production for press releases or social media posts. One of the learning objectives I intend to achieve here in relation to the use of ChatGPT is the difference between »journalism« and »text generation for public relations« (SCHRAGE 2023).

Prompting is everything!

In early April 2023, in the summer semester, the focus returns to writing news items. The students are given a content-based introduction to the structure and news factors, before being assigned a classic task common for trainee journalists: turning a press release into a news item. The students are free to choose whether to complete the task alone or with the help of ChatGPT.

When we discuss the results in the following seminar session, each student is asked not to say in advance who the author is. We guess together. And we are wrong together.

One outstanding journalistic news items comes from ChatGPT3. A less good one (sentences too long, news core not recognized) was written by students. Three students took the experiment further and used the same prompt, including the press release, in their three separate accounts. The result is three different, outstandingly written news items that use the correct form and structure. Only one of them has a small factual error.

I ask myself whether we still need to give trainees the classic task of writing a news item based on a press release. Is the discovery of where generative language AI can take on standard tasks for us not much more valuable than we currently see?

Amusing diversion: Further options for using language AI

I am working on this piece while sitting in a very full train. The young fellow passenger next to me is using Jenni.ai to write a cultural studies essay in English. We soon get talking. He is very happy with the tool, because it provides him with the right specialist terms and, above all, proper English. He did not know that

the tools roll the dice differently each time; but he also uses it at work to write polite email responses, for example to his boss.

The lady across the aisle also gets involved: Does language AI also find literature? She has to write a lot of DFG research applications ...

ChatGPT3 cannot write biographies

As part of the press and public relations seminar, the students are asked to write Instagram and Facebook posts. Actors need to be introduced. I stop short: This actor – was he really born in Munich? I don't think so. Wikipedia confirms that he was born in Nuremberg. That is how we spot ChatGPT3: It cannot write biographies. It just makes them up based on probabilities. Fact checking – so important.

Social media and press texts

The students are making progress with prompting. They quickly learn to make precise entries in the text line – the prompt – and to enrich them with content. Soon, they are no longer satisfied with the mediocre responses, but demand improvements in dialog with the chatbot. ChatGPT3 can use pre-prepared information to generate beautiful dialog-like Instagram and Facebook posts, for example, complete with the common hash tags. What we all learn together: When the starting text entered as the prompt is good, the result is usually both correct and factually accurate.

ChatGPT does not perform so well when it comes to writing press releases. Again and again it mixes value judgements into the text, or the weighting and structure are wrong. One student notes, »I could have written the text faster myself.«

Reporting and reportage through prompting in the dialog

How to write lively reports is really a topic for advanced journalism students. The same goes for the use of ChatGPT. Again we used the method described above: Students were given the task of using pre-prepared material to write a lively report with quotes, a beginning, an ending and an arc of suspense, and were free to choose whether they wrote it themselves or using ChatGPT.

One less good report was written by the students themselves (who learned a lot in the subsequent discussion). One outstanding report was deemed by all of us to be written by a student, before the student described the approach she had taken using ChatGPT, divided into multiple steps: First, she entered the basic information and the task in the prompt. Then, she refined the process step by step, from »Choose a quote as the beginning,« to »give the beginning and ending the same

theme,« »write an exciting title« etc. The description of the approach taught the students a lot. What I learned: The students could soon overtake us here.

Limitations and conclusions

The examples and considerations set out here by the author in May 2023 will probably already be obsolete when they reach their audience in summer 2023. The tools are being developed further and learning more all the time. The way they are used is moving forward. Something that is true today might look ten years old by tomorrow. New learning objectives will be added, while classic exercises might prove out of date. This workshop report can offer no more than a snapshot in time.

Journalistic writing and text production for public relations offer new opportunities for both tasks and methods in university teaching and journalism training. There is no need to define new professions at the moment – as was attempted at other moments of rapid change, such as upon the advent of online journalism (ALTMEPPEN/HÖMBERG 2002). Instead, it is worth considering which competencies will be needed for the »profession of the public sphere.«

Trying out and assessing ChatGPT together has taught the students both rules for journalistic writing and knowledge of the possibilities and limits of generative language AI in a fast, compact and enjoyable way in comparably little time. Working hypotheses such as »language AI is well-suited to text generation in public relations, but only has limited uses for journalistic texts,« can be examined and scrutinized. A white paper by the University of Hohenheim, »Unlocking the Power of Generative AI Models and Systems like GPT-4 and ChatGPT for Higher Education – A Guide for Students and Lecturers,« which can be found at heise.de (WIEGAND 2023), provides further options for use including advice for teaching staff on the use of generative language AI.

I showed the students my approach. What I learned: greater transparency about what we do together in the seminar, why we do it, and what we achieve and learn from it.

There appears to be no justification for the fear that students will use the new possibilities of language AI uncritically, as expressed in the white paper from the University of Hohenheim, namely »that students use the new possibilities only for passive absorption of information, instead of developing into critical minds« (quoted in WIEGAND 2023). The investigations described invite the conclusion that students explore the possibilities for using generative language AI with curiosity and enjoyment, and gain from it. I can only concur with Doris Weßels (HOOFFACKER 2023): »Try it yourself.«

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Debate

Georg Cremer

A lack of critical corrective

Expectation-led distortions in reporting on the welfare state in Germany

Abstract: However valid their empirical basis, the images commonly distributed on the social situation and welfare policy in Germany have consequences for reporting – they shape the developments that are considered worthy of reporting on and how they are interpreted. As a result, reporting serves to reinforce hardened opinions. This often negatively impacts a solution-oriented debate on reform, as problems are not considered in a sophisticated way for specific target groups. The media frequently fail to provide a critical corrective, especially when press releases from social organizations are in line with preconceived perceptions and the demands that the organizations derive from them appear to be for a good cause. Even where depictions are extremely distorted, politicians are often reluctant to take a contrasting position, as this carries the risk of being accused of wanting to ›talk down‹ social problems. A lack of statistical skills for handling complex social statistics also plays a role.

Keywords: welfare state, welfare policy, poverty, pension policy, attention economy; UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Social conditions and the welfare state in Germany are often characterized as being in decline. Many people to whom a good safety net in the form of the welfare state is important, are convinced that the welfare state has been dismantled over recent decades; sometimes gradually, sometimes rapidly. Comparing the services provided by the welfare state with Germany's economic strength, however, shows that this simplified image is not in line with the true development of the welfare state. The welfare expenditure ratio – the proportion of gross domestic product accounted for by the welfare budget – has risen consistently over the

decades. This is also true for the period following reunification, with the welfare expenditure ratio rising from 25 % in 1991 to 30 % in 2019 (BMAS 2022:7). The welfare state has grown in line with the country's wealth, and often even faster. The fact that many people still believe that the welfare state is shrinking comes down to the myriad conflicts in social policy that have accompanied the further expansion of the welfare state. Its overall development has two themes: the expansion of many promised benefits of the welfare state, and limits on benefits introduced to slow the increase in costs (CREMER 2018: 91-180).

However valid their empirical basis, the images distributed on the development of the welfare state have consequences for how the welfare state is reported on. They shape the developments that are considered worthy of reporting and how they are interpreted. This paper aims to explain this using various examples, before presenting some requirements for the work of journalists.

Is poverty expanding rapidly among the elderly?

On January 22, 2023, Deutschlandfunk issued the following news item, published on its homepage under the heading »Poverty among the elderly. More and more pensioners rely on basic state pension.«

> »Figures from the Federal Statistical Office show that 647,515 claimed the basic state pension in September last year. This was almost 19,000 more than in June. Compared to the previous year, the number of claimants rose by more than 68,000.
>
> The parliamentary leader of far-left party Die Linke, Dietmar Bartsch, told Redaktions-Netzwerk Deutschland that poverty among the elderly is breaking record after record. [...] Bartsch also proposed holding a pensions summit in the Chancellor's Office, arguing that it is high time for a major pension reform in Germany.«[1]

The item draws on a press release from Dietmar Bartsch[2] and, in line with his arguments, links the rise in the number of basic state pension claimants to deficits in the German pension system. Yet breaking down the figures from the Federal Statistical Office by citizenship shows that, in the three-month period from June to September 2022, the number of basic state pension claimants with German citizenship fell by more than 2,000 – the rise was entirely due to the increased number of claimants with foreign citizenship. Looking at the year September 2021 to September 2022, 50,000 of the total 68,000 additional recipients did not hold German citizenship (FEDERAL STATISTICAL OFFICE, Tab. 22151-0001).

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1 Accessed on the website of Deutschlandfunk January 22, 2023. The item is no longer available there, but is documented on https://de.knews.media/nachrichten/altersarmut-bericht-immer-mehr-rentner-auf-grund-sicherung-angewiesen-2/ (21 April 2023).
2 https://www.linksfraktion.de/themen/nachrichten/detail/altersarmut-immer-mehr-rentner-muessen-so-zialhilfe-beantragen/ (21 April 2023).

The data does not back up Bartsch's claim that poverty among the elderly is breaking record after record – at least not if poverty in old age is taken to mean claiming the basic state pension, as is the case in the Deutschlandfunk item. Since 2015, the proportion of those of pensionable age who claim the basic state pension has remained relatively constant at 3.5 % in the former West Germany and 2.2 % in the former East Germany (FEDERAL STATISTICAL OFFICE, Tab. 22151-0013). Given that the number of people of pensionable age is growing all the time, the number of basic state pension claimants increases even if the percentage remains constant.

The rise in the number of basic state pension claimants quoted in the news item is striking. Yet it is just as astonishing that the editorial office did not think to mention the attack on Ukraine as a possible explanation for the rise, even though Deutschlandfunk has reported in great detail on the social consequences of the war and the situation of Ukrainian refugees in Germany. Since June 1, 2022, refugees from Ukraine have been eligible to claim benefits including job seekers' allowance, social security, disability benefits, and the basic state pension. This means that refugees from Ukraine are in a privileged position compared to other refugees when it comes to accessing the welfare state in Germany – a fact that must be reflected in the claimant figures. If this link is ignored, a welfare state rule that strengthens the position of Ukrainian refugees is transformed into evidence of the supposed failure of the welfare state. The editors appear to have been so convinced by the way in which Bartsch framed the situation that they failed to conduct any further checks, or even to look at the data from the Federal Statistical Office that is freely accessible online.

It is also worth mentioning that equating claiming the basic state pension with poverty, as the Deutschlandfunk item does, is problematic, as it is considered that there is a large number of unreported cases of hidden poverty is not included in the statistics on the basic state pension (BUSLEI et al. 2019). It is estimated that around half of those eligible for assistance do not claim the benefits, primarily people with very low pensions who would be eligible for an additional basic pension. If all those eligible were to receive the assistance to which they are entitled, the amount claimed would increase – not because poverty was increasing, but because it was being tackled more effectively.

More help, more poverty?

On August 22, 2018, the Federal Association of the Child Protection Associations in Germany (DKSB) achieved a media coup. They stated that 4.4 million children are living in poverty, with the DKSB's calculation showing under-recording by 1.4 million children in poverty whom, the accusation goes, the government is covering

up. This news item shaped the reporting for a whole day, featuring prominently in the major daily television news program *Tagesschau* and in almost all major media. It would have been a huge success for the public relations of any charity.

The DKSB's calculation was based on equating claiming assistance with poverty, although they did also attempt to look for the unreported cases, i.e., the children in families who are eligible for assistance but whom the welfare state does not reach. If claiming assistance is used as an indicator of poverty, it makes sense to consider those listed in the statistics as claiming assistance together with those who are eligible for assistance but do not claim it. Otherwise, the problem indicator is lower if the welfare state and the assistance it offers does not reach those eligible at all.

Yet equating the number of people claiming basic social security with the number in poverty can also be an intellectual trap – as noted in the early 1980s by Amartya Sen, who would later go on to win a Nobel prize. He described the »perverseness« of this measure of poverty: If the government attempts to fight poverty by raising the basic social security, the number of people receiving it increases. Poverty therefore appears to rise, even though it is actually being tackled better. Conversely, reducing the basic social security would reduce the number of people claiming and thus give the impression that poverty had fallen, i.e., assistance for those in poverty was becoming less important (SEN 1983).

The DKSB's calculation reinforced this problem, since it also included children living in families who receive (or are eligible for) child tax credit or housing benefit. This expansion of the definition of poverty resulted in the figure of an unreported 1.4 million children living in poverty.

Child tax credit is aimed at those on low incomes and is intended to prevent people who are able to earn a living for themselves from their work but need assistance in covering their children's needs from having to move onto unemployment benefit. When combined with housing benefit, child tax credit generally means that families are better off than they would be if they were to receive only additional unemployment benefits. Housing benefit is an essential social policy instrument in securing the material livelihoods of people on low incomes without claiming unemployment benefits.

If the definition of poverty is then extended as the DKSB specifies – by equating claiming child tax credit and housing benefit with poverty – targeted improvement of the aid system becomes seen as proof of greater child poverty. The ›Strong Families‹ Act of 2019 increased child tax credit and improved the claim conditions, thus increasing the number of people eligible. By the logic of the DKSB's calculation, this serves to disclose growing social problems. The calculation gave the DKSB a day of headlines, but the charity is no longer pursuing the method. The news dissipated and failed to trigger a critical debate on the DKSB's method of measuring poverty.

Drawing incorrect conclusions can have political consequences. Whenever attempts are made to make the welfare system more effective, this triggers a »fear of statistical effects« among politicians, as described by FDP social policy specialist Johannes Vogel (DEUTSCHER BUNDESTAG, 20. Wahlperiode, 66. Sitzung, 10. November 2022: 7478f.). As a young member of parliament at the time of the last CDU-FDP coalition (2009-2013), Vogel campaigned to enable Hartz-IV [unemployment benefit] claimants to earn more in addition to their benefits – but was unsuccessful. Mathematically, the necessary effect of this would have been to increase the number of people receiving benefits (Arbeitslosengeld II, now Bürgergeld) on top of their wages, which could have been turned into a scandal of an increase in the working poor. His idea had no chance. Although rarely discussed in public, this fear of statistical effects is tangible when talking to politicians involved in social affairs about how to develop welfare systems.

A quarter of children can't afford breakfast?

In May 2011, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights published its routine state report on Germany, stating the following on the social situation under Section 39:

> »The Committee notes with concern that as many as 25 per cent of pupils go to school without breakfast and are thereby at risk of malnutrition as lunch is not yet provided in all schools. The Committee urges the State party to take concrete measures to ensure that children, especially from poor families, are provided with proper meals.« (UNITED NATIONS 2011, Section 28)

The report did not initially attract a great deal of attention, until a report in *Der Tagesspiegel*, »United Nations slams German social policy« on July 5, 2011,[3] drew interest across Germany. However, the *Tagesspiegel* report missed out the small phrase »up to,« which clearly demonstrates that the Committee was unable to reliably quantify the scale of the problem. »One in four children go to school without breakfast,« claimed the report in *Der Tagesspiegel*. All other media that picked up on the report then used this figure. »Up to« disappeared in papers from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (07.07.2011: 4) to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (06 July 2011).[4]

As would be expected, charities were quick to pick up on the report, claiming that the United Nations had now officially established how unjust the situation in Germany was. The Deutsche Kinderhilfswerk expressed this sentiment on

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3   https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/vereinte-nationen-rugen-deutsche-sozialpolitik-4564546.html (22 April 2023).
4   https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/bericht-der-vereinten-nationen-un-tief-besorgt-ueber-soziale-missstaende-in-deutschland-1.1116605 (22 April 2022).

July 6, 2011, in a press release entitled »UN state report is slap in the face for Federal Government,« demanding that the Federal Government »finally implement specific measures to ensure that all children regularly receive breakfast.«

What the media did not address was the obvious question of how the UN Committee had come to this finding, given that there had been no representative survey in Germany at the time on the number of children who go to school without breakfast, from which such a claim could have been derived. The Committee's only source was the public discourse in Germany. It can be presumed that the »up to« claim in the report expresses the response from a respondent interviewed by the Committee. The experience basis for the statement remains unclear. The Committee's next report in 2018 also notes that many children go to school without breakfast, but does not attempt to quantify the problem (UNITED NATIONS 2018: 8).

If the figure of a quarter of children going to school without breakfast were true – a figure that the Committee did not quote in this form – that would make hunger and neglect among children a mass phenomenon in Germany. Any doubt about whether this could be true was clearly not great enough to cause the media representatives who picked up on the *Tagesspiegel* report to take a look at the original report, which is easy to find online, themselves.

It goes without saying that some children do go to school without breakfast and that, for some of them, this is due to poverty and/or neglect. A survey of primary school parents conducted by the Allensbach Institute (2019: 13-18) shows that 10 % of children do not usually have breakfast at home. The reasons behind this are not necessarily material: The parents named a hectic routine and lack of time as the most significant reasons.

Data on material provision for children in households claiming jobseekers' allowance highlights a lack of or insufficient provision in mobility, leisure and social and cultural participation, but only to a tiny degree in nutrition. An analysis by the Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung shows that around one percent of households on unemployment benefits with children do not have a warm meal every day (LIETZMANN/WENZIG 2020: 6, 14-16, 32).

Campaigning to achieve a better material position for families on low incomes is commendable. But it does not mean that Germany has to be declared a land of hunger.

More and more pensioners need to work?

On February 14, 2022, Deutschlandfunk broadcast the following news item:

>»The number of working pensioners is rising, reports RedaktionsNetzwerk Deutschland, quoting figures from the Federal Government. These show that more than one million

people aged 67 years or older were employed last year. In 2010, that figure was around 685,000. Member of parliament for Die Linke, Sören Pellmann, spoke of a sad development. He argued that the figures are the consequence of a pension system that is barely able to safeguard the living standard of citizens.«

Here, too, a quote from a politician clearly and unambiguously frames a statistical development in the context of falling social standards. The proportion of those working among the population over 65 has indeed risen significantly, from around 5 % in 2001 to around 10 % in 2021 (FITZENBERGER et al. 2023). Naturally, this proportion is higher in the years immediately after pensionable age (17 % in the 65-69 age group, BUNDESAGENTUR FÜR ARBEIT 2022). Pensioners who continue to work are therefore still only a minority.

The figures tell us little about the background. In times of high unemployment, it was much more difficult for pensioners to find a job than it is today. Life expectancy is rising, and many pensioners today are in good physical health for many years after retirement. The majority of those working work just a few hours in a ›mini job,‹ which also carries with it the suspicion of precarious employment. Yet mini jobs are attractive for pensioners, most of whom do not want to work a lot of hours, let alone full time. Mini jobs are not subject to health insurance contributions and allow pensioners in higher tax bands to avoid paying additional taxes on that income. Pensioners in employment are significantly more likely to hold academic qualifications than those who do not work (GORDO et al. 2022: 4f.). This is no surprise, given that good education makes it easier to find employment, even after pensionable age.

This data must not necessarily lead to the conclusion that all pensioners who work do so purely because they enjoy working. Some people with low pensions deliver newspapers or stack shelves purely because it is the only way they can afford to live. When the labor market is booming, they have a better chance of finding work. Needless to say, a system of old-age pensions must not depend on additional employment, not least because many of those in most urgent need of additional earnings are unable to work due to health reasons.

Are 80 percent of students living independently poor?

To accompany the debate on the reform to Germany's system of student grants and loans (BAföG), the charity Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband (2022) published a brief comment piece on poverty among students in Germany. The key findings from the accompanying press release on May 17, 2022: 30 % of all students live in poverty; the figure for students living alone is almost 80 %. The student funding and the increase in BAföG planned at the time are absolutely insufficient, given that 45 % of students receiving BAföG are affected by poverty. The item was

picked up by a wide range of media, including the websites of *FAZ*, *Die Zeit*, *Spiegel* and *TAZ*.[5] Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband was in the spotlight for a day. Student representatives spoke of shocking figures.

The comment piece was based on data collected in 2020 by the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) on the income situation in 2019, with the figures analyzed in 2022. In line with the statistical convention established by the European Union, the definition of persons living ›at risk of poverty‹ is those who live in households with incomes of less than 60 % of the median income of all households. For comparability, the household income is converted using equivalence figures (net equivalent income). On this basis, the SOEP calculated that, in 2019, a single person with an income of less than EUR 1,266 per month was at risk of poverty. Whether one considers students with less than this to be poor is a question of perspective.

The European Union's (EU) method of measuring the risk of poverty has now become dominant. Yet since the EU has never defined where the ›risk of poverty‹ ends and ›poverty‹ begins, it has created communicative chaos. ›Risk of poverty‹ and ›poverty‹ are now used synonymously in both the media and public perceptions. If one accepts this equivalence, the data in the charity's press release is correct.

FAZ, *Die Zeit*, *Der Spiegel* and *TAZ* were almost unanimous in their online reports, which were based on a news item from the DPA. None of the media mention the poverty risk threshold of EUR 1,266; the press release by Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband did not quote it directly either, although it did provide the basis for calculating it: by adding the median value for the income of students classed as poor and the value for the ›poverty gap,‹ i.e., the difference between this and the poverty risk threshold. Only zeit.de quoted both values. None of the aforementioned media supported readers in assessing what exactly is meant by poverty among students.

It is also astonishing that the large discrepancy between the poverty risk rate among all students and that of students living alone is not addressed. This discrepancy arises from the calculation method used for income equivalence. Students who live with their parents are recorded as being part of their parents' household. As a result, those students who are in a position to leave their parents' house and do not look for a course close to home for financial reasons appear particularly poor. Neither was there any critical examination of whether EUR 1,266 is a suitable standard for measuring whether a student is poor. If 80 % of students living alone are ›poor,‹ there must be a lot of upper middle class parents who are

5   *Der Spiegel*: https://www.spiegel.de/panorama/bildung/paritaetischer-wohlfahrtsverband-fast-jeder-dritte-student-lebt-in-armut-a-df4f9be8-f46f-4ea8-9480-e2d4ad02dc19; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*: https://www.faz.net/aktuell/karriere-hochschule/buero-co/paritaetischer-gesamtverband-ein-drittel-der-studenten-von-armut-betroffen-18036893.html; *Die Zeit*: https://www.zeit.de/campus/2022-05/studierende-armut-paritaetischer-wohlfahrtsverband; *Die Tageszeitung*: https://taz.de/Studie-des-Paritaetischen-Wohlfahrtsverbands/!5855448/ (08 May 2023).

not willing to protect their children against this kind of poverty, despite being financially able to do so.

To avoid misunderstanding: Some students are undoubtedly in a difficult financial position, and it is essential that there is a debate on a (targeted!) reform of the BAföG system. Yet the media hype surrounding the Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband did nothing to contribute to this. After all, raising the level of BAföG to EUR 1,266 was never discussed. Why should BAföG be higher than the amount parents on high incomes are willing to pay to their student children? While BAföG remains below this threshold, however, the rate of poverty measured will remain unchanged. The hype triggered outrage for a while, but did nothing to focus attention on the problem groups among students in order to find a solution. The Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband's brief comment piece itself would have provided some input on this, had anyone actually read it.

What is (not) reported?

Media reporting on social developments in Germany often draws on studies by academic institutes. These institutes conduct professional PR work and often publish teasers of their results in such a way as to attract media attention. Sometimes this is done in a way that stretches the scientific findings a little. Even in academic circles, media presence has been a valuable currency for some time now, and was included alongside political consultancy and research performance as criteria for the list of »most influential economists« compiled by the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* until 2021. Studies by academic institutes are also quoted in questions by the Opposition in parliament, receiving attention accordingly, together with the responses from the federal government. This is ultimately a positive development, as the academic institutes are generally transparent about their data and methods and their work therefore serves as a basis for well-founded debate – as long as it is used.

Here, too, however, selection is guided by expectation. It is harder for academic studies to gain attention if they do not correspond to popular expectations. One example of a study that was ignored by the media is an analysis of the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) by the Deutsche Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung (DIW) for the period 1995 to 2019, i.e., up to the start of the pandemic (GRABKA 2022). The SOEP is one of the most important, if not *the* most important data source on economic and social development in Germany. A long-term evaluation by the SOEP is not just a study among many others, but a central data source for recording trends in social development. Yet apart from a few small news items, the study was ignored. This is particularly noteworthy given the extensive media resonance otherwise enjoyed by the DIW.

We can only speculate on the reasons. The long-term evaluation of the SOEP data showed a generally positive development that contradicts the narrative of decline. The key findings: Hourly wages have risen significantly in real terms since 2013 after having stagnated with slight fluctuations up to 2005, i.e., in a phase of constantly rising mass unemployment, and then falling by around 4 % up to 2013. Looking at the entire period 1995 to 2020, gross monthly pay rose by more than 10 % in real terms across all workers, and that of full-time workers by 22 %. The low-wage sector is shrinking, having grown until 2007 and then remained consistent. Inequality in gross hourly wages has fallen. Available net household income is higher than in 1995 in real terms across all deciles, and up 25 % for those in the middle. Inequality in net household income, which rose significantly until 2005, has remained largely stable since then, with only slight fluctuations.

This study, which takes an objective look at the social situation without glossing over its problems, deserved attention – especially in a period of great uncertainty triggered by the attack on Ukraine and its social consequences in Germany. That uncertainty led to high expectations of compensation among the middle classes, resulting in expensive packages of relief measures that failed to reach their targets effectively (DIERMEIER et al. 2022). Greater awareness of the DIW study could have helped to correct the idea that, even before COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine, the middle classes were among the victims.

Is there a lack of statistical skills?

Statistical data serves to back up political statements, including in many of the examples selected here. The idea that statistics are a particularly good way to lie is commonly repeated. A counterargument against this critical attitude towards empirical approaches is attributed to Frederick Mosteller, the founding director of the Statistics Department of Harvard University: »While it is easy to lie with statistics, it is even easier to lie without them« (CHIVERS/CHIVERS 2021:7). Selective everyday experiences cannot be used as the basis for valid statements on whether income distribution is becoming less equal, whether poverty in Germany is increasing or decreasing, which at-risk groups are affected, etc. Without statistics, it is impossible to say. Teaching basic knowledge of statistical methods has taken a back seat in schools today, even in advanced mathematics classes. It is with this lack of knowledge that journalists begin their training. On the other hand, better knowledge of methods would not necessarily mean that news was not selected and interpreted in line with established narratives. Preventing this also demands a critical professional attitude. Knowledge of methods can help this kind of attitude to gain traction in everyday professional practice.

There is no doubt that many journalists have excellent training and a broad range of theoretical tools that allow them to get to grips with the methodological concepts of studies and social statistics in the necessary depth – as long as the everyday routine of an editorial office allows them the time. It will presumably not be possible for the wider majority of journalists to become experts in statistical methods, but they should at least be familiar with the most important pitfalls in order to assess whether the material they are using is legitimate – an aspect that should unquestionably be part of their training. A few examples: When an enormous rise in a variable is quoted, is the starting point also stated? (If the starting point is very small, even small changes create impressive percentage increases.) When conducting a comparison over time from a period of fluctuating values, has the base year been deliberately selected in order to create the desired effect – be it an increase or decrease? Various media frequently report on random samples. It is important to scrutinize whether the sample is representative and thus enables conclusions to be drawn on a whole population, such as the population of Germany, or whether it is distorted. Are differences found between groups statistically significant, or could they be the consequence of an unavoidable sampling error? Journalists should understand that they ought to steer clear of studies that make no mention of statistical significance, however new and interesting the results appear. Care must also be taken with studies that interpret a statistical link as causal without discussing this carefully (CHIVERS/ CHIVERS 2021 provide an overview of statistical pitfalls closely related to media).

A critical attitude must also be adopted when organizations publish their own studies. If such studies are produced with the collaboration of researchers who have the appropriate methodological tools, they can bring forth valuable results. Yet there are also unprofessional studies whose sole aim is to generate media attention. It costs little to add one or two questions to a telephone survey by a polling institute and inflate the responses into a study. A press release then announces that a study has shown that a large majority of the population shares the organization's concern and that the government therefore has a democratic obligation to act on it. Without knowing the precise formulation of the question – which may be suggestive – the data is completely worthless. In one case, I requested the precise formulation, only to be told that this was an operating secret of the polling institute. Moreover, even if valid methods have found that a broad majority of those surveyed advocate higher welfare payments, people often give generous responses in surveys, as long as they are not directly asked about the costs that this would incur for them as tax payers. Reputable studies check this information. In addition, the data collected by the organization's ›study‹ may already be well known, or may be determined far more effectively by analyzing data sets gathered in a scientific context. But this would have much less chance of becoming news.

A press release announcing that an organization is aware of the results of the SOEP would go straight in the trash at any editorial office.

A lack of critical corrective

I have quoted just a few examples here to demonstrate my theory that the common narrative of decline in social policy has a major influence on the selection and framing of news and reports on the situation in society and social policy. It would be worthwhile to investigate this more thoroughly in (quantitative) media analyses. The effect of pre-expectations on journalistic work is likely to be something that media studies experts would confirm, rather than deny.

Below I set out some considerations on how perception and reporting can be differentiated. Sophisticated perception of the development of the welfare state is essential if the debate is to sound out options for reform, rather than merely exhausting itself with inconsequential outrage. I am not a media studies expert – my remarks are based on my media contacts and my observation of reporting on the welfare state in association with my professional role leading a charity.

The most important thing is to encourage openness and curiosity among trainee journalists, so that they develop an interest in exploring whether the development of the situation in society might be different, more complex or more contradictory than they had previously imagined. This is likely the most difficult aspect of the change that needs to be made, as it has a bearing on fundamental questions of attitude. Needless to say, what matters is not only the attitude, but also the conditions under which journalists work at media houses. The economic pressure that managers and chief editors pass on to their employees is sometimes so high that journalists have no benefit from being thorough. After all, research can destroy the best – i.e., most sensational – stories.

A journalist's professional attitude includes the ability to take a distanced view, including of political opinions close to their own and of institutions to which they feel connected. The impression I have gained from my work with the charity is that journalists are generally very sympathetic towards charities, as they are benevolent towards the causes that the organizations represent. There are some striking exceptions, however, such as articles – usually in business papers – that present charities as clandestine networks enriching themselves at the cost of society. Even if some of these articles do pick up on problems that would be worthy of further investigation, they are sometimes so overexaggerated that it is easy to reject them as malicious, especially when they are associated with general opposition to a well-developed system of welfare state safeguards. Charities then perceive them as expressions of opinion from an opposing camp

that need to be rejected harshly and provide no incentive for them to rethink their own positions.

The vast majority of journalists have a benevolent attitude. Yet this in itself can become problematic if it turns into an uncritical attitude and a failure to examine claims about and interpretations of the situation in society. The media coup achieved by the Deutscher Kinderschutzbund [Federal Association of the Child Protection Association in Germany] is one example. This phenomenon results in a lack of the critical corrective that is so urgently needed. After all, charities themselves are not entirely innocent when it comes to their media work, either; they are also competing for the limited public attention available. Members often see media presence as proof that their charity is effective, however misguided this perception may be. When members see their own charity as having less public presence than other charities, this creates an expectation that the charity's leadership should also use shrill, exaggerated statements to gain attention over the competition.

This kind of exaggeration can only be achieved by dramatically reducing the complexity of a story – which, as the handful of examples shows, can lead to contradiction of the facts or at least to a highly one-sided interpretation of social developments. Given the unavoidable complexity of the welfare state – only complex systems are at all fair while also being manageable from a fiscal point of view –, social policy (and presumably many other political fields) is especially susceptible to this. Scandalization is a way to decrease complexity and reduce complex phenomena to simple patterns.

Journalists would be providing an important service if they were to subject statements from charities to critical examination – even if they generally serve, or appear to serve, a good cause. If charities had to factor in this ›risk‹ in their media work, changes in behavior could be expected. The majority of charities certainly have the staff and resources to work in a way that reflects the complexity of the content. Supported by significant public funding, larger charities have numerous staff at federal headquarters whose size can compete with some state ministries of social affairs. I am absolutely convinced that these specialist resources are often used insufficiently (or not at all) to back up media statements, as they tend to get in the way of the kind of radical exaggeration that ensures media presence. Staff in press offices are at a greater distance from the expert discourse and find exaggeration easier. Those experts at charities with whom I come into contact are certainly often embarrassed when I ask about their charities' press releases.

»Lost in the ether« – on the lack of reaction from policymakers and authorities

Journalism is of course not the only authority that needs to step up and provide a critical corrective. As I have demonstrated, the decision to give refugees from Ukraine immediate access to basic welfare payments unavoidably led to a rise in the number of claimants. If this is then misinterpreted as an indicator of growing social inequality, it would be up to ministries of social affairs and the policymakers in them to contradict this. But they usually do not. Asking those responsible in politics throws up two reasons why they do not often speak up. The first is the risk of creating a media storm. Someone who tries to counter scandalization with sophisticated arguments is easily accused of trying to sugarcoat the situation and deny the state of affairs in society. This risk is indisputable. But the fewer social policymakers are brave enough to take a stand, the greater the risk for those that do.

The other argument for not reacting is that a reaction adds value to the news item and increases its public impact further. But this is a weak argument. The individual news item is indeed quickly forgotten, and this may happen even more quickly when there is no public contradiction. Yet it still helps to firm up the perception of failure of the welfare state that bears no relation to the reality of German society. When a constant stream of expectation-led selection and one-sided interpretation of news gives rise to the impression that everything in Germany is screamingly unjust, this must have consequences for the perception of the social situation.

Representative surveys clearly show this. Surveys conducted in 2009 and 2020 asked respondents to state which of five ideal forms of society best reflected the situation in Germany at the time. More than half of those surveyed saw the largest group of people at the bottom, rather than in the middle of society, i.e., imagined the kind of social structure typical of agricultural societies or societies in early phases of industrialization (niehues 2019; bellani u.a. 2021: 7f.). A perception like this can have negative consequences. Someone who sees themselves in the middle of society but most people at the bottom risks developing excessive fear of losing status. Surveys on the subjective perception of unemployment show that, in large sections of the population, perception has become detached from actual developments on the labor market. Both in 2008 and in 2016, around 40 % of the population estimated the rate of unemployment as at least 20 % – the actual figures were 7.8 % and 6.1 % respectively. It was also found that the more that people overestimate unemployment, the less trust they have in the democratic system and its institutions (diermeier/niehues 2019).

The individual news item may be ›lost in the ether,‹ but the constant stream of items that are selected because they appear to fit with the narrative of constant

worsening of the situation in society, and interpreted accordingly, has consequences. At least when charities fuel this discourse of decline with their media work, they do so – apart from their own charity policy interest in securing their own media presence – with the intention of promoting the safeguarding and expansion of the welfare state. It is for a good cause and, so a widely held view goes, it is legitimate to use broader brush strokes. Yet it is questionable whether this kind of approach is useful. Ritual outrage does nothing to aid a more sophisticated look at groups at risk, nor to analyze chains of effects between political action and the living situations and prospects of people threatened by poverty or exclusion, nor to explore solutions, let alone make them happen.

Furthermore, there is nothing to say that outrage contributes to political support for the welfare state. After all, it also sends the message that the welfare state is constantly failing, despite the fact that almost one third of GDP is used for the various aspects of the welfare state safety net. If the welfare state has such little effect as is claimed in scandalizing exaggeration, it would be plausible to draw the conclusion that conditions with a smaller welfare state would not be much worse than today. Scandalization can also promote another position that is just as poisonous for solidarity-based systems: the idea that taxes and social security contributions are a loss of income for which nothing is received in return. A discourse of decline that is detached from empirical data can play into the hands of the trend towards desolidarization in the middle classes, who already see themselves at risk of a loss of status – a fear which in turn also has a negative impact on acceptance of marginalized groups.

A contentious public debate on the social safety net and the fundamental principles of the welfare state is essential. After all, at stake are existential questions like material safeguarding in precarious living situations, preventing poverty, security in old age, and health – and how society can successfully ensure inclusion for people with severe impairments.

There is good reason to hope that a public debate on social issues, held in a rational way, could achieve a better effect and thus be political in a real sense. This would require journalism that sees itself as a critical corrective, rather than a sounding board for widely held fears.

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Books

Fritz Hausjell, Wolfgang Langenbucher

The Top 10 of Book Journalism

Recommendations for books by journalists

The idea of selecting and presenting the best books written by journalists is a project of the Institute for Journalism and Communication Studies at the University of Vienna, co-founded by Hannes Haas (1957-2014) and compiled by Wolfgang R. Langenbucher and Fritz Hausjell. The project published its first recommendation list in 2002 in the quarterly journal *Message*, **founded by Michael Haller. After the journal's discontinuation, the selections were documented in the magazine** *Der österreichische Journalist* [*The Austrian Journalist*] **starting in 2015. In 2020 and 2021 the publication of the recommendation list had to be temporarily suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It found its new home,** *Journalism Research*, **in 2022.**

1.   **Antonia Rados (2022):** *Afghanistan von innen: Wie der Frieden verspielt wurde.* [**Afghanistan from inside: How peace was thrown away.**] **Vienna: Brandstätter, 328 pages, EUR 25**

»The fronts are everywhere« was the title that Antonia Rados gave to her two lectures on the poetry of journalism as the University of Vienna's Theodor Herzl Lecturer (Picus Verlag 2009, ed. Hannes Haas). A legendary reporter with decades of experience in travelling to and researching one of these fronts – Afghanistan –, she now reports on this oppressed country in the style of a contemporary history chronicle. The result is a magnum opus that not only demonstrates the exemplary work of this well-known Austrian television reporter, but also bears witness to a generation of international women war reporters who have gently shaped our understanding of a – largely unpeaceful – world over the last few decades. Rados' story begins with the Soviet forces' invasion of Afghanistan and

ends many decades, many crises, and many changeovers of power later with the withdrawal of the Western military and aid workers and the catastrophic consequences of this decision. There have been few quiet times along the way – and many dangerous ones for journalists. Some of the passages describing what they have faced take the reader's breath away, as we see how survival can depend on professional experience or even just luck. Journalism can be fatal, as Reporters Without Borders regularly reports. Having survived all these dangers herself, Antonia Rados has developed an almost encyclopedic knowledge over the decades. With her dramatical journalistic experience and an admirable presence, she has now transformed this enormous knowledge into a book that is a fascinating read despite its large scope and format. Reading the book, it is tragic to learn how the disaster in which the country now finds itself is the result of a long succession of political mistakes and failures. It is impossible not to wonder whether journalists might not have a better idea of what to do, given their more comprehensive and sensitive perception of the situation. Their truth is certainly confronted with that of the army of press officers and press spokespeople who flood the Western audience »with persistent rain and announcements and videos« (p. 195) and »misused facts« : »Manipulation is the norm« (ibid.). The book's final chapter is entitled »Run for your lives« and documents 2021's undignified evacuation (including many photos, as throughout the book). Kabul fell to the Taliban once again. Yet Antonia Rados ends on an optimistic note: »The sun rises in the East.« Her final sentence: »Yesterday is not over in Afghanistan.«

2. **Erhard Stackl (2022):** *Hans Becker O5. Widerstand gegen Hitler.* [Hans Becker 05. Resistance against Hitler.] **Vienna: Czernin Verlag, 416 pages, EUR 28**

Once you know it is there, the sign on the outside wall of St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna is impossible to miss: O5. Most people pass by without noticing. But the symbol is actually part of a dramatic chapter in Austria's unhappy history. It is the symbol of a resistance organization that emerged in late 1944, centered around Hans Becker (1895-1948). A group whose aspirations were bold and, under the murderous Nazi regime, potentially fatal. They saw themselves as the core of a future Austrian government and wanted to gain the attention of the world. Even today, many decades after the end of the War and in a democratic age, this group and its protagonists do not receive the kind of recognition they deserve in Austria – the kind that is afforded to other groups such as the White Rose in Germany, for example. Former *Profil* and *Standard* journalist Erhard Stackl saw this as good reason to conduct broad-based research into the topic of »resistance against Hitler.« With the skill of a storyteller, he organizes an impressive quantity of content chronologically, tracing the life of Hans Becker: pilot officer,

scientist, head of public relations for the Dollfuß government in the corporative state (Vaterländische Front [Fatherland Front]), prisoner in Dachau and Mauthausen, organizer of resistance against the Nazi occupation and, after the War, his country's ambassador to Chile, where he was murdered at the age of 53. His wife then had to fight a shamefully long battle to force the Austrian government to provide financial support for her and their children. A major part of the book's appeal is its enlightening and significant discoveries, such as Becker's description of a coincidental attendance of a speech by Hitler in Munich before 1933. Becker calls Hitler a dangerous semi-fool who attracts loser types over anyone else. He also accidentally ends up at an upscale evening event where he observes that even wealthy, genteel members of the bourgeois had fallen under the spell of the »hysterical man.« Similar passages teach the reader to remain vigilant even today. With so many changes of role, Becker is not an easy »hero« for a biographer. But he is an appealing figure whose old world charm allows him to attract people to him even in Chile – just as, in the most difficult of times, he succeeded in winning over so many Austrians to the resistance.

3. **Lars Haider (2022):** *Das Phänomen Markus Lanz. Auf jede Antwort eine Frage.* [The phenomenon of Markus Lanz. A question for every answer.] **Essen: Klartext Verlag, 320 pages, EUR 25**

There are now so many talk shows on public and private television channels that it is difficult to keep track of them all, let alone watch them all regularly. While they undoubtedly have a loyal audience, many colleagues, intellectuals, media critics, and academics take a more skeptical view, with some even rejecting or hating the programs entirely. The reason? This television format has instigated a problematic development in the culture of political debate. Yet it remains rare for anyone to explicitly address the issue – perhaps because the mass of material has become unmanageable. A short book by young political science researcher Oliver Weber (*Talkshows hassen. Ein letztes Krisengespräch.* [Hating talk shows. A final crisis meeting.], Stuttgart 2019) did attract some attention. Nonetheless, the succession of programs continued, their content and effect changed significantly through the dramatic course of time. It is therefore very useful to analyze at least one of these formats, *Markus Lanz*, in detail. Chief Editor of the *Hamburger Abendblatt*, Lars Haider, whose portrait of Olaf Scholz received widespread acclaim in 2022, took on the time-consuming task. Anyone who has not watched *Lanz* for a while might be surprised by this interest – but this will change once they read the study, which is backed by a rich body of material and intensive research. After all, »this is the story of a transformation that has rarely, perhaps never, been seen before in German television.« In short, a program that few took seriously

has developed in the minds of many into »the best political talk show.« Lars Haider proves this theory by »living with Lanz« constantly for the first half of 2022. What makes the constant stream of visual impressions the experienced political journalist enjoys so passionately into a noteworthy document, however, is the way in which he contextualizes the material. Most significantly, we learn about the unimagined impact that all this talking has on political careers and decisions. Combined with the effect of (anti)social media, this has changed the country's political culture in quite a problematic way – notably by weakening its parliaments. The perfect example of this was the pandemic, during which more than a few parliamentarians and functionaries appeared enthusiastically on *Lanz*, robbing the Bundestag of its dignity.

This book is as surprising as it is commendable. It documents the wealth of aspects involved in a program like this, which one tunes into without much thought and without ever suspecting what an influential part of the modern political system it has become.

4. **Mark Schieritz (2022):** *Olaf Scholz. Wer ist unser Kanzler?* [Olaf Scholz. Who is our Chancellor?] **Frankfurt /M.: Verlag S. Fischer, 176 pages, EUR 20**

The subtitle of this book by ZEIT journalist Mark Schieritz – Who is our Chancellor – has been a recurring question in the public discourse since Olaf Scholz took office. The book's answers focus less on the life and career of Scholz the politician and more on his political thought. Scholz' understanding of politics is reconstructed here, and it quickly becomes clear that this understanding has a system and continuity that inspires confidence. We learn that one does not become Chancellor of Germany by accident, but because one has a universal idea for this country and its future and pursues it with consistent passion. Scholz' philosophy of respect is much more than a campaign slogan – it is a vision of the future to counteract (the failure of) neoliberalism. Mark Schieritz describes how Scholz attempts to turn this idea into practical politics, making the book also an introduction to how to govern under the very difficult conditions of today's media world. Contrary to some prejudices about the silent Chancellor, his political tool is the instrument of negotiation. This often remains hidden in day-to-day reporting. But none of today's problems can be solved without negotiation.

5. **Danny Schlumpf, Mario Nottaris (2022):** *Das Rentendebakel. Wie Politik und Finanzindustrie unsere Vorsorge verspielen. Und warum kaum Zeit für Reformen der zweiten Säule bleibt.* [**The pensions debacle. How policymakers and the financial industry are gambling away our pensions. And why time is running out to reform company pensions.**] **Zürich: Rotpunktverlag, 219 pages,** EUR 28

This might be a thin book about the pension problems of a small country, but the issue of pensions and security in old age is much more universal. The ongoing protests in France are proof of that, and pensions are a constant issue in Germany, too. The political debate largely centers around two key aspects: the pension age and democratic change. Both call the current principles of the system into question. Switzerland introduced fundamental reform four decades ago: Since 1985, anyone who undertakes paid work in Switzerland has to pay into an old-age pension fund. This results in enormous sums being accumulated on an annual basis and in total. The two journalists – Danny Schlumpf from *SonntagsBlick* and Mario Nottaris from SRF ZV – subject this system, which policymakers have regulated and controlled too little over the decades, to merciless critique. Pension issues in every country are so complicated that few non-experts can understand them. This book demonstrates the useful role journalism can and must play in this regard.

6. **Bettina Dyttrich (2022):** *»Es hilft, dass ich Leute anschreien darf«. Schweizer Popmusiker:innen erzählen.* [**»It helps that I am allowed to shout at people.« Swiss pop musicians tell their stories.**] **Zürich: Rotpunktverlag, 271 pages,** EUR 44

Bettina Dyttrich, born in 1979, is an editor at the »left-wing« (its own description) weekly paper WOZ – *Die Wochenzeitung* published in Zürich. Her previous books have looked at environmental topics, but she has been interested in pop music, specifically in Switzerland, since her youth. The result is an astonishing work: comprehensive, informative, and fascinating to read, thanks to having been produced with all the proven means of journalistic research and presentation. Even those who have never delved deeper into the culture of pop music, but are now trying to understand it as a signature of the times through its omnipresence, will find all the facts and background on this musical world here. The status of pop music has long been demonstrated by the relevant music critique found in many quality media today, and is now honored monographically for Switzerland in this book by Bettina Dyttrich. The photos by Florian Bachmann and Tatjana Rüegsegger make it truly enjoyable to read.

7. **Daniel Kalt (2023):** *Staat tragen. Über das Verhältnis von Mode und Politik.* **[Wearing the state. On the relationship between fashion and politics.] Vienna: Verlag Kremayr & Scheriau, 216 pages, EUR 24**

As a cultural technique, journalism has tried-and-tested ways of addressing pop culture phenomena – as demonstrated by this book from Daniel Kalt, editor at daily newspaper *Die Presse*, on the relationship between fashion and politics. Anyone who regularly, or indeed occasionally, watches political programs on television will be able to picture all the notable manifestations in the relationship between fashion and politics without much thought. Using the style of an ambitious essayist and a wealth of information, Daniel Kalt gives us an enlightening, sophisticated view of the targeted design of modern politics, which is all too often defined more by image than by content.

8. **Stefan Ulrich (2022):** *Und wieder Azzurro. Die geheimnisvolle Leichtigkeit Italiens.* **[Azzurri again. The mysterious lightness of Italy.] Munich: dtv Verlagsgesellschaft, 366 pages, EUR 13**

Stefan Ulrich actually holds a doctorate in law, but he made his first successful forays into journalism as a college student and joined the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* at a young age, holding various roles before being appointed Rome correspondent in 2005. This post was to define his future writing destiny. Every one of the books he went on to publish in quick succession was a success and helped many people to get their bearings when travelling to Italy. The same can be said for this title, in which he makes yet another fresh start in the country, this time spending two months travelling north to south from the Brenner Pass to Sicily (a journey of 4,012 kilometers!) in order to answer a question from his daughter: »Why are you so passionate about Italy?« Structuring his answer in 29 chapters, he takes the reader with him on a literary (Goethe...), cultural, culinary, and sociological journey of discovery that has a huge amount more to offer than the usual travel literature. Stefan Ulrich is an enthusiastic journalist who knows exactly how to entertain and enrich his audience.

9. **Raimund Löw (2022):** *Welt in Bewegung. Warum das 21. Jahrhundert so gefährlich geworden ist.* **[World in motion. Why the 21st Century has become so dangerous.] Vienna: Falter Verlag, 224 pages, EUR 22.90**

Some new publications that fall under book journalism are compilations of texts, reportages, editorials, comment pieces, and any number of other journalistic

genres that have already been published in periodicals – a process sometimes sarcastically termed 'bookbinder journalism.' Raimund Löw, born in 1951, shows here in impressive form how one can republish one's work from a decades-long career in such a way that it gains current, topical value. The book is structured by theme and brings together the wide range of different worlds from which the long-standing ORF correspondent reported. His technique turns daily news items into political events on the world stage with a historical depth of focus, and sets them in the context of the situation and time in which they were written. This is not Raimund Löw's first book, but it is one that places him firmly among the legendary generation of great foreign correspondents who shaped, and continue to shape, our view of the world.

10. Armin Thurnher (2023): *Anstandslos. Demokratie, Oligarchie, österreichische Abwege.* [Without complaint. Democracy, oligarchy, how Austria has gone astray.] Vienna: Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 126 pages, EUR 19

Armin Thurnher has long since reached retirement age. But it is not a limit that applies to journalists, especially when the times and the politics are turning the kind of pirouettes that would not have been imaginable just a short time ago. An Austrian political critic who has long been a legend in his own right cannot stay silent when something that he has been castigating for decades in his Vienna weekly newspaper *Falter* and his many books is coming to a head. When it comes to those in power today, an expletive is the only word he can think of. But there is one small glimmer of hope: The state of the uncomplaining is running out of people; »no state can endure this kind of weakness at the top forever« (p.126).

Extra: a translation

Wojciech Rogacin (2022): *Selenskyj. Die Biographie.* [Zelensky. The biography.] Polish-German translation by Benjamin Voelkel. Berlin u.a: Europaverlag, 256 pages, EUR 20

With the situation in world politics remaining precarious, not only the works of English-language journalists are regularly being published, but also – decades after the translation boom by Ryszard Kapuściński (1932-2007) – the latest book by a prominent, renowned Polish journalist, Wojciech Rogacin, born in 1968. With his biography about Zelensky, he has written a work in a genre that has become a journalistic classic in many political cultures. Astonishingly, even people just starting out on their political careers receive the honor of a biography

today. The Ukrainian President, too, is still relatively young, but the unprecedented fate of this country has made him a figure about whom people want, indeed need, to know as much as possible. Rogacin's book meets this need with an overwhelming wealth of information, voices, observations, and interpretations, in part fed by his geographical proximity. Given that Ukraine has not enjoyed great prominence in public and journalistic perceptions in recent years, there was not a great deal of archived material to choose from. That makes the number of sources that Rogacin found to combine with his research even more impressive. We learn a great deal about Zelensky's years as an artist and businessman in particular, and his great successes in cabaret, on the stage and on television (»Ukraine's richest showman,« p. 91), before he decided to pursue a political career. That career got off to such a promising start that critical observers both in Ukraine and abroad were rarely surprised by the quite exemplary way in which he mastered the change in role forced upon him by Putin's attack. Just as he had played the stages of his country with the greatest of success during his existence as an artist, he now made use of every modern instrument of communication to turn the world into a stage for himself and his country. This transformation and new start were no coincidence, argues Rogacin convincingly in his analysis; it was our Western lack of knowledge, indeed ignorance, that failed to see this unique Ukrainian culture. Anyone who consumes the current reporting should be familiar with this richly illustrated biography. It teaches us more about the background that makes this war unique: the self-delusions of a dictator and the political impact of a great stage talent. What will happen in the future is frighteningly unknown. But this unusual President, Rogacin believes, is already a »world-class personality« (p. 249).

Translation: Sophie Costella

Reviews

Gunter Reus (2022): *Der andere Claudius. Anmerkungen zu einem oft verkannten Publizisten.* [**The Other Claudius. Notes on an Oft-Misunderstood Publicist.**] **Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 142 pages, 32.- EUR.**

Reviewed by Horst Pöttker

»Der Mond ist aufgegangen, die goldnen Sternlein prangen...« [The moon has risen, the golden stars are shining...] – Matthias Claudius' lullaby has become such a staple that it has spawned numerous parodies, among others by Dieter Höss and Dieter Hildebrandt. Peter Rühmkorf's spoof begins like this: »The moon has risen, / I, between hope and dangling, / don't touch the sky.«

Even such rather odd echoes of the song point to the part of Claudius' work that paints him as a sensitive, occasionally sanctimonious, God-fearing poet, and as such, he certainly fit into the literary and cultural historical era of his time (1740-1815).

Gunter Reus, journalist, scientist, and historically inclined author (of which there are not too many in Germany), shows us a »different« and »oft-misunderstood« Claudius, as we learn from the subtitle. This is true biographically, as Reus paints a vivid portrait of a man who outwardly seems confidently faithful and lofty-minded, but who is really ridden by deep doubt and despair as well as struggling with daily life during an era – the Enlightenment – which we often idealize. But it is especially true because, as the word »publicist« in the subtitle merely alludes, Reus portrays Matthias Claudius as one of the first Germans who not only practiced the journalistic profession in its early phase during the 18th century, but also developed professional creativity to match. Along with Lessing, Kleist, and Heine, he represents the long development phase of this profession, which Dieter Paul Baumert called »literary journalism« in 1928. It is worth recalling this phase today that the profession is in need of fundamental change, because it shows that journalism was not always the assembly-line job driven by factuality, speed, and brevity that it has become since the last third of the 19th century, and still is today.

Headed by the quote »I'm not just jotting down the news,« chapter 4 (the longest one in the book) talks about Claudius as a representative of journalism in its infancy (p. 67) (pp. 67-98). In this era, creative minds invented and tested forms of presentation and research techniques that would later develop into teachable and learnable professional standards, such as the news item, the commentary, a reportage, or a (research) interview. Reus reminds us that Claudius was not only an author of Sentimental genres, but also wrote for the *Wandsbecker Bothe*, which appeared four times a week. He spent a few years serving as editor of the newspaper and in this role, relied on sources that were all but Sentimental, if only because of his geographical proximity to Hamburg, which was already a buzzing trading port and media hub at the time. The largest and most important daily newspaper in Europe at the time was the *Hamburgische unpartheyische Correspondent*.»When he compiled his news for the *Wandsbecker Bothe*, Matthias Claudius probably also made ample use of the reports in this paper with its widely ramified network of correspondents.« (p. 74)

Today, information media rely on news agencies, which emerged from the mid-19th century, but Claudius pioneered this method of news gathering as well as journalistic genres in Germany, such as social reportage.

> »Matthias Claudius is not a social reporter. But he does have a knack for the genre. The *Hessen-Darmstädtische privilegirte Land-Zeitung*, for example, heralds the beginnings of a precise depiction of social reality [...]. On 15 January 1777, Claudius submitted a report (probably sent to him) from a spinning facility Giessen: ›A spinning facility has recently been established in our town to provide for poor children. It works as follows: The children come to the spinning room at daybreak and stay there until 10 o'clock in the evening; at 11 o'clock in the morning, each child gets 1 pound of bread and may go home for an hour, as well as one hour in the evening. [...] In the spinning room, there is a box available to visitors to deposit donations at their discretion [...] So far, 39 children have been employed, partly boys and partly girls, 12 of whom are already able to spin wool, and the remaining 18 are still being taught; and several more join every day.‹« (p. 75f.)

Reus vividly shows how creatively Claudius applied the journalistic qualities of clarity and entertainment, always geared towards the audience, and his way of creating forms of presentation. Reus points out, contrary to professional prejudice, the value of the primary journalistic quality of professional independence for Claudius, even though he was also occasionally willing to compromise in his later years. This is not only evident from an instance of self-praise: I »usually add something of my own, an exclamation, or I call someone out for falsehoods, or I add something satirical,‹« which is evident in annotated news such as this: »›On the morning of 29 December, Sir Francis Gosling Knt. died, who was a great banker in Fleet Street. Hmm, a great banker!‹« (p. 83)

It is also evident from the fact that the supposed aesthete got into scraps with publishers and financial backers on several occasions throughout his professional

life because he took some journalistic liberties, and even ended up walking away from comfortable jobs. After only nine weeks as editor at the *Hessen-Darmstädtische privilegirte Land-Zeitung*, where he takes »the liberty of making pointed remarks against the ruling princes,« his employer Friedrich Carl von Moser

> »fiercely berated him, yet did not fire him from his position as editor, but instead even expressly offered Claudius the opportunity to continue to run the newspaper. Moser was going to cut his salary, though Claudius would still have earned a lot more than what he made in Hamburg and Wandsbek. But Claudius refused the offer and threw in the towel, preferring not to earn any money over submitting to journalistic dependence and be a civil servant for public relations. In his reply to Moser, he indicated that he could no longer consider it his job to peddle Darmstadt court politics via journalism. The break with his editor affected him, leaving him seriously ill, but he had no regrets. After a year in Darmstadt, he returned to his Wandsbek home in the spring of 1777 and remained a freelance publicist until the end of his life.« (p. 85f.)

Reus researched his sources thoroughly and extensively, as evidenced by 405 references and notes. In addition to its academic diligence, the book also showcases impressive journalistic qualities such as readability and vividness, owed to the author's smooth style, and even more so, his interspersed fictional scenes from Claudius's life, which are quite unusual for a non-fiction volume. The author lets the reader eavesdrop as Claudius gets scolded by his employer at the *Hamburgische Addreß=Comtoir=Nachrichten*, where he had been an editor since 1768. Reus adeptly leverages his sources to write a plausible dialog:

> »Claudius, come here. You're brimming with imagination, and that makes me brim with bile. Are you aware that we're making a newspaper for merchants and citizens? You write well, I can see that. And you possess wit. But those flights of fancy of yours… You have to adapt a bit, do you hear? Our readers have influence, and they have money, no matter how you feel about them. And I know how you feel about them. I understand that. But we need the moneybags, we need their advertisements. This is how publisher Leisching makes his living, and therefore, it's also how you, Claudius, and I make our living. Consider that when you write. And clean up the office, look at this jumble of old invoices, drafts, galley proofs … Where is your mind?« (p. 79)

Fictionality is inevitable in journalism; every metaphor is fictional, and journalistic writing relies on metaphors, especially in genres like commentary or reportage. Journalists also rely heavily on the fictional genre of satire. But when fictionality in journalism masquerades as factual, it becomes a lie, as we have seen with Relotius at *Der Spiegel*, as well as many others, including Theodor Fontane, who brazenly engaged in it during the 19th century while writing for Prussian newspapers. Fictionality in journalism is only legitimate when it is clearly evident. Reading the many quotes from Claudius in Reus' book, I gather that this often misunderstood publicist from Wandbek more or less consciously adhered to this rule. At any rate, the author of this book very consciously adhered to it,

clearly separating the fictional parts from the factual parts and making them clearly distinguishable by using distinct indentation and italics.

This, too, makes the book valuable, not only as a detailed research work on a development phase of the journalistic profession, but also as a journalistic monography – not least because of the touching biographical accounts of Matthias Claudius' tragic private life, especially in the first chapter entitled »Life, Death, and Doubt« (p. 11), which is a rare thing in scholarly literature. I, for one, devoured the book in a few days.

However, from an editorial view, I must make a minor critical remark about the very end of the book: Interested readers will find it bothersome to read with their pinkie finger stuck between the rear pages of the book so they can refer to the notes, which are all the way in the back. It would have perfected the readability of this fine book if it used good old-fashioned footnotes instead of a closed block of endnotes.

About the reviewer

Horst Pöttker (*1944) is a retired Professor of the Theory and Practice of Journalism at TU Dortmund University and editor of *Journalism Research*.

Translation: Kerstin Trimble

Markus Wolsiffer (2022): *Das Nachrichtenverständnis junger Menschen.*
Definitionen und Erwartungen im Kontext aktueller journalistischer Information.
[**How young people process the news. Definitions and expectations in**
the context of current journalistic information.] **Wiesbaden: Springer VS,**
543 pages, 84.99 EUR.

Reviewed by Nadine Klopfenstein Frei

When a journalist with a doctorate writes a book about how young people pro-
cess the news, one might expect a sharp argument here or there, or at least a
pointed pen. But Markus Wolsiffer exercised academic restraint in his book *Das*
Nachrichtenverständnis junger Menschen. The author consolidated his disserta-
tion into a nice volume on news processing by adolescents aged 14 to 21, also provid-
ing an overview of news research and its underlying theories. What is more, his
monumental (more than 560-page) tome contains a comprehensive outline of the
major theories in news and communication research, which will certainly be an
asset to future students. The book starts out strong. The sections on the status
quo and the research issue contain pointed statements that will make even the
most serious reader smirk. However, the book becomes more rigid and harder to
read as the chapters progress. The fact that the theoretical foundation takes up
more than half of the book does not help in terms of its readability.

The empirical, research-geared part includes a survey of young adults on their
understanding of news as well as a focus group which discussed TV formats for
this target group with young people. A survey, a classic instrument of commu-
nication science, is a logical choice to obtain meaningful results. Nonetheless,
it would certainly have been helpful to add a qualitative assessment of the
research question, namely, whether adolescents between the ages of 14 and 21
have their own individual understanding of news that differs from normative
understanding.

The author does not fully explain why he focused on TV news in the qualitative
part of the study – a rare item on the overall target group's media menu, since
young people between the ages of 14 and 20 consume news primarily via social
media. Thus, the book's goal to illuminate the »blind spot« of the young audi-
ence's news perception remains little more than a (small) glimpse.

Despite his focus on more traditional TV formats, the author critically exam-
ines the previous definition of news and the understanding of news in general,
thus penetrating directly to the core of the problem: how young people under-
stand news and whether their understanding of news differs from the normative
ideal. Unlike other authors, he does not paint a dystopian picture of young adults
as media recipients, but differentiates between interest in the news and news

consumption itself. Wolsiffer points out that the latter accounts for only a small part of this group's (digital) media use.

The book becomes really interesting from chapter 4, which adeptly summarizes the current theories and the state of research. If you are pressed for time, I recommend you start the book with this chapter and skip the theoretical introduction with its extensive presentation of well-known communication and news theories (or leave it to first-year students).

The critical examination of the Uses and Gratification approach and various developments of the method, on the other hand, is rather more suited for expert researchers. The study was conducted in 2020 under Covid-19 conditions, which meant that the recruitment of survey participants had to outsourced to an external provider and the focus group had to be conducted digitally. That is all the more remarkable because no significant limitations arose from these difficult circumstances.

The results of the survey reveal different clusters of news understandings that would have merited more detailed description – after all, they represent the actual core of the empirical study and could open up a new perspective on news research into young people. The individual's understanding of what they perceive as news does contribute significantly to reception behavior – despite variability within the target group.

This realization presents the media industry with a fundamental problem in producing news for young people: You cannot assume that the target group is homogeneous. This has implications for the producers of news formats, as they can never hope to meet all the demands of young recipients between the ages of 14 and 21. This segmentation, coupled with fierce competition for attention, is rapidly exacerbating the problem of news production. The expectation that recipients should actively go looking for suitable offers to satisfy their information needs seems to be utterly outdated.

In his book *Das Nachrichtenverständnis junger Menschen*, Markus Wolsiffer paints a differentiated picture of young news recipients and encourages media producers to rethink their practices. With his doctoral thesis, the author has produced an appealing work with interesting and important insights into young people's understanding of news. The book could have been somewhat narrower in scope, but is a fundamental foundational work due to its comprehensive classification of news and communication theories.

This review first appeared in rezensionen:kommunikation:medien, 12 May 2023, accessible at https://www.rkm-journal.de/archives/23814

About the reviewer

Nadine Klopfenstein Frei, a former journalist, works as a research assistant at the Institute for Applied Media Studies (IAM) at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW) in Winterthur. In 2017, she completed her master's degree in digital journalism at the University of Hamburg. Her research areas are news consumption by young people, youth and media, digital transformation, volunteer communications, and sustainability communications.

Translation: Kerstin Trimble

Andreas Elter (2021): *TV und AV Journalismus. Praxisbuch für Unterricht und Training, Bd. 2.* [TV and AV journalism. A practical primer for teaching and training, vol. 2.] Baden-Baden [Nomos] 287 pages, 26.- EUR

Reviewed by Sebastian Köhler

Andreas Elter is considered one of the most theoretically and practically versed moving image journalism experts in this country. Prior to his current role as head of the »Moving Image« department at the ARD-ZDF Media Academy, he spent many years working as an editor and reporter at WDR, ZDF and RTL before becoming the nationwide Director of Studies for Journalism at a private university. According to Elter, he wrote this book between December 2019 and May 2021 – a time when Germany and much of the world were heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time of crisis, there was a considerable surge in the use of traditional media, similarly to the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2001.

The »Praxisbuch für Unterricht und Training« is the second part of a work whose first volume – with a clear theoretical focus – was already reviewed at r:km. According to Andreas Elter, both books have value in their own right and each volume is structured in a modular fashion. In both aspects, he generally succeeded.

The second book, written as a highly practical primer, is also original in that it discusses »renaissances« of media that had previously almost been written off (such as linear television), which often happens in the wake of drastic crises such as the pandemic. Another innovative aspect is the book's examination of digital audiovisual journalism relatively independently of the channel, i.e. the media form. Overall, Elter's work makes stimulating contributions to greater media literacy in the very important field of moving images for practical media creators, teachers, and learners.

The book is quite comprehensive in that it brings together two aspects in both the theoretical and the practical realm: Elter shows the »very foundational« aspects (5) without neglecting important recent developments.

The author is aware, and explicitly states, that he can mitigate but not remedy the lack of a comprehensive textbook that considers or even integrates moving image journalism in both theory and practice in equal measure. His attempt to bridge multiple areas is also an attempt to help connect academic fields such as journalism/publicity (more geared towards communication studies) on the one hand, and film and television studies (more geared towards media studies) on the other.

Overall, Andreas Elter attempts to table a kind of »universal model of digital, audiovisual journalism« (6). He succeeded in creating a remarkably integrative approach, also in his personal combination of scientific reflection and practical professional experience.

The book has some (minor) linguistic weaknesses. For instance, the German book title casually dropped the necessary hyphens, an ommission that is common in TV journalism. However, the book's minor (even negligible) shortcomings hardly detract from its overall, considerable usefulness – especially for media professionals who seek theoretical grounding for their practical work.

This review first appeared in rezensionen:kommunikation:medien, 24 April 2023, accessible at https://www.rkm-journal.de/archives/23789

About the reviewer

Dr. Sebastian Köhler, M.A., has been Professor of Journalism and Applied Communication Studies at ʜᴍᴋᴡ University of Applied Sciences for Media, Communication and Management in Berlin since April 2010. Sebastian Köhler can be found on Twitter as @sebkoe and on mastodon.social as Sebastian Köhler.

Translation: Kerstin Trimble

Translators of this edition

Sophie Costella was born and grew up in the ᴜᴋ. After completing her degree in German and Politics, in 2008 she moved to Germany, where she has worked as a translator ever since. She lives in Mainz with her husband and two children, but loves to travel as much as possible. Contact: sophiecostella@hotmail.com

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Schriften zur Rettung des öffentlichen Diskurses

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Künstliche Intelligenz und Maschinisierung des Menschen
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2020, 200 S., 190 x 120 mm, dt.
ISBN 978-3-86962-512-6

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Sebastian Turner /
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**Deep Journalism.
Domänenkompetenz als redaktioneller Erfolgsfaktor**
Schriften zur Rettung des öffentlichen Diskurses, 5
2023, Broschur, 190 x 120 mm, dt.
ISBN (Print) 978-3-86962-660-4

Journalismus

Journalismus. Das Lehr- und Handbuch von Stephan Russ-Mohl erscheint mit Tanjev Schultz als neuem Ko-Autor in vierter Auflage – aktualisiert und von Grund auf überarbeitet. Das Buch widmet sich primär der Praxis und dem journalistischen ›Handwerk‹, lässt aber Erkenntnisse der Journalismus- und Medienforschung mit einfließen, wenn dies nützlich ist und den Horizont erweitert. Es spürt den dramatischen Veränderungen im Berufsfeld nach, ohne in modischen ›Hype‹ zu verfallen. Das Buch zeigt, wie sich durch netzbasierte Recherche- und Kommunikationsformen der journalistische Alltag verändert. Nach amerikanischen Vorbildern konzipiert, ist das Lehrbuch leicht lesbar, aber vor allem informativ. Kurze Pro- und Contra-Texte zu umstrittenen Themen sollen zu eigenem Nachdenken anregen.

Das Buch bietet Grundlagen für Volontäre, Journalistenschüler und Studierende der Journalistik, Kommunikations- oder Medienwissenschaft, aber auch Interessantes für voll ausgebildete Journalistinnen und Journalisten, PR-Fachleute und Medienmanager.

Journalismus

Das Verhältnis zwischen Journalisten und Kommunikationsverantwortlichen von Unternehmen und Organisationen gilt als kompliziert. Letztere fühlen sich durch entsprechende Berichterstattung hintergangen, Journalisten sehen sich durch Einflussnahme und Material manipuliert. Dabei verstehen sich viele Verantwortliche in Kommunikationsabteilungen als Dienstleister der Medien. Journalisten erkären sich dagegen gerne als moralische Wächter.

Das Buch beleuchtet unterschiedliche Themenfelder im Miteinander von Journalismus und PR. Arbeitsweisen und Berufsbilder werden verglichen, Spannungsfelder beleuchtet, Erwartungshaltungen eingeordnet und Chancen ausgelotet. Die Fachlektüre zeigt auf, wie unterschiedlich die Organisationsstrukturen und Herangehensweisen an Themen und Tools trotz aller ›handwerklichen‹ Gemeinsamkeiten sind. Neben Forschungsergebnissen zur Krisenkommunikation in Pandemiezeiten und die Auswirkungen auf beide Seiten, dem Einfluss von Social Media oder dem brisanten Thema ›bezahlte Pressereisen‹ legt das Buch Wert auf aktuelle Beispiele und Nähe zu den handelnden Protagonisten.

Dieses Buch richtet sich an Journalisten und PR-Verantwortliche, Studierende beider Fachrichtungen und interessierte Leser.

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http://blexkom.halem-verlag.de

rezensionen:kommunikation:medien (r:k:m) versteht sich als zentrales Rezensionsforum für die Kommunikations- und Medienwissenschaften. *r:k:m* will seinen Lesern einen möglichst vollständigen thematischen Überblick über die einschlägige Fachliteratur ermöglichen und Orientierung in der Fülle des ständig wachsenden Buchmarkts bieten. Aktuelle Rezensionen erscheinen in regelmäßigen Abständen.

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http://www.journalistikon.de

NIKLAS VENEMA

Das Volontariat.
Eine Geschichte des Journalismus
als Auseinandersetzung um seine
Ausbildung (1870-1990)
Öffentlichkeit und Geschichte, 13
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ISBN (PDF) 978-3-86962-624-6

FELIX KOLTERMANN

Fotografie im Journalismus.
Bildredaktionelle Praktiken in
Print- und Online-Medien
2023, 288 S., 43 Abb., 5 Tab.,
Broschur
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