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HERBERT VON HALEM VERLAG

Editorial

Dear readers,

Three questions first: Which country bans books in public schools because they allegedly do not conform to moral standards? Which country denies journalists access to press conferences if they do not follow the government's language rules? The government of which country relies on billionaire tech oligarchs, but cuts off funding to humanitarian organizations, covers newspapers and broadcasters with lawsuits and calls the press »enemy of the people«?

If you are guessing Russia now, you are not wrong, of course. But we were actually thinking of the United States. Because things are not going well for the once protective power of the Western world. With remarkable unscrupulousness, the Trump administration is currently laying the axe to media and communication freedom – only to then demand this fundamental right from others, as it did recently at the Munich Security Conference in February 2025. And it is not just media that are being attacked. Cultural achievements and civil liberties in general are under unprecedented threat in the US. Reason enough for us to look across the Atlantic in this issue of *Journalism Research*.

In his contribution to the debate, Fred Vultee shows how the social climate can tip over into the inhumane by deliberately irritating the population. For our author from Wayne State University, this is the case when people are overcome by the feeling that all kinds of social problems have reached a state of emergency that can only be countered by rigorous means. Right-wing policies (stopping immigration, expelling foreigners or suppressing gender diversity) then offer themselves as a salvation. However, according to Vultee, the driving force behind this process in the United States are media outlets such as Fox News or social media platforms, which constantly report on negative individual events in a shrill, false or generalized manner – until the idea of a national threat arises.

The »increasing oligarchization of US politics« and the influence of Big Tech on US media and communication are described by *Journalism Research* editor Mandy Tröger and Hendrik Theine (Linz/University of Pennsylvania). Their analysis is as prudent as it is somber. It analyzes the influence that mega (and »MAGA«) entrepreneurs such as Elon Musk have on journalism and media

regulation in Europe. The contribution to the debate leaves no doubt that the Trump administration's actions threaten the controlling function of journalism and thereby democracy on both sides of the Atlantic. However, Tröger and Theine also outline countermeasures that journalism and communication research could take.

Alfred Cotton and Jeffrey Blevins (University of Cincinnati) take a look at media reporting in the US in the run-up to Donald Trump's second term in office. In a critical discourse analysis, they show how differently four major daily newspapers portrayed the protests of the »Black Lives Matter« movement following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis – depending on which (online) sources the editorial offices used for their research. The study shows how contradictory media's interpretations of the riots of summer 2020 were in a nation that was already deeply divided at the time.

In further essays in this first issue of 2025 Teodora Trifonova and Joy Jenkins (University of Missouri) shed light on the research paths and understanding of the roles of Romanian, Bulgarian and Hungarian reporters on the war in Ukraine. Roxane Biller, Seraina Cadonau and Marion Frank (Hamburg Media School) focus on diversity issues in German newspaper editorial offices. They show that there are still too few women, too few people of color and too few young journalists, which has a negative impact on empathetic and adequate reporting. Thomas Hauser takes a more fundamental look at the development of journalism in Germany. In his essay, the former editor-in-chief and publisher of the *Badische Zeitung* warns that economization and digitalization are endangering the very foundation of journalism. Hauser believes that the former »symbiosis« between journalism and society has been destroyed. Instead, alarmism and denunciation in the news coverage intensifies aggression and hysteria in the political debate. Hauser's observations draw attention back to Fred Vultee's analysis of the »culture war« in the US, which closes the full circle of topics in this issue.

Our authors' contributions remind us – time and time again – of what is important: ensuring diversity, independence and quality of journalism. This is our task as a journal for journalism research, and it is the task of civil society as a whole – especially in times like these.

Yours, Gunter Reus

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HERBERT VON HALEM VERLAG

Obituary

Horst Pöttker

Prof. Dr. sc. pol. Hans Poerschke

(March 5, 1937 – January 19, 2025)

We are in mourning for an extraordinary academic whose career mirrored the upheaval of German contemporary history and, in particular, of journalism studies as a university subject.

Hans Poerschke was born in Berlin in humble circumstances. His father, who was taken prisoner in the war and never returned, was a janitor and later an unskilled worker in the *Reichsdruckerei* (imperial printing house); his mother was a seamstress who made ends meet after the war by taking in work at home, by helping with the harvest, and finally as a quality inspector. Scholarships received under the education policy of the DDR – which was initially friendly to the working class and was later replaced by self-recruitment of the privileged official class – enabled Poerschke to attend grammar school. After completing his schooling in 1955, and despite his gift for music, he studied in the faculty of Journalism Studies at Karl Marx University Leipzig. He graduated in 1959 with a thesis on analysis in journalistic pieces and, after a brief interlude as an official in the Free German Youth (FDJ) youth movement – returned to the Journalism Studies faculty. Students called the faculty the »red monastery« – a nickname that would later become the title of a book in which Brigitte Klump settled scores with the academic institution that trained the vast majority of journalists in the GDR. Under Dean (or Faculty Director) Emil Dusiška, Hans Poerschke gained his doctorate in 1969 with a dissertation on a topic of his own choosing: »the concept of societal information in journalism studies.« He then rose through the ranks to become a senior research associate, a lecturer, and, in 1983, having achieved his post-doctoral qualification, Professor and Head of the academic field of Theory and History of Journalism.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, students freely elected Hans Poerschke as the last Director of Leipzig's Journalism Studies Faculty in the final months of the GDR. He then – despite being deemed »of limited educational potential« in evaluations by Kurt Koszyk – led the Communication Studies program in 1991 under founding Dean Karl Friedrich Reimers and served on the founding commission for the new Institute for Communication and Media Studies. Already knowing that there would be no place for him in the institute, Poerschke did not apply for a professorship and, when his last employment contract expired in 1992, entered transitional retirement. The financial security this provided enabled him even in retirement to remain active in academia and in politics, especially media policy, representing the political party PDS on the Bundestag's »New Media« commission and spending six years on the MDR Broadcasting Council. He also helped to found the Saxony chapter of the Deutscher Journalisten-Verband and (together with other former members of the Journalism Studies faculty in Leipzig) the society »Diskurs«, which published a newspaper for the unemployed in Dresden as part of a job creation scheme. He sat on the district council for Anhalt-Bitterfeld and the town council of Bitterfeld-Wolfen. And, in the late 1990s, he accepted several invitations to teach at the Institute of Journalism at TU Dortmund University.

Hans Poerschke was an exemplary academic above all because he maintained a self-critical distance from himself and the practical interests of his life. This distance enabled him to admit to errors and correct problematic positions. In doing so, he did not abandon the ideology-critical idea of the possibility of false consciousness that does not match the situation at hand. He would perhaps not have liked it, but Karl Popper's favored method of laboriously making scientific progress through efforts at falsification is visible here.

For Hans Poerschke, an important object of his intellectual progress was the view that Lenin had held of party press and journalism. The fundamental work that shaped journalism studies in Leipzig was published in 1983, compiled by a collective of authors under his leadership. In it, he quotes and applauds Lenin:

> »Only the creation of a shared party organ can fill every ›sub-worker‹ of the revolutionary cause with the consciousness that he marches ›in rank and file,‹ that his work for the party is directly necessary, that he is a link in the chain that will strangle the worst enemy of the Russian proletariat« (POERSCHKE 1983: 36f.).

The dictatorial character of Lenin's views – expressed here and in many other places, such as the notorious, oft-quoted description of the role of journalists as collective propagandists, agitators, and organizers – was often explained by Poerschke and those around him at the time as temporary tactical necessities that arose in the early 20th Century from the development of the socialist party press in Tsarist Russia.

In late 1988, with Gorbachev's Perestroika underway and the GDR having begun the socio-economic decline that would lead to the fall of the Berlin Wall

a year later, a manuscript by Hans Poerschke was reproduced and distributed in the Journalism Studies faculty. In it, unlike earlier in his career, he wrote of the role of journalism less as the production of *public opinion*, and more as the *public sphere*. He described journalistic work as a way to incite the processing and change of current problems in society – described somewhat generally and convolutedly as the »current societal situation« – by bringing them to people's attention:

> »Appropriation of the current societal situation [by socialist journalism] as a situation in which the people are to act, demands not only that possibilities and requirements resulting from this situation for further action [on the part of the people] are uncovered and assessed, but also that specific goals and means for using the possibilities and taking the requirements into account are presented and explored.« (POERSCHKE 1988: 158)

The source information of the chapters of the manuscript, bound separately, include more writings by Karl Marx, a champion of press freedom in Germany.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Hans Poerschke more clearly reconstructed the change in views of the public sphere in the final years of the GDR from writings by Michael Brie, Wolfgang Luutz, and himself. In an essay from 2010, he writes:

> »Whereas before, the guidance of society by the party, its leadership by the state, the introduction of the masses to socialist consciousness were the starting point for considering the public sphere, a new form of consideration now gained the upper hand. The public sphere was now consistently seen as a ›form of intercourse,‹ as ›a societal form of social communication,‹ as a ›societal way of communicating‹ that is a condition of the societal existence of people in modern society and whose functions dictate whether and how they can shape the way they live together.« (POERSCHKE 2010: 49)

Hans Poerschke also examined the views of party press and journalism that Lenin expressed in his many writings. In his 2020 book on the subject, Poerschke recognized Lenin's concept of journalism as repressive and hostile to the public sphere from beginning to end, criticizing it sharply:

> »The regime for the party's dealings with the press, inspired by Lenin and implemented under his leadership, was thoroughly undemocratic. This was not a repairable deficit attributed to a lack of experience or adverse circumstances. On the contrary, only a comprehensive system of gagging and patronizing the people mentally and politically could secure the power exercised dictatorially by a party elite. The principle of party literature destroyed – like all other sides of the reign of the party of Lenin – the conditions for achieving the emancipatory objective under which the party had stood. [...] The practice of regimentation was established under Lenin; Stalin was able to fall back on it as an indisputably self-evident.« (POERSCHKE 2020: 216)

Hans Poerschke reached this insight in a long and thorough process of research. He did not find it easy. In podium discussions, he spoke of his unease at his insight forcing him to betray the younger man he himself had been. In him,

communication studies and journalism studies have lost a colleague who embodied the »profession of academia« like few others. The fact that there was no place for him at German universities following reunification speaks against the pluralistic diversity of those universities – as does the fact that his university became ashamed of and then jettisoned the name Karl Marx in the 1990s. It is another reason why we should keep the memory of the honest Marxist Hans Poerschke alive. He – and we – deserve that.

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HERBERT VON HALEM VERLAG

Research Paper

Alfred J. Cotton III / Jeffrey Layne Blevins

Policing the narrative

A critical discourse analysis of reporting on the #BlackLivesMatter social media movement

Abstract: **Protests emerged worldwide during the summer of 2020 in response to the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin on May 25, 2020, who was murdered two months after the Louisville Metro Police Department killed Breonna Taylor. The #BlackLivesMatter hashtag has trended on social media and reignited a nation-wide social justice movement, all during a global pandemic. Our study is a critical discourse analysis on how news media quote, source, identify and misidentify members of the Black Lives Matter movement as it took shape on social media during June 2020, as reported in four US newspapers.**

Keywords: Black Lives Matter, critical discourse analysis, sourcing

During the summer of 2020, protest emerged worldwide in response to the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin on May 25, 2020. Bystander video recorded Chauvin kneeling on Floyd's neck for 9 minutes and 29 seconds before he died while four other officers stood by without intervening. In the video, before he ultimately died, Floyd struggles to tell officers 27 times that he could not breathe.

Prior to Floyd's murder, on March 13, 2020, plain-clothed police officers in Louisville, Kentucky shot and killed Breonna Taylor, a young Black woman, while serving a no-knock search warrant. Tragically, the officers serving the warrant were at the wrong address that was several miles from where they were supposed to be. On May 15, 2020, just ten days before Floyd would be killed, Taylor's family filed a wrongful death suit, which brought more media attention to

her killing. Although Floyd's death occurred after Taylor's, his case appeared to attract more national media attention because of the bystander video.

Nonetheless, the two cases ignited a series of protests across the country that ranged from organized marches to unorganized riots with looting and the burning of buildings. Though most protests involved little violence perpetrated by the protestors, many prominent US news broadcast and cable outlets emphasized the few instances of property damage instead of focusing on the violent behavior of police attempting to silence the protesters (see CHENOWETH/PRESSMAN 2020). This inconsistency between events and coverage is significant, as news media operate to define the social reality of a given situation for audiences (ADONI/MANE 1984). Moreover, one of the primary ways that reality is defined is through journalists' selection and use of sources, and the analysis to be presented here looks to examine the social reality of the protests in the US during the summer of 2020 based on the selection and use of sources.

How social situations are described by journalists through sourcing, language, as well as the selection and arrangement of facts is critical to the broader public discourse and how audiences will interpret, discuss, and understand these kinds of events (see TRACY 2001). Through a critical discourse analysis of news reporting about the political and racial unrest in the US during the summer of 2020 we can contextualize how journalistic sourcing (who they interviewed and quoted) primarily defined the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and related social activities at the time.

Hall et al. (1978) argued, with their theory of primary definition, that elite and official sources (e.g., police, politicians, academics) tend to be the primary sources of information for mainstream journalists. This level of access affords these sources the opportunity to have a say in crafting media narratives around a given issue. As Herman and Chomsky (1988/2002) noted in their propaganda model, mainstream news media are complicit in the maintaining of the status quo insomuch as they benefit from its continuance. By strategically selecting whose voice receives prominence in the larger discourse around an issue, media workers can be strategic about what messages are prominent in the larger discourse, thus defining the social reality for the public. Specific to news coverage of protests and social movements, scholars have found news media tend to avoid speaking to activists and alternative sources (ATTON/WICKENDEN 2005). This allows law enforcement and politicians to become the arbiters of truth for the public and pushes the alternative's view of the world further into the margins. We explore the sourcing of news reports about the protests from the summer 2020, and question whether journalists in four cities where protests emerged cited activists, voices from social media and other alternative sources during a one-month period from that summer and whether those sources provided support for, or opposition to, the Black Lives Matter movement.

Literature review: Propaganda, new media, and sourcing

How news media portray protests, protesters and others who challenge institutional norms (in this case, policing) can have a significant impact on the sustainability of the causes that protesters and activists are supporting. As Kilgo and Harlow (2019) showed, including anti-Black racism tended to delegitimize those causes through various features of framing and sourcing. Similarly, Umamaheswar (2020) produced somewhat conflicting results: While activists presented their goals positively to the news media, coverage tended to focus on the supposed negative consequences of the movement. Furthermore, as locally based Black Lives Matter activists in Cincinnati described, there is a tendency for »legacy news to inaccurately associate people, activities, and statements« (BLEVINS/LEE 2022: 41) to members of a particular group. This was despite the local group's effort to use its social media platforms in a disciplined way to control their own messaging. While Blevins and Lee's (2022) study referenced a particular group in a single location, we aim here to expand the examination of that kind of phenomenon on a larger scale, including multiple newspapers and cities across the US, while also focusing on a particular part of the propaganda model described by Herman and Chomsky (1988/2002) – namely, sourcing.

The Propaganda Model

Herman and Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent* (1988/2002) outlined and discussed the differences between news and propaganda. In highlighting those differences, the authors noted the American communication media ecosystem is sustained and supported by a propaganda model whose intent is to support the status quo, namely the actions of government and private actors (DEMUYAKOR 2021). The claims of the propaganda model are supported using five filters through which big media manufacture the consent of consumers into the democratic process (BROUDY/KLAEHN 2019). Those filters – media ownership and size, advertising, sourcing, flak (political spin), and anticommunism as ideology – shape the perception for a mostly passive consumer base.

In sum, Herman and Chomsky (1988) made the argument the economic, political and linguistic power afforded large corporate media organizations allows them the ability to filter the ›news fit to print‹ in a way defining the social reality (ADONI/MANE 1984) for their consumers. In this model, those with power can shape the dominant ideologies of public discourse. The implication here is that the so-called free market of American mainstream mass media is in fact a market manipulated by the forces of those powerful entities. All actors in the media system (e.g., journalists and reporters, editors, managers, publishers, advertisers,

consumers) described by the propaganda model fit into one of those filters playing a role to perpetuate the status quo further.

Propaganda and new media

Recent scholars have attempted to apply the 1988 model to new media such as the internet and social media. Herman in a retrospective (2000) on *Manufacturing Consent*, noted the internet was not likely to be the linguistically and politically liberating force for change other scholars predicted.

Fuchs (2019) noted several factors making the propaganda model useful for understanding discourse on social media, while also noting the uniqueness of the context, specifically, »that in computer networks and on networked computers, the production, diffusion and consumption of information converges. Audiences become users and prosumers … different from the broadcast model of communication« (86). Fuchs' online propaganda model noted the consolidation of ownership in online content, targeted advertising supporting the entire structure, traditional news sources remaining in place as powerful players, flak in bots, politician accounts and hate speech and ideologies of the internet (often in the form of memes) being amplified by algorithms. Fuchs' (2019) conclusion was that the model is »relevant for the critical study of the internet, social media, and Big Data« (88).

Herman and Chomsky's (1988/2002) propaganda model had always been concerned with the presence and prevalence of elite voices in the public discourse (HERMAN 2000). The reliance on these elite information sources is one of the primary driving forces behind the spread of propaganda. They did however make explicit in *Manufacturing Consent* the role alternative voices can play in mitigating the perpetuation of propaganda:

> It is a model of media *behavior* and *performance*, not of media *effects* [emphasis in original]. We explicitly pointed to the existence of alternative media, grassroots information sources and public scepticism [*sic*] about media truthfulness as important limits on media effectiveness in propaganda service, and we urged the support and more vigorous use of the existing alternatives. (HERMAN 2000: 103)

That elites are involved in the crafting of narratives involving elites is evident of a »self-protecting system« (HERMAN 2000: 108) where the owners, funders and sources all come from the same background. Whether focusing the analysis on individual »micro strategies to influence the media« (HERMAN 2000: 108) or the macro efforts of global conglomerates, their PR agencies and spin rooms, the sources of information as well as the strategies employed by those sources have a profound impact on the continuation of dominant ideologies.

Sourcing alternative communities and on social media

A specific concern of this study is: How did journalistic outlets source their reporting on BLM activities and messaging? Online sourcing practices were supposed to »democratize« (VAN LEUVEN et al. 2018) the news, particularly news involving alternative communities. Empirically, that has not been the case as Deprez and Van Leuven (2018) found that Twitter had been primarily used for maintaining contact with the same elite sources only through a different medium.

Moreover, Hall et al.'s (1978) theory of primary definition argues social hierarchies become the deciding factor in how journalists assign credibility to a source (e.g., police and elites above activists and ordinary citizens). Hall and his colleagues argued the primary definers (both implicitly and explicitly) assign the terms through which counter-definitions and alternative viewpoints are stated in the news.

Research questions

The impact of legacy news reporters relying largely on a limited pool of official and elite sources is those entities are in a privileged position to establish what becomes the primary and hegemonic interpretation of the topic. However, this study questions whether social media platforms helped elevate the narratives of BLM activists through journalistic sourcing. Accordingly, our discourse analysis considers the following research questions:

RQ1: How did newspaper journalists' reporting on the BLM movement over the summer of 2020 reference social media accounts of official and elite sources, as well as those of BLM activists and supporters?
RQ2: Were there differences in how they referenced official sources vs. activist ones?
RQ3: What was the tone surrounding the use of activist sources?

Critical Discourse Analysis

The questions posed in this study about news reporting on BLM and social media are rooted in the theoretical frameworks of Herman and Chomsky's (1988/2002) propaganda model and Hall et al.'s (1978) primary definition; and lend themselves well to exploration through a critical discourse analysis. For journalism and mass communication scholars, discourse analysis is a qualitative methodology that is »the study of talk (or text) in context, where research reports use

excerpts and their analysis as the central means to make a scholarly argument« (TRACY 2001: 726). Tracy (2001) maintained that context is crucial for interpretive theorists in understanding »communication as a socially situated activity« (727). The context of political and racial unrest in the US in the summer of 2020 provides a backdrop of controversy and texts surrounding that controversy (news reports, the data of this analysis) afforded us the opportunity to answer our research questions. Tracy (2001) argued that discourse analysis allows researchers »to study how people present themselves, manage their relationships, assign responsibility and blame, create organizations, enact culture, persuade others, make sense of social members' ongoing interactional practices, and so on« (734). Our research questions seek to do precisely this in understanding the contextual meaning of the sources used by journalists in reporting on BLM and related social media activities.

The framework for our analysis comes from Fairclough (2001), who outlined five steps necessary to the critical discourse analysis (CDA): (1) focus on a media case that has a semiotic aspect; (2) identify the narrative ingredients in the story as well as challenges to that story through analysis of: (a) the argumentative practices and semiotic practices located within the story and (b) discuss how these systems of practices are similar or different from practices in other secondary mediated texts; (3) consider what alternative narratives exist to disrupt the initial representation in and of the media case; (4) identify shifts in the discourse over time and possibly ways that this works or happens; and (5) reflect critically on the analysis (adapted from Fairclough 2001: 125). These steps provide a clear path to gaining more meaning of the precarious nature of this specific context using critical discourse analysis.

Critical discourse analysis is a tool for reevaluating texts and the context around which those texts were produced to promote »alternative readings or readings by particular others« (KRIPPENDORFF 2012: 65) of those texts. Krippendorff provided a rationale for CDA as the preferred method when seeking to reevaluate the effectiveness of mainstream/status quo readings of texts. By looking specifically at the types of sources used in these news reports from a critical lens, we provide an alternative reading of these texts within the context of the uprisings of summer 2020. Seeking to use CDA as a means to understand »all practices are practices of production« (FAIRCLOUGH 2001), we can situate these news reports as tools used by mainstream media either to further subjugate alternative voices to the margins or as tools whose purpose is to give voice to the voiceless; a common journalism maxim. What makes CDA a critical technique is the emphasis on »the divergence, the distances, the oppositions, the differences, the relations of its various scientific discourses« (FOUCAULT 1991: 55; as cited in LOCKE 2004). In other words, the focus of our analysis is on how we can look at the practices of source selection in these media as maintaining the status quo

even when the common reading is of these texts as subversive merely for writing about BLM and these protests.

We follow Fairclough's (2001) framework and furthermore, modeling Dawson's (2018) ethnographic content analysis of newspaper op-eds, we analyze the discourse of news articles from local papers in cities with notable BLM protest activity during throughout the summer of 2020 to discover how local news reporting was describing BLM activists on social media. How did reporting on BLM and its organizational activities on social media present the activists – as peaceful protesters organizing for social justice or rioting mobs of looters?

Following Dawson's (2018) procedures for analysis, the paper used a purposive sample of a handful of local newspapers across the US to include city newspapers, as urban areas were most likely to have BLM-related social justice demonstrations over the summer of 2020. This study excluded those cities (i.e., Minneapolis and Louisville) where focusing events (BIRKLAND 1997) (i.e., the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, respectively) had occurred to have an assessment of how local journalism was covering BLM's organization through social media without being particularly close to any specific set of events. In addition, city newspapers in Minneapolis and Louisville, where local law enforcement was directly involved in the triggering events (i.e., police officers were involved in the killings of Floyd and Taylor), would be more likely to include official government sources in their reporting on BLM activities. Our aim was to focus on what people in cities outside of where the triggering events took place were learning about the movement from local newspapers. We limited our analysis to newspapers since local television news tends to focus on visuals and covering events as they happen, which might limit sources to who is there and what is happening at that moment.

Our purposive sample of US newspapers included the largest daily as identified by Muck Rack for unique visitors per month (UVM) (MERCIER 2019) from each of the four geographic regions (Northeast, Midwest, South and West) recognized by the US Census Bureau (n.d.). Those newspapers included the *New York Times* (Northeast), *Los Angeles Times* (West), *Houston Chronicle* (South) and *Chicago Tribune* (Midwest). ProQuest was used to search the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times* and *Chicago Tribune* newspapers, and the *Houston Chronicle's* website for its coverage during the month of June 2020. The key words were »Black Lives Matter,« »social media,« »Facebook,« »Instagram« and »Twitter.« The date range of the search was the month of June 2020, which followed the May 25, 2020, murder of George Floyd. This coincides with nationwide protests and organizations becoming more widespread nationwide, and a week after the killing itself, which was likely to dominate news coverage in the immediate aftermath. The focus was not on the reporting of Floyd's killing, but coverage of the BLM movement and related social media activities.

In our analysis we counted the number of references to BLM social media activity in the stories, as well as the number of times official/elite sources were referenced compared to activists/organizers. However, modelling Dawson's (2018) ethnographic content analysis in which the »meaning of the content – rather than the quantity of the data – remains paramount throughout the analysis« (302) we created loosely structured coding schemas to categorize »official/elite« sources vs. »activist/alternative« (see Table 1 below where we describe social and cultural norms as reflected in journalistic sourcing).

Table 1
Social and cultural norms as reflected in journalistic sourcing

Official/Elite Sources	Activist/Alternative
Examples: any government official (mayor, city council member, police officer, business owners, etc.).	Examples: BLM member, other social justice group members, or anyone identified as an organizer, protester, etc.)
Official/elite sources tend to convey or imply traditional social and cultural norms, such as law-and-order, business and economic concerns, public safety, reliance on policing and city government to address social concerns.	Activist/alternative sources tend to convey or imply social and cultural norms, such as the failure of policing and city government to protect marginalized and minority members of its community and stress the importance of social justice over business and economic concerns.

Source: Authors' own

Sources considered »official« or »elite« included anyone who was identified as government officials, including police, mayor, city council members, business owners, etc. Sources were coded as »activist« or »alternative« if they were identified as a BLM member, member of a social justice group, organizer, protester, etc. Furthermore, we paid close attention to how BLM members were described in the news stories (e.g., as social justice advocates or rioters, looters, etc.).

Policing the narrative: Reporting on BLM during the summer of 2020

Here we present a critical discourse analysis of the narratives from each of the newspapers under examination, beginning in the geographic East and moving West. In the section that follows we will discuss critical themes across the four newspapers and conclude our analysis.

New York

Reporting in the *New York Times* (NYT) used both elite and alternative sources among its 27 articles. When reporting focused on the protests directly, NYT reporters often spoke directly with activists on the ground. These sources typically were in support of the protests and protesters.

Specific to social media sourcing, NYT reporters used both direct and second-hand social media sources. NYT journalists used Twitter, Instagram and Facebook to gather information both from elites and alternative sources. In the *Times*, reporters referenced tweets and Instagram posts BLM protesters made critical of elites (POGREBIN 2020a). These activists used social media as a platform for expressing frustration with the status quo as well as with the way these elites portray them and their cause. Reporters in the *Times* also noted how activists used social media both to recruit (KIM 2020) and fundraise (GOLDMACHER 2020).

New York Times reporters produced several feature articles on protesters and activists during the month of June 2020. Many focused on girls' and young women's involvement in the movement (BENNETT 2020; GOLDBERG 2020). Those reporters used traditional and social media sourcing to speak to these young women.

When writing about elites, NYT writers did something unusual on a couple instances. The reporters used social media as a tool for gathering information and testimony from people typically classified as elites but who were either supportive of the movement or less than antagonistic. One example is an article by Southall and Sandoval (2020) that referenced Facebook posts of Black New York Police Department officers denouncing Derek Chauvin and encouraging »good cops« to speak up. Another from Rubinstein (2020) focused on Jumaane Williams, an New York City public advocate and former city councilmember who emerged as a media darling during these summer protests with references to protest crowds chanting his name:

> »You all ready for this?« Linda Sarsour, a prominent activist, said to the crowd of hundreds, shortly before they were to march across the Brooklyn Bridge. »When I say ›mayor,‹ you say ›Jumaane.‹ «
>
> The crowd heartily obliged.
>
> There's just one catch: Williams was not running for mayor in 2021.

Similarly, the NYT referenced video from Facebook and Twitter of police chiefs marching with protesters (SANDOVAL/BOGEL-BURROUGHS 2020) and state representatives who are supportive of demilitarizing police forces (EDMONDSON 2020). Though, it should be noted, the focus of the article referencing the video of police chiefs marching with protesters was actually on a fatal shooting by police of a man pointing a gun at them. The shooting, according to the article (citing police), was not related to demonstrations in the city.

The few instances of negative commentary typically focused on looting and property damage that occurred during some protests. One article that was generally supportive of the protests, made a point to delineate between looters and protesters, arguing the looters' rationale for property damage and theft were tenuous (MACFARQUHAR et al. 2020).

The overall reporting in the *Times* was generally positive regarding portrayals of the protests. *New York Times* writers struck a healthy balance of utilizing both elite and alternative sources in their reporting. When a politician, business owner or police officer made a disparaging remark about a protester or the movement, NYT reporters often provided context for those statements and responses from alternative sources (FEUER/SANDOVAL 2020; POGREBIN 2020a, 2020b). The narrative of June 2020 in the *New York Times* was not monolithic. The *Times* portrayed protest in New York City that month as necessary from the perspective of protesters, while also making a point to differentiate between those engaged in property damage, violence and looting and other protesters (HONG/RASHBAUM 2020). The implication from these data suggests this may have been an active editorial decision for reporters to diversify their sourcing by speaking to alternative sources and making use of social media.

Chicago

The *Chicago Tribune* used more elite sources than alternative ones in their 24 articles reporting on Chicago protests in June 2020, but the portrayal of the demonstrations was still fairly positive. Typical sources in the *Tribune* were academics (YIN 2020), officers and local politicians (HINKEL/SWEENEY 2020; PEARSON 2020; PRATT et al. 2020). The reporting here was not necessarily as positive about the protests and protesters as in *The New York Times* but was not particularly antagonistic toward them either.

Tribune writers used both elite and alternative social media sources often for reporting on Chicago protests. Chicago artists used Instagram to show off their protest-inspired art painting boarded up storefronts (BORRELLI 2020) and to speak out about counter protesters painting over their murals (RODRÍGUEZ PRESA 2020). Local politicians used social media to complain about protesters and decisions made by opponents (PEARSON 2020). Another common refrain from Chicago-area politicians was the perceived hypocrisy over COVID-19-related social distancing mandates not being enforced for protesters (PEARSON 2020). Even with those cited complaints, *Tribune* reporters frequently noted protesters' use of facemasks (BORRELLI 2020; CREPEAU 2020b; PRATT et al. 2020; SCHMICH 2020); some even using masks as political statements like those printed with the phrase »I can't breathe« (STEVENS et al. 2020), as well as their attempts at social

distancing (BUCKLEY 2020; CREPEAU et al. 2020; SCHOENBERG 2020) during these demonstrations.

Tribune writers also referenced social media use by protesters who posted about protests they attended as well as those who used social media for recruitment. One use of social media was for people to post how the movement allowed them to speak about race and racism in ways they could not have previously. Chicago restaurant workers posted on Instagram about their experiences dealing with racism in the industry and from owners (CREPEAU et al. 2020; WONG 2020). Some social media posts from elites served to perpetuate the very reason the Black Lives Matter movement persists. In one article, police officers took to Facebook to insult and threaten protesters (CREPEAU 2020a).

The negative articles typically focused on property damage and looting as the central feature of their BLM coverage. One article mentioned a tweet from another *Tribune* reporter who observed »looters« (SULLIVAN 2020) exchanging t-shirts. Another referenced a video from Facebook showing the aftermath of a retired police officer who was apparently killed while trying to intervene during the looting of the storefront of one of his friends (KASS 2020a). Though, the *Tribune* also reported protesters used Facebook to reach out and find people to help clean up after the looting (SCHMICH 2020).

Not all elite sources referenced in the *Chicago Tribune* were against the protests and the movement. Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot and Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker both were quoted expressing solidarity with protesters. Lightfoot tweeted support for her own police reform initiative as well as criticisms of excessive force by Chicago Police Department officers (HINKEL 2020). The *Tribune* also noted activists were worried Lightfoot would spend funds from the CARES Act (The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act; the purpose of which is for municipalities to provide relief to segments of their cities negatively affected by the coronavirus pandemic) to support police (BYRNE/PRATT 2020). Pritzker admonished Donald Trump for his tweets calling for shooting as a response to looting but, it should be noted, this occurred amidst Pritzker's call for more police and the deployment of the National Guard in response to the looting in Chicago and across Illinois (PRATT et al. 2020).

The overall reporting was generally positive in the *Chicago Tribune*. Reporters for the *Tribune* referenced online and traditional sources and utilized elite and alternative sources. The context of the coronavirus pandemic was also prevalent in the reporting here with numerous articles mentioning social distancing and mask use as well as rising case numbers in Chicago and across Illinois (PRATT et al., 2020; STEVENS 2020). Another important piece of context was the frequent mention of force used by police in arresting and attacking protesters. *Tribune* reporters spoke directly to protesters who claimed they were assaulted by police during demonstrations and many who felt they were unjustly arrested during

the protests that summer (ANDERSON et al. 2020; CREPEAU 2020a; ELEJALDE-RUIZ 2020; KASS 2020b; MARX 2020).

Houston

The *Houston Chronicle* had only four articles that fit the search criteria for our study, which is noteworthy considering that George Floyd was a native Houstonian and his death and subsequent protest and demonstrations against his killing took place across the nation – and was prominent in national news coverage. Furthermore, local news outlets have a familiar practice of looking for local story angles to national or international news (BUTTRY 2016).

Among the four articles only in the *Houston Chronicle*, there was only a single source that was coded as activist/alternative, which was a high school athlete who posted on his Twitter account his decision to take a knee during the national anthem at his high school graduation. The other eight sources in the articles were coded as official/elite.

Perhaps, more notably, none of the articles were direct coverage of BLM marches or social media activity in Houston. This could be because there was little protest activity, but the lack of coverage is still interesting since local news media often try to find a local angle to national stories. Rather, the four stories included the following: a June 5 report about a local restaurant owner who was criticized for a Facebook post he made in which he characterized a BLM march as a »parade;« the June 9 story about a high school athlete taking a knee during the national anthem at his high school graduation ceremony; a June 12 report about three people who were arrested and accused of being part of »antifa«; and a June 24 story about the lack of diversity at CrossFit-affiliated gyms in Houston in the wake of (now former) CrossFit CEO's insensitive comments on Twitter about BLM.

While none of these stories directly depicted BLM activists and organizers as looters or a radical mob, the voices of BLM activists and organizers were noticeably absent in these reports. For instance, the report of three arrested and accused of being »antifa« members included zero interviews of people affiliated with BLM, who may have likely disaffiliated their movement from the antifa trope frequently presented in right-leaning media outlets, such as Fox News, OAN and Newsmax. Rather, the article included sources from the Texas Department of Public Safety and led with a quote from Texas Senator Ted Cruz during a Fox News broadcast. Later in the story, a criminologist from the University of Maryland and a historian from Rutgers University were quoted and raised concerns about »antifa« labelling, but again, no one representing BLM was represented to voice their own narrative.

Los Angeles

The *Los Angeles Times* had 11 articles that fit the search terms for this analysis but showed a similar lack of balance between activist/alternative and official/elite sources, especially from social media. Only two sources coded »activist/alternative« had their social media posts referenced (and in a single story) against 18 official/elite sources whose social media content was sourced. There was a greater balance in the overall sourcing between activist/alternative (17 references) and official/elites (23 references), although nine of the activist/alternative sources were in a single story about elderly white people supporting BLM. Moreover, only two of the nine protesters quoted in that story were identified as being »among a handful of Black Americans at the protest.«

The June 17 story described above – »[s]eniors risk virus to march for social justice« – was the only one to directly cover on the street marches from the perspective of activists. Four reports were about the media and entertainment industry, including a June 2 story about Facebook employees who were dissatisfied with their CEO's tolerance of then President Trump's incendiary post including the line »when the looting starts, the shooting starts;« another article about popular media brands, such as Amazon, CBS and Netflix aligning with the BLM movement; and a June 5 analysis of how local television news in Los Angeles has been covering the protests.

One story, on June 9, covered the theater community's response to the BLM movement by focusing on one theater producer's effort through a Facebook page called »Theater Folks of Color« that tracked which theatre companies were not supporting BLM through a »Not Speaking Out List.«

Five other stories examined area policing and mayoral responses during the protests, including a June 19 story about the resignation of an area mayor after pressure on social media and a June 23 report about criticism facing Los Angeles' mayor for his handling of the protests. Three of these stories about policing are worthy of closer examination.

Another June 23 story reports the arrest of three people for vandalizing a Black Lives Matter sign, which is particularly interesting as one of the suspects was a Ventura County Sheriff's employee and another was an employee of the county's District Attorney's office. The story's only direct reference to BLM is that the sign's owner posted surveillance video on their Facebook page of the vandalism, which allowed police to identify the suspected culprits. However, the sign owner, a BLM supporter, was a not source for the article.

A third story on June 23 covers a city council panel recommending a $133 million cut to the Los Angeles' Police Department (LAPD) budget. Although, the article notes a proposal by »Black Lives Matter-Los Angeles and other grass roots groups« called »The People's Budget«; the story did not interview or source any

person representing the group. Similarly, a June 28 report refers generally to a »proposal pushed by Black Lives Matter« that »would practically eliminate LAPD and shovel that money into housing, mental health services, crime prevention and other things.« However, it does not interview or quote anyone from BLM.

In summary, the *Los Angeles Times* coverage in the early part of June 2020 seemed more focused on the news and entertainment industry's response to the BLM movement, rather than the movement itself. In the later part of the month, the focus goes more toward examining official government responses to the protests, but there appears to be a strong tendency to rely more on local government sources, even when those government sources are the target of criticism in the article. Proposals offered by BLM organizers are mentioned generally but are not directly sourced to provide context to their own suggested policies.

Conclusions: Discourse and reality in reporting on BLM

Across all four papers our analysis showed that »sourcing« is still a critical component of the propaganda model, especially as we consider the contextual meaning of sources within the broader narratives provided by news media. The findings were different depending on the city. *The New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* had a proportionally higher number of alternative sources, which corresponded with more favorable coverage of BLM protesters. In the cases of Houston and Los Angeles, the selection and exclusion of certain types of sources supported the status quo of who are newsmakers, as grassroots organizers on the ground and on social media were virtually ignored by the major newspapers in those cities. In Los Angeles, BLM supporters organized on social media, activated on the ground and proffered specific public policy proposals but their voices did not transcend in the reporting discourse to match the established elites. Rather, the social media messages of government officials, business leaders, celebrities and other elites were the primary definers of the BLM movement in their city – no matter whether those messages were incendiary or supportive.

The findings suggest future scholars could explore, ethnographically, the practices, motivations and newsroom routines that led to the decisions of some journalists to reach out to activists, advocates and allies of the Black Lives Matter Movement and other journalists to make primary the perspective of law enforcement and elites. Asking those questions of newsroom managers and editors, publishers and reporters could help broaden the knowledge on what perpetuates propaganda.

The answer to this study's question of the tone of journalistic discourse about non-elite BLM activists has less relevance when those voices are essentially ignored in the mainstream news narrative. Even with the democratized social

media ecosystem providing an array of alternative sources for journalists, the news media is still a business that appears to be primarily focused on elites. This could explain the divergence between the findings from city to city. A critical conclusion to the findings might suggest reporters and news workers for the *New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* could have recognized the economic benefit in diversifying their reporting on BLM if these favorable portrayals correlated with better circulation and traffic. What is shown is city newspapers in Houston and Los Angeles provided platforms for elites to signal their social justice virtues, or to be called out for their incendiary, hateful or racist proclivities. What was newsworthy about the BLM movement in June of 2020 was primarily defined through the lens of media, business, celebrities, government officials and other elite white people.

The findings suggest newsroom routines that determine whether journalists use alternative or elite sources when reporting on the Black Lives Matter Movement are consistent with the propaganda model (HERMAN/CHOMSKY 1988/2002). We are in a time where newsrooms are shrinking and newspapers are being consolidated into larger corporate umbrellas. Corporations advertise their support for Black Lives Matter and other social justice causes in the pages of these newspapers or remain silent when this is considered to be strategically better. Internet troll farms and disinformation organizations are actively working to disinform the public about BLM, police brutality and systemic racism (O'SULLIVAN 2008). This study provides evidence that the sources of information in journalism about BLM have an impact on the discourse about BLM, thus defining the reality of what the Black Lives Matter Movement is.

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Research Paper

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Getting the truth out

The professional practices and roles of Central European foreign correspondents covering the war in Ukraine

Abstract: **The study examines the professional practices of foreign correspondents reporting on the war in Ukraine for Central European media. In-depth interviews with representatives of leading media organizations in Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary (N = 11) show that the correspondents distrust the Ukrainian authorities as a source of information and are skeptical of local Ukrainian fixers. They see themselves in a conflict between their personal convictions and journalistic standards, as they are not neutral towards the war but try to remain objective in their reporting. The influence of Russia has been noticeable in all three countries since the start of the war.**

Keywords: foreign correspondent, Fixer, propaganda, Ukraine, Russia, Eastern and Central Europe, interviews

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, more than 12,000 foreign and Ukrainian journalists have been accredited to report on the war in Ukraine (WARC 2024a). The list of injured or killed reporters grows longer every day (WARC 2025). The foreign journalists also include correspondents from Central and Eastern European media. While those foreign correspondents who work for large international media have professional teams in Ukraine, journalists from smaller foreign media rarely work with more than two people: themselves and a photographer or videographer. Some do not have the financial means to rent a car, hire a translator or even buy an armband that says »Press«. In this study, we ask: What influences the reporting of Bulgarian, Romanian and Hungarian foreign correspondents covering Ukraine and how do they define their role as journalists covering the war in Ukraine for media in their home country?

Literature review

So-called »parachute journalists« (HAMILTON/JENNER 2004), who only come briefly to report on a country far away from their home country, tend toward stereotypical coverage (LUNDSTROM/MITCHELL 2002; NOTHIAS 2020). Ethnocentrism and »us« versus »them« narratives are common among them (FONDREN/HAMILTON/MCCUNE 2019). Such poorly differentiated reports arise due to deadline pressure, insufficient knowledge of the country and the restrictions journalists face when contacting local actors and authorities (HANNERZ 2004). However, well-traveled and experienced correspondents generally value proximity, empathy and a realistic assessment of existing risks (HANNERZ 2007). They want to aid in painting a comprehensive picture of the situation on the ground and strive for accurate and fair reporting that includes different perspectives and people (ZHANG/JENKINS 2023). Yet, war reporting is still dominated by men and is characterized by sexism. Although the number of women war reporters has increased, they are often not accepted by their colleagues and are hindered in their work (PALMER/MELKI 2016). Almost all of them say they have experienced discrimination, some of them sexual assault (STEINER 2017).

Foreign reporting depends on the work of local contributors (»fixers«), both logistically and in terms of content. The roles, motivations and principles of fixers have already been studied (GRYTSAI 2023; ERICKSON/HAMILTON 2006; TUMBER/WEBSTER 2006; PALMER/FONTAN 2007; MURRELL 2014; PALMER 2019). Their tasks include driving, hotel bookings, security management, source procurement, interview organization, phone calls, etc. Fixers are directly involved in reporting insofar as they suggest topics and interview subjects, translate, and provide international media teams with background information (BISHARA 2006; MURRELL 2010; PALMER 2018, 2019; PALMER/FONTAN 2007; PLAUT/KLEIN 2019; KOTIŠOVÁ/DEUZE 2022). Foreign reporting depends crucially on their work, both logistically and editorially.

Journalism in Central and Eastern Europe

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in the early 1990s, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe moved toward democracy. However, Russia is still trying to influence politics and the media in these countries. Four media models exemplify the region today: a *politicized* model in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania; *media in transition* in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Moldova; a *liberal hybrid model* in Poland, the Baltic countries, Slovenia and the Czech Republic; and an *authoritarian* model in Russia and Belarus (BOSHNAKOVA/DANKOVA 2023; DOBEK-OSTROWSKA 2015). Although

democratic standards apply in countries in transition or with a politicized media model, political influence on public broadcasting in Hungary, for example, is strong. In countries with a liberal hybrid model, media freedom is greater. The authoritarian model, on the other hand, is considered to be highly politicized. In these countries, media are mostly propaganda tools of those in power (DOBEK-OSTROWSKA 2015).

Despite some similarities, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania differ in many respects: In Hungary, media are subject to strong political influence. They predominantly disseminate the views of the government. Private media companies are also closely linked to the government. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán himself has a stake in various media outlets and maintains good relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin. The Bulgarian media are also heavily influenced by politics and business interests. There is hardly any critical reporting, for example on corruption (BOSHNAKOVA/DANKOVA 2023). In Romania, the media offering is more diverse, but public and private broadcasters often follow the government line and there is little transparency in media financing. Social media such as TikTok and Telegram proved to be a gateway for Russian propaganda during the elections in early December 2024, leading the European Commission to initiate proceedings against TikTok under the Digital Services Act (EU COMMISSION 2024). The freedom of the media is therefore under threat in all three countries. Economic interests prevent comprehensive and independent reporting. Advertising corruption is commonplace (LAUK 2008). To this day, the Central and Eastern European media systems are strongly controlled by the government, political parties, individuals and commercial enterprises; in contrast, civil society organizations and religious and ethnic minorities have significantly less influence (GROSS 2004). According to Reporters Without Borders, Romania is ranked 49th in terms of press freedom, Bulgaria 59th and Hungary 67th (RWB 2024b).

Theoretical framework

The »hierarchy-of-influences« approach (REESE 2001; SHOEMAKER/REESE 1996) provides a suitable framework for examining all the factors that shape foreign correspondents' news gathering and their (self-)understanding of their role. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) identified five levels of influence on news production: the *individual*, the *routine*, the *organizational*, *the extra-media* (later renamed »social institutions«) and the *ideological* level. These levels act separately and are at the same time intertwined in a »web of interconnected forces« (REESE 2001: 179).

The *individual* level of influence includes factors such as demographics, education, training, professional experience, creativity, attitudes, professional values and norms as well as the degree of autonomy of journalists. It illustrates that

journalists differ in their perception of the profession and that there are different understandings of the profession within and beyond national cultures. It also reveals how journalists adapt to existing conditions in order to do their job (REESE/SHOEMAKER 2018). The objectivity norm is effective *on an individual level*. It should lead to a separation of facts and opinions and encourage journalists to take different perspectives into account and to report fairly, especially in political disputes (SCHUDSON 2001).

The level of *routines* considers the influence of professional rules, norms and procedures as well as the constraints of space, time and technology. Journalists cannot always control the latter. Research has analyzed »those unstated rules and ritualized enactments that are not always made explicit« (REESE/SHOEMAKER 2018: 399).

At the organizational level, the editorial line, the size of the company, management styles and financing options influence the way in which news is obtained and prepared.

The *extra-media* level beyond journalism is of great importance as it includes governments, public relations and advertising agencies, technology companies and other influential corporations. Reese and Shoemaker (2018) explain how economic, political and cultural powers operate at this meso-level and how institutional boundaries become blurred. This extra-media level is related to the ways in which journalists justify the knowledge they produce as valuable and the practices they use to determine ›truth‹ – a framework referred to as journalistic epistemology (EKSTRÖM 2002).

Finally, at the level *of social systems*, research focuses on how media institutions function within larger systems that transcend social and national boundaries. Studies have shown that media such as television or online news adapt to global standards, while the print sector focus more on cultural particularities (REESE/SHOEMAKER 2018).

Method

For this study, interviews were conducted with journalists from three Central European countries: Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania. Of interest were factors that affect the independence of reporting, as well as the role that journalists see themselves in when reporting on the war in Ukraine for audiences in their home countries. The relatively small sample consists of eleven journalists, ten men and one woman. Four are from Bulgaria, four from Hungary and three from Romania. The fact that only one woman journalist (A) was interviewed is partly due to the fact that media companies mainly send men correspondents to Ukraine.

The eleven interviewees from Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania work as reporters, photographers, videographers and multimedia journalists. We use the term

»foreign correspondent« to refer to reporters who visit a foreign country or stay there for a longer period of time to report on events, as well as employees of established media companies that maintain a foreign office (HAMILTON/JENNER 2004). The journalists we interviewed work for public and private media (television, radio, print and online media). We do not mention their names but use abbreviations or capital letters (see Table 1) to protect their identity. The broadcast journalists worked in teams with videographers and drivers, while the journalists working for online media were alone on the ground in Ukraine. Some of the interviewees had been there since the beginning of the conflict, i.e., for months, while others had only been there for a few weeks. Four interviews took place in person and seven were conducted via Zoom between July 2022 and June 2023. The interviews lasted between one and three hours each; they were recorded and transcribed. Six of the interviews were conducted in English, four in Bulgarian and one in Romanian, with the latter being translated into English.

Results

The reporting from Ukraine differs considerably from coverage originating in countries from which the correspondents had previously reported. We look at different levels below.

Individual level

Eight of the eleven interviewees had never been to Ukraine before the war. They were reporting from and about the country for the first time because of the war. Only two, both from Hungary, had already reported on a major war, more specifically on the Bosnian War (1992-1995) and/or the war in Afghanistan (2001-2021). Most of the reporters were sent to Ukraine without any special knowledge of war and crisis journalism. They had to adapt to the challenges and dangers on the ground, as well as to dealing with disinformation and propaganda. All eleven interviewees stated that they tried to remain objective when reporting on the war in Ukraine when preparing information for their home countries. They made an effort to distinguish between facts and opinions, to adopt different perspectives and to present political positions fairly. Nevertheless, they were not on a personal and professional level (SCHUDSON 2001): They wanted Ukraine to win the war. For instance, a Hungarian journalist (I) explained how he sees the difference between neutrality and objectivity:

> I am not neutral. I'm supporting Ukraine in this war, but I'm trying to be objective. So, yes, this is a special time for journalists. And I'm aware, as I was saying this through the black-and-white story, which is quite rare even in human history.

A Romanian journalist (F) also said that he tried to maintain his objectivity but admitted that the war had an impact on his work. He said it was normal in war that »you have to choose a side, even as a journalist, even though you have to be impartial«. Another Romanian journalist (E) similarly explained that he tries to remain balanced on the ground in Ukraine, but that is not possible. He said that his reporting was »pro-Ukrainian«, and that Romanian media used »pro-Ukrainian speech« because Ukraine had been invaded; he stated: »it's hard not to be on the Ukrainian side«.

The correspondents also questioned Russia's role in the conflict. Some explained that they adopted Russian perspectives in the form of statements from the government in Moscow, which they also received from leading Western news agencies. Others said that their reports from Ukraine did not include the Russian view. Some, such as a Hungarian reporter (H), questioned the need to include the Russian side:

> I try to show the audience that this is an aggressive war against Ukraine [...] and I keep repeating in my stories that this is a black-and-white story. So, we have an aggressor, and we have a country which has been attacked. This country was attacked because of territorial claims by Russia and the imperial beliefs of Russia. So probably the audience can feel that I'm on the side of the country that has been attacked.

Some interviewees explained that they would like to report on the Russian side of the war from Russia, but that the authorities in Moscow would not grant them visas to enter the country. They also feared that their lives would be in danger if they reported on the war from Russia and that they might never be able to return to their home countries. They referred to the recent cases of international journalists who were jailed under the Foreign Agents Act, as this law »criminalizes objective reporting about the war in Ukraine« (FLACKS 2022). The correspondents also explained that they would be considered Russian »spies« by the Ukrainian government if they reported from Russia and that they would not be able to return to Ukraine.

Routine level

Respondents stated that they relied on information from international media and news agencies. They named CNN, the *New York Times*, Reuters, the Associated Press, BBC, Sky News, France 24, but said that even leading international agencies could publish inaccurate information. Bulgarian journalists working for a website referred to a report by Reuters about a cemetery for killed Ukrainian soldiers in the town of Irpin. The Bulgarian correspondents in Ukraine decided to go there. When they got to Irpin, however, the situation turned out to be different from the Reuters report. Doubts arose, and the Bulgarian journalist (D) decided not to report on it:

> It looks incredibly photogenic, some thousands of graves that are freshly dug with crosses and with wreaths. […] However, when you start walking around the cemetery, you see that these graves, although they are fresh, are from last year and the year before. We took pictures, but then we didn't broadcast and produce anything.

Other interviewees said they tended not to trust Ukrainian media because they could be patriotically biased. A Hungarian journalist (G) said that the guidelines for the media had changed. After all, Ukraine was at war, and, from the Ukrainian point of view, media reporting should not benefit the other side. He understands this:

> I don't blame them for that. Journalists are now becoming activists in Ukraine, which is also a natural thing. I mean, patriot activism. And some of them are trying to show their patriotism by writing Russian names not with a capital letter at the beginning, so writing Putin with a small »p« in their articles.

The Ukrainian news agency *Ukrinform*, the *Kyiv Independent* and the *Kyiv Post* were among the trusted national sources. One Bulgarian reporter (A) explained that she trusted them because she had heard from other journalists that they were trustworthy. Furthermore, the journalists mentioned social media, especially X (formerly Twitter), as an important source of information. There they could follow the latest developments or check local information. One Hungarian journalist said he followed several X accounts of journalists working for international news channels who were on the ground in Ukraine, as well as the accounts of leading international media, to find trustworthy information because »propaganda is big in Ukraine, and it's obvious«.

Messenger services such as WhatsApp, Viber and Telegram are also valuable sources for journalists. They often use them to communicate with colleagues, institutions and organizations. According to the interviewees, Telegram is the main source of real-time information about the war and the most important platform for political discussions. However, they said that the information in Telegram is not always reliable. A Hungarian reporter explained that the channels on Telegram related to the war could be biased, but he used the app to get information from Ukrainian and Russian officials.

Additionally, fixers play an extremely important role for the correspondents, and mutual trust is crucial when working together in extremely dangerous places. The Bulgarian reporter (A) said she was able to get by without a translator because the cameraman was half Ukrainian and half Russian. Nevertheless, she would have liked more support on the ground. However, the media she worked for did not hire fixers or translators in order to save money.

> You cannot do it without a local because you don't have the contacts. You may try to find the contacts, but you don't know the people. You don't know the customs. You don't know the background. For the personal stories, you have to go in search of them. And if you have a fixer, you don't waste the time to go and look for the stories.

The reporter explained that without a fixer and translator, it is difficult to interview decision-makers or get in touch with Ukrainians who have interesting stories to report. A Bulgarian journalist (B) added that a local fixer was also important for traveling through the country, as there were Ukrainian military checkpoints in many places. For the checkpoints, the military required a press card or password. He explained:

> The fixer can have a password key. For example, with our fixer around the checkpoints in Kyiv, there's a passcode, and it changes every day, and he knew it every day. One of the days, I remember the password was »storm« and »bee.« We stop at a checkpoint, and he just says »storm« and »bee« and we move on.

The journalists described the roles of Ukrainian fixers in different ways. A Hungarian journalist (I) spoke of a »co-journalist« and emphasized that the fixer had more knowledge than he did about the social and political dynamics in Ukrainian society. A Romanian journalist (F) described the fixer he worked with as a negotiator and described how he and his team were picked up by the Ukrainian police because they did not have press cards. They were detained for hours. The fixer spoke to the police, and the journalists were released. Another Hungarian journalist (H) explained that his fixer, who had been a marketing manager before the war, established access to sources by telling them that the correspondent worked for one of the few independent media companies in Hungary. The journalist (H) said: »After establishing this communication with the fixer, it worked out perfectly.«

Journalists take certain criteria into account when hiring a fixer. One Hungarian journalist (H) said that he was looking for a responsible person who was not pro-Russian and had good contacts with the Ukrainian authorities. Some correspondents admitted that they did not trust Ukrainian fixers because they tried to influence the reporting. They considered fixers to be patriots who were not objective. Correspondents who speak Russian or Ukrainian said they preferred not to use fixers. A long-time Hungarian journalist (K) said he did not work with fixers because he believed that »they have their agenda« and did not adhere to journalistic standards. Similarly, a Bulgarian reporter (B) said that his fixer in Mariupol was a student and that she was »very influenced by what was happening in Ukraine, and she was not impartial.«

Organizational level

The interviewees stated that the type of orders received changed over time. In the first weeks of the war, live reports were in demand. Later, the media companies that had sent them were more interested in background reports and features. Journalists working for smaller media outlets, especially websites in Romania, Hungary or Bulgaria, produced videos, multimedia stories (with photos, videos

and text) and documentaries. At the beginning of the war, TV journalists delivered between ten and 15 live broadcasts per day. The Bulgarian reporter (A) said that her media organization had asked her to make a live broadcast while they were waiting at a gas station in Moldova, looking for a toilet. They were asked by producers to describe »how the road out of Ukraine is«. A Bulgarian journalist (C) described how he and a reporter experienced the start of the war in Kyiv. They only produced a few reports because they were concentrating on live broadcasts. His media company had asked the team to broadcast live every 30 minutes. A Romanian reporter (G) explained that in the first days of the war, he broadcast at least ten live broadcasts per day from Ukraine. His station urged him to produce dramatic reports, e.g., on bombings and the destruction of buildings and shelters. Journalists working for newspapers and online providers stated that they mainly produced »standard« news in Ukraine. They divided their reports into two types: either about the impact of the war on the Ukrainian population or from the frontline of the conflict. For the first type, they reported on hospitals and whether people had access to food, water, shelter and medical care. For the second type, they traveled to the east of Ukraine, to the front line and to cities such as Bakhmut and Kharkiv. They reported on military successes, the resistance of Ukrainians and civilians who became soldiers after the war began.

The correspondents concentrated on telling personal stories and experiences, also as a way to avoid propaganda. A Hungarian correspondent (G) working for a small, independent website said his stories focused on Ukrainians who had witnessed the war first-hand, »people who witness history, what happened [...] and from their story, you will have a nice and colorful media coverage«. He added that his focus differed from that of larger media outlets, which provided information on the course of the war, interviewed Ukrainian officials and did live broadcasts on the ground. The interviewees also reported on people from Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria living in Ukraine. For their media organizations, such diaspora reports would have top priority, as this would make the extent of the war comprehensible for their audiences.

Extra-medial level

The correspondents interviewed did not trust all the information published by the Ukrainian authorities. For example, these authorities organized travel for journalists to towns and villages where Russian military forces had killed civilians and destroyed houses. A Bulgarian journalist (D) reported on one such trip organized by the Ukrainian Interior Ministry. He said when he arrived at the scene, he was surprised because the authorities showed him two bodies buried in a yard and told him that each media representative had five minutes to film the

scene. The Bulgarian journalist refused to report the story because he thought it was Ukrainian propaganda:

> I said to my colleague (videographer): This is the first time I have seen such a thing; it is not OK to report on here. […] I can easily say it is propaganda, and it probably is. Channeling of information from the authorities. Accordingly, if you check that day – I can check the date and go into the archives – it will be clear that everybody gave the same report, the media of the world.

The interviewees explained that propaganda usually involved information about the victories of the Ukrainian armed forces at the front, about Russian massacres and about violence against the Ukrainian population. There were cases in which the Ukrainian authorities wanted to prevent reporting because they feared that it could give an advantage to the Russian armed forces. For instance, a Hungarian journalist (G) had filmed a train station that had been hit by a Russian missile. Afterwards, the Ukrainian police detained him for several hours. He said: »I was told not to take pictures. But, of course, I'd have to do it because that's why I went there. And it was, it was already ruined, so there was no complete information.« Yet, the Hungarian journalist, as well as most of the other interviewees, showed understanding for the restrictions placed on their work by the Ukrainian authorities on the ground; after all, they were at war. It was also an information war between Ukraine and Russia. One Romanian journalist (E) spoke of the targeted news selection he experienced: »The information they [the Ukrainian government] give us is not complete. I don't think they give us fake news, but I do think they don't give us the whole information.«

Social system level

According to the journalists interviewed, reporting on Ukraine is important because it informs the public in their home countries about the latest developments in the conflict and because they need to know how Ukrainians are experiencing the war and the consequences of Russian aggression. They believe that comprehensive reporting is essential because of Russian influence and the spread of Russian propaganda in their home countries. Russian influence has increased since the start of the war, particularly in Hungary and Bulgaria, and the population is divided with regard to the conflict. The four Hungarian journalists cited the fact that the leading media in their country are pro-Russian and do not report independently on the war in Ukraine as reasons for this division:

> The Hungarian government is too close to Russia. And you can find a lot of proof in Hungarian public TV and media coverage that it is very biased towards the Russians, and it is very difficult to fight against this propaganda, unfortunately.

Another Hungarian correspondent (K) explained that the leading media in his country reported on »how the Russians are winning«, »how good are the

Russians«, and »how Ukrainian President Volodimir Zelensky is a puppet of the United States«. There are only a few independent, critical media outlets. However, according to another of the war correspondents, they had difficulties financing the dispatch of reporters to Ukraine. A Romanian journalist (G) described the mood in his country as being characterized by the fear that Russia could also attack Romania if Ukraine lost. Romania had supported Ukraine from the beginning of the war and the conflict was being reported on intensively, including by his medium: »We hope that Ukraine wins this war because if Ukraine loses, then the Russians will be one step closer to our borders, and we do not want that to happen.« The correspondents from Hungary and Bulgaria also expressed fear of Ukraine's defeat. Reporting on the war is therefore of crucial importance for the population in their home countries.

Additionally, according to a Romanian journalist (F), cultural proximity to Ukraine is an advantage when it comes to making contacts and building trust with people and institutions. He does not see any major differences between Romania and Ukraine. One reason for this is the shared history of the two countries:

> We [Romania and Ukraine] were also under Russian communist influence for 30 to 40 years. And we know the toughness of what Russia means, such as the living conditions and the living environment. We are not so different. Let's say, Romania is not as different in civilization to Ukraine as Britain, France, Spain, or the United States. The difference is so small, so we can adapt much easier than Western journalists would be.

However, being from Eastern Europe is not only an advantage. Some interviewees said that they had more a difficult time gaining access to the frontline areas and were afforded fewer opportunities to interview high-ranking people than Western journalists. The Romanian correspondent (E) described how surprised a CNN team was that he was reporting without a team of local security forces. The correspondents interviewed often worked with less experienced local fixers because they could not afford to hire the more experienced ones. A Hungarian journalist (G) divided the local forces in Ukraine into two categories: first-class and second-class fixers:

> If you are a fixer and doing it for the 10th year, working with international media, it's incomparable to those fixers who have been doing it for a year since the war started. So those fixers who have been doing this since 2014 are now working for the biggest outlets, for CNN, *New York Times*, for major Western outlets. And we, average guys from small media from Central-Eastern Europe, can only have those who started this job now.

The leading international media would also have easier access to Ukrainian authorities. A Hungarian journalist (K) spoke of unequal treatment and of Ukrainian officials preferring to support Western media, which have more reach than Central and Eastern European media.

Discussion

We investigated how Central and Eastern European foreign correspondents describe the influences on their reporting on the war in Ukraine and how they perceive their role as mediators between the events in Ukraine and their audiences at home. From the perspective of these journalists, war reporting is essential due to the geographical and cultural proximity of their countries to the theater of war in Ukraine. The results of the study indicate that the journalists experienced influences on their work on several levels: Their individual background had an impact on their journalistic work, as did working with fixers, the limited opportunities to obtain information on the ground, the expectations of their employers at home in terms of good stories, and the political situation in their home country.

As far as the war correspondents' *individual* beliefs, values and prejudices are concerned, we found that, on the one hand, they endeavored to remain objective, to separate facts from opinions and to report in as politically balanced a manner as possible. This attitude reflects the high value placed on objective journalistic reporting worldwide (MUÑOZ-TORRES 2012). On the other hand, journalists are rooted in their home countries. They also have close historical and cultural ties with Ukraine, which is why the interviewees want Ukraine to win. They are members of an international professional community as well as of a national community of values (ZANDBERG/NEIGER 2005). This tension was evident in the decision-making processes, for example in the selection of stories. Some journalists admitted to reporting in a pro-Ukrainian manner and deliberately drawing the attention of the domestic audience to the situation in Ukraine and the danger to their own country. This also shows how objectivity may be called into question when reporters distance themselves from their home editorial offices (SCHUDSON 2001: 163).

The *routines* of the correspondents covering Ukraine are in line with professional rules, norms and procedures of journalism (REESE/SHOEMAKER 2018). These correspondents, however, displayed a lack of trust in the local media in Ukraine as they considered the local media reporting to be biased. The journalistic rules of information gathering and verification were challenged by propaganda from both the Ukrainian and Russian sides. The correspondents interviewed from Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary also doubted the credibility of reports from international media, as there had been cases in which journalists working for foreign media had been taken in by Ukrainian propaganda. In contrast, the Telegram app was considered to be an important source, even if the information was perhaps not correct, as both Ukrainian and Russian authorities used it to provide direct information about the latest developments. Ukrainian fixers were another important source of information. Nevertheless, some of the interviewees

were skeptical about the fixers. The Hungarian journalists described them as »biased« and »patriots«. Previous research has indicated that correspondents are aware of the danger that fixers are pursuing their own agenda and may not be trustworthy (PALMER/FONTAN 2007; MURRELL 2014).

At the organizational level, the corporate policy of the media companies who sent journalists to cover the war in Ukraine influenced how the correspondents collected and edited news. Smaller media outlets reported more personal stories, eyewitness accounts and documentaries, also to avoid propagandistic tones. Larger media companies, especially Bulgarian and Romanian ones, relied on live reporting, also to show that they have correspondents on the ground. Such a decision on an organizational level is a consequence of the special circumstances of news production in wartime (REESE/SHOEMAKER 2018). *On an extra-media level*, the correspondents also experienced propaganda from official Ukrainian authorities. They were asked to report on the victories of the Ukrainian armed forces or on Russian massacres and violence against the Ukrainian civilian population. In some places, the correspondents had to accept restrictions as the Ukrainian authorities feared that sensitive information would otherwise be leaked to the Russians.

At the level of *social systems*, Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary are countries that were under Soviet influence until 1989 and managed the transition to democracy in the 1990s. With the war against Ukraine, Russia's influence on these countries is growing again. Correspondents from Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary worked against this by addressing the Russian aggression against Ukraine. In Hungary, pro-Russian reports are much more common, especially as most media companies are owned by followers of Victor Orbán, who publicly expresses his support for Russian President Vladimir Putin (MILOJEVIĆ/KRSTIĆ 2018). The cultural proximity between the countries in the region makes it easier for correspondents to identify with the Ukrainian population and produce both informative and emotional reports.

An information war is taking place between Ukraine and Russia, and the correspondents interviewed were confronted with disinformation and propaganda from both sides. They saw Ukrainian authorities as only partially credible sources of information and were sometimes skeptical of local Ukrainian fixers. Above all, they were torn between their personal convictions and the need to adhere to journalistic standards. Their reporting is of great importance because Russian influence on public opinion is increasing in countries such as Hungary and Bulgaria.

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Appendix

Table 1
Research sample

	Journalist	Gender	Country	Type of media organization	Experience
1.	A	Woman	Bulgaria	Private	Reporter, 7 years
2.	B	Man	Bulgaria	Public	Reporter, 10 years
3.	C	Man	Bulgaria	Private	Videographer, 24 years
4.	D	Man	Bulgaria	Private	Reporter, 10 years
5.	E	Man	Romania	Public	Videographer, 24 years
6.	F	Man	Romania	Private	Reporter, 22 years
7.	G	Man	Romania	Public	Reporter, 14 years
8.	H	Man	Hungary	Private	Reporter, 15 years
9.	I	Man	Hungary	Private	Reporter, 14 years
10.	G	Man	Hungary	Private	Reporter, 24 years
11.	K	Man	Hungary	Private	Reporter, 25 years

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HERBERT VON HALEM VERLAG

Research Paper

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Diversity in journalism

An empirical analysis of gender, age, and origin in German newspaper journalism

Abstract: **Diverse and sensitive journalistic reporting is only possible where there is a diversity of staff in editorial offices. Previous studies (cf. e.g., NIGGEMEIER 2018; HASEBRINK et al. 2021; SPILLER 2018) demonstrate the relevance of the topic. The question guiding the research behind this paper is whether the composition of newspaper editorial offices is sufficiently diverse to reflect the population as a whole. The focus is on three characteristics of diversity: *gender*, *age*, and *origin*. The authors are also interested in the differences between newspapers of different political orientations and between the levels of editorial office and leadership positions. A total of 1,503 data sets from six editorial offices of national newspapers, collected from publicly accessible secondary data and from primary data requested personally, were analyzed. The analysis shows that young people, people with a history of immigration, and women are under-represented in German newspaper journalism. Connections were found between the political orientation and the origin of the staff, and between the hierarchical level and the age structure. Consequently, German newspaper editorial offices do not currently have sufficient diversity among their staff.**

Keywords: diversity, newspaper journalism, gender, age, origin

In democratic societies, the role of journalism is to provide complete, objective, comprehensible information in order to enable different recipients to weigh arguments independently and form opinions freely (cf. NEUBERGER/KAPERN 2013: 81; WELLBROCK/KLEIN 2014: 407). Furthermore, journalism needs to critique, scrutinize, educate, and entertain. The value of journalistic work for

democracy relies on adherence to journalistic quality. Wellbrock and Klein's (2014) criteria for journalistic quality include topicality, relevance, accuracy, truthfulness, transparency, ethics, and legality (cf. WELLBROCK/KLEIN 2014: 391). When it comes to questions of ethics and relevance, the only way to guarantee objectivity is through a diversity of perspectives. Furthermore, cultural and social differences can be illustrated by empathetically depicting the different living situations and ways of life of individual groups in society (cf. HASEBRINK 2016: n.p.). Up to now, stereotypical images, for example of migrants, have dominated in daily newspapers (cf. LÜNENBORG et al. 2011: 104-106). But journalism needs diversity in order to cover and address the full spectrum of lived realities. It holds up a mirror to society and acts as a mediator between the classes and flows. Addressing the definition of diversity is essential in order to maintain a diversity of perspectives and to prevent prejudice and discrimination.

The central research question is: *To what extent are the characteristics gender, age, and origin distributed among journalists in German newspaper editorial offices in a way that fairly reflects diversity?*

This guiding question was used as the basis to derive two sub-questions and hypotheses, in order to examine potential connections with the political orientation of a newspaper and the hierarchical level.

»Diversity« refers to the distinctness and variety of individuals within groups (cf. HANAPPI-EGGER 2012: 178; HARRISON/SIN 2006: 191ff.), and can be investigated using various social categories such as gender identity, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion (cf. HANAPPI-EGGER 2012: 178). Intended to make diversity in an organization tangible, the diversity model of the Diversity Charter[1] (2021a) contains seven core dimensions, as well as external and organizational dimensions. These dimensions were developed based on the work of Gardenswartz and Rowe (1994) and adapted to current conditions. The most important are *age*, gender and gender identity (*gender*), and ethnic origin and nationality (*origin*) (cf. *Charta der Vielfalt* 2021a: 6). The characteristics most closely linked to an individual's personality, they were selected for this study because they are likely to be handled very transparently and are therefore the most likely to permit complete data collection. The other core dimensions are physical and mental abilities, religion and worldview, sexual orientation, and social origin (cf. *Charta der Vielfalt* 2021a: 6).

This work is based on data collected on diversity in German newspaper journalism (n=1503) in 2021. The data comprises both secondary data on employees of newspaper editorial offices accessible online, and primary data directly

1 The Diversity Charter is a non-profit association founded in September 2010. It is an initiative that aims to promote diversity in companies/institutions and calls for a working environment free from prejudice. The patron of the Diversity Charter is Angela Merkel. By signing the certificate, employers commit to cultivating equality of opportunity, diversity, and appreciation (cf. *Charta der Vielfalt* 2021b).

requested. Statistical methods such as a chi-squared test and a Levene's test were used for data analysis.

Diversity in journalism: current status of research

The book by Hanitzsch, Seethaler and Wyss analyzed data from 2,502 journalists from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland (cf. HANITZSCH et al. 2019: 20). The proportion of women in the German sample was 40% – a slight rise compared to a study from 2005 (cf. DIETRICH-GSENGER/SEETHALER 2019: 53f.), in which the proportion of women was 37% (cf. WEISCHENBERG et al. 2006: 268). Women with more than 15 years of professional experience made up just 30% of the German sample (cf. DIETRICH-GSENGER/SEETHALER 2019: 58). The men journalists had an average of 22 years of experience, the women journalists just 16 – regardless of the media genre (cf. DIETRICH-GSENGER/SEETHALER 2019: 59). Looking at the hierarchical level, Dietrich-Gsenger and Seethaler (2019: 53) noticed that women held only around a fifth of the leadership positions, such as editor in chief or a similar function. The lowest proportion of women, 31.7%, was seen in newspaper editorial offices. 48.7% stated that they worked for magazines, and 50% said they were employed in online editorial offices (cf. DIETRICH-GSENGER/SEETHALER 2019: 55).

The average age of the German sample at the time of the survey was 46 years (cf. DIETRICH-GSENGER/SEETHALER 2019: 57), having been just 41 in 2005 (cf. WEISCHENBERG et al. 2006: 268). In the German sample, journalists aged 29 and under were the least represented, accounting for 7%. Respondents from the 50+ age group were most strongly represented, at 40% (cf. DIETRICH-GSENGER/SEETHALER 2019: 57). There was also a discernable age difference between men and women. The women German respondents were around 4.5 years younger on average than their men colleagues. The study by Dietrich-Gsenger and Seethaler (2019: 58) also showed a slight increase in women, especially in the 26 to 35 years age group. In the higher age groups, the low proportion of women remained unchanged.

ProQuote[2] investigates the gender distribution in journalistic leadership positions at regular intervals, referring to a single media segment in each case, such as newspapers. The study from 2019 shows that the proportion of women in the position of editor in chief or deputy editor in chief at regional newspapers is just 11.7% (cf. VON GARMISSEN/BIRESCH 2019: 9). Of these, women are more likely to hold the position of deputy, while three of the eight women editors in chief share the position with a man colleague. As a result, just five of the 100

2 ProQuote is an association that campaigns for a higher quota of women in leadership positions in German journalism (cf. https://www.pro-quote.de/verein/ [11.07.2023]).

newspapers in the ProQuote sample had a woman as sole editor in chief (cf. von garmissen/biresch 2019: 9). ProQuote had conducted the same investigation in 2016, and was able to detect a slight increase in the proportion of women as editors in chief between 2016 and 2019 (cf. von garmissen/biresch 2019: 11). In addition, ProQuote investigated the gender distribution at the leadership level of national newspapers, taking their political orientation into account (cf. von garmissen/biresch 2019: 66f.). The results clearly showed that only the left-wing alternative newspaper *die tageszeitung* taz employed equal numbers of women and men in leadership positions in 2019 (cf. von garmissen/biresch 2019: 18). They were followed by other left-wing liberal newspapers: *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Die Zeit* (cf. käppner/mayer 2020: n.p.). Tabloid newspaper *Bild* had women in just 27.7% of leadership positions – less than a third. At the two bourgeois-conservative newspapers *Die Welt* and faz, only around 20% of leading staff were women. Economic newspaper *Handelsblatt* came in last place in the investigation (cf. von garmissen/biresch 2019: 18).

A study conducted in 2020 by the association Neue deutsche Medienmacher:innen made important findings regarding origin. The investigation by Boytchev et al. shows that journalists with a background of migration are under-represented. Of the 126 editors in chief surveyed, 118 were German with no background of migration. Just eight respondents had a background of migration, none of them from outside Europe (cf. boytchev et al. 2020: 9f.). The results of the study also show that German media houses were not clear about the diversity of their journalists at the time of the investigation. Of the 122 editorial offices surveyed, just 56 responded to the question of whether they knew the proportion of journalists in their editorial office with a background of migration. None (except one) was able to provide reliable, systematic information (cf. boytchev et al. 2020: 10). News agency Thomson Reuters is the only one to record the citizenship of its staff for the purpose of statistical analysis. The proportion of employees with a background of migration there was 31%, presumably due to the agency's multinational status (cf. boytchev et al. 2020: 11).

Looking at the various studies, the shortage of specific, current figures is striking. It is impossible to gain a reliable picture of journalists in editorial offices and at leadership levels. The study by Hanitzsch et al. (2019), described above, makes it possible to draw some systematic conclusions on gender and age, but its data collection stems from 2015 and is thus no longer up to date. The sample in that study is also very small. Moreover, it is clear that there are fewer studies on origin and age in the media sector than on gender. Up to now, few studies have focused on the diversity of conventional newspaper editorial offices. The ProQuote study did examine the medium of newspapers, but only looked at the gender ratio at leadership level.

Due to the lack of data, potential connections with factors such as the political orientation of a newspaper remain unclear. This paper hopes to close this research gap by investigating the diversity of newspaper journalism in Germany based on the three characteristics gender, age, and origin. The diversity characteristic gender takes the binary gender options into account; the age is recorded in years; the origin category is defined by nationality.

We take a diversity-oriented gender distribution to mean as balanced a ratio as possible between men and women. For the *age* characteristic, diversity would mean that the age distribution in the editorial offices corresponded to that of the total population of adults subject to social insurance contributions. For the purposes of this paper, the *origin* characteristic would be appropriately diverse if the proportion of colleagues among all journalists were similar to the proportion of those of foreign nationality in the total population.

The question guiding the research covers not only journalists with editorial roles but also those in leadership positions, as these have a key influence over which content is published and which topics are covered. The political orientation of a publication is also to be taken into account as a possible dimension for differentiation. This results in two sub-questions:

Sub-question 1: Are there differences between newspapers of different political orientations in terms of the diversity characteristics gender, age *and* origin*?*

Depending on their political orientation, newspapers may prefer to cover particular topics or pursue a particular type of reporting (cf. HANKE 2011: n.p.; *Deutschland.de* 2020: n.p.). Garz et al. (2020) looked at this by analyzing Facebook data. This shows, for example, that *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Die Zeit* are classified as more left of center; *Handelsblatt* and *Bild* are in the center of the spectrum; and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Die Welt* are right of center (cf. GARZ et al. 2020: 102). The two orientations *bourgeois-conservative* and *left-wing liberal* are contrasted in the hypotheses by way of example.

›Conservatism‹ refers to a political worldview that strives to maintain traditions. Continuity and security are its most important features (cf. SCHUBERT/KLEIN 2020: n.p.). Origin and homeland are also key pillars (cf. NDM-GLOSSAR 2021: n.p.). Bourgeois-conservative newspapers also focus more on economic issues, as businesspeople and decision-makers make up a large part of their readership (cf. HANKE 2011: n.p.).

On the other side is liberalism, advocating each individual's right to develop freely and rejecting all forms of coercion (cf. THURICH 2011a: n.p.). »Liberal« is considered a synonym for »tolerant,« »open-minded,« and »not dogmatic« (cf. HUG 2019: n.p.). When someone is politically left-wing, their focus is on social justice and equality (cf. THURICH 2011b: n.p.). Left-wing liberalism is shaped by and combines the values and attitudes of liberalism with elements of left-wing politics (cf. HUG 2019: n.p.).

For these reasons, we anticipate that left-wing liberal newspapers strive for more diversity than bourgeois-conservative ones. The hypotheses are therefore as follows:

H1a: The proportion of women is lower at bourgeois-conservative newspapers than at left-wing liberal newspapers.
H1b: The age distribution is smaller at bourgeois-conservative newspapers than at left-wing liberal newspapers.
H1c: The proportion of journalists of non-German origin is lower at bourgeois-conservative newspapers than at left-wing liberal newspapers.

Sub-question 2: Are there differences between the editorial office and leadership positions with regard to the diversity characteristics gender, age, *and* origin*?*

Leadership positions comprise (deputy) editors in chief, (deputy) heads of department, and lead editors in newspaper editorial offices. All other journalists working for the newspaper are categorized as »editorial office.«

The »Act for the Equal Participation of Men and Women in Leadership Positions in Private Enterprise and Public Service« came into effect in Germany in May 2015 (cf. *Bundesgesetzblatt* 2015: n.p.), as part of the Federal Equality Act. According to the federal government, there have been some changes in leadership positions at companies, but this change has been very slow and insufficient (cf. BMFSFJ 2021: n.p.). The proportion of women in German editorial office leadership positions in 2014/2015 was 33%; the figure for higher levels such as editor in chief was just 21% (cf. LAUERER et al. 2019: 88). We can therefore assume that there are still fewer women than men in journalistic leadership positions.

H2a: The proportion of women is higher in editorial offices than in leadership positions.

According to a study by CRIF Bürgel GmbH (2018: n.p.), the mean age of managers in Germany in 2018 was 51.9 years. The mean age of the working population in the same year was 44 years (cf. DESTATIS 2018: n.p.). The journalism sector is no exception here – those in leadership roles are likely to be older on average than editorial office staff. Furthermore, the age distribution is likely to be more concentrated at leadership levels, because employees with more years of professional experience are more likely to take up journalistic leadership positions. Editorial offices also include those just starting out in the profession, so a broader age distribution can be expected there than at the leadership level.

H2b: The age distribution in editorial offices is broader than in leadership positions.

People with a background of migration are generally under-represented in leadership positions (cf. HANEWINKEL 2021). While those with a background of migration made up a total of 24.4% of the workforce in Germany in 2019 (cf. DESTATIS 2020: n.p.), a study by the German Centre for Integration and Migration Research (DeZIM) showed that the proportion of people with a background of migration in leading positions in the media was just 16.4% (cf. DEZIM-Institut 2020: n.p.). According to a study by Neue deutsche Medienmacher:innen, just 6.4% of editors in chief in Germany have a background of migration (cf. BOYTCHEV et al. 2020: 9). We can therefore assume that the proportion of journalists in leadership positions with a background of migration is slightly lower than in editorial offices.

H2c: The proportion of journalists of non-German origin is higher in editorial offices than in leadership positions.

Age is one of the most common dimensions in diversity research (cf. *Charta der Vielfalt* 2021a: 7f.). Rising life expectancy and low birth rates are having an impact on the changing composition of the workforce (cf. RAHNFELD 2019: 8ff.). Up to five different generations currently work together in the same team, bringing with them their different values, attitudes and experiences. This can result in conflict. In Switzerland, for example, 27% of those surveyed stated that they had observed negative prejudice against older employees in their work teams (cf. GROTE/STAFFELBACH 2020: 28). Other studies show that a working environment featuring age discrimination is linked to poorer performance (cf. KUNZE et al. 2013: 413). It is therefore important to foster and retain the opportunities that generational diversity offers and to break down age-related stereotypes. Mentoring programs, flexible working, and mixed-age teams can all help to put generational diversity to positive use (cf. *Charta der Vielfalt* 2021a: 7f.). This study measures the *age* characteristic in years (rather than generations or age groups).

When it comes to the *gender* dimension, the focus is on integrating all identities and genders into the company and its culture, and enabling everyone to enjoy the same opportunities. When someone feels accepted as an individual, they are better able to fulfil their potential (cf. *Charta der Vielfalt* 2021a: 11f.). Gender-neutral processes, teams with a good gender mix, and training on leadership skills or to combat prejudices, for example, can help to prevent the phenomenon of the glass ceiling[3] and problems like wage inequality and rigid working models (cf. *Charta der Vielfalt* 2021a: 11). Further focus topics in gender diversity include discrimination against women in everyday working life, which may include oppression,

3 This refers to the invisible barrier that results in qualified women being less likely to rise into higher leadership positions. Conversely, men should be given equal access to more flexible, family-friendly working models (cf. *Charta der Vielfalt* 2021a: 11).

harassment, and mobbing (cf. BRÜGGER 2021: n.p.; SALIN 2015: 69ff.), and flexible working hours models for fathers who also want to spend more time with their families (cf. *Monitor Familienleben* 2012: 17). This paper reduces gender[4] to the two genders of women and men, because comparable investigations look at equality and equality of opportunity between women and men. Studies show that women in Germany earn around 20% less than men (cf. FÜNFFINGER 2021: n.p.).

Origin is used here to mean the dimension of ethnic background and nationality in line with the Diversity Charter, which refers to the cultural and language resources of those in work (cf. *Charta der Vielfalt* 2021a: 9). In a globalized economy, dealing openly and professionally with cultural diversity in the company environment is fundamental (cf. *Charta der Vielfalt* 2021a: 9f.). Recommended measures include, for example, putting together diverse teams and providing intercultural and language training (cf. *Charta der Vielfalt* 2021a: 10). A diversity of origin is the result of migration. Almost 16 million international migrants are estimated to live in Germany (cf. IOM 2022: 24). With a lack of sufficient data on the ethnic origin of employees in large organizations (cf. MÜLLER 2005: 230), origin is generally recorded based on nationality and ›background of migration‹ (cf. DESTATIS 2021b: n.p.). The background of migration can be understood to different degrees; because we have not recorded it systematically, we can only assume the origin based on the person's own statement of nationality.

Method

Both, existing public secondary data, such as the names of journalists and people in leadership roles, and new primary data was collected (cf. BECKER 2021: n.p.). The primary data is the diversity characteristics *age*, *gender*, and *nationality*, which were collected in person in a survey.

The following newspaper editorial offices were selected for the investigation because, as newspapers of record, they are highly relevant to the public discourse (cf. VON GARMISSEN/BIRESCH 2019: 51f.; PASTOR 2023: n.p.): *Die Zeit*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), *Bild*, *Der Spiegel*, and *Die Welt*. These newspapers are also those with the largest print and online reach in Germany (VON GARMISSEN/BIRESCH 2019: 12ff.), and are intended to reflect the full spectrum of political orientations (cf. GARZ et al. 2020: 98, 102). *Die Zeit* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung* were categorized as left-wing liberal; FAZ and *Die Welt* as bourgeois-conservative. All other editorial offices were excluded from the analysis of the political orientation in order to highlight the opposing poles.

4 The German word *Geschlecht* can refer both to biological sex and to social gender. The authors are aware that, in reality, this is not a dichotomous variable but a continuum. Given the data available, however, it is only possible to record two genders.

Given that the news titles were chosen in advance, the sample does not consist of randomly selected respondents. The intention was to collect a full data set from selected editorial offices. However, the accessibility of the personal data and the response behavior of the respondents both have an impact on the sample (cf. HÄDER/HÄDER 2019: 333ff.; STEIN 2019: 136). Once the newspaper editorial offices had been chosen, work began to collect the data from journalists. This was conducted in two stages in July and August 2021. The first step was to find the names of journalists in the selected editorial offices and leadership levels using the legal notice of the respective media company or newspaper. Further research was conducted on social media, such as LinkedIn and Twitter, as these are used by many journalists. In most cases, the gender of the person could be determined from the name. In addition, around a third of the sample had publicly accessible fact files that provided information on their *age*, *origin*, and *gender*. These fact files were found either in posts on the websites of the employers or, for example, on people's private websites. The second step was to contact people whose data could not be fully collected in the first stage in person via email or LinkedIn, informing them of the research project and asking them their *age*, *gender*, and *origin*. There was great willingness and interest among the respondents, with a return rate of around 80%. The sample size is n=1503, accounting for around 11% of newspaper journalists in Germany. The German Journalists Association [Deutscher Journalisten-Verband, DJV] estimates that around 13,500 journalists are employed at German newspapers and their online outlets (cf. VON GARMISSEN/BIRESCH 2019: 8).

The following information and categories were secured for each data point: newspaper title, orientation, role, hierarchical level, name, gender, age, nationality. The hierarchical level is divided into editorial office and leadership position. The editorial office level comprises various professions: journalists, lead editors, freelance journalists, reporters, authors, and correspondents. Editors in chief, heads of department, heads of editorial offices, chief editors, and managing editors were assigned to the leadership level. The diversity characteristic *origin* was operationalized using the nationality requested.

Because we were unable to collect complete data on all three characteristics for all people, we adjusted the samples for gender, age, and origin in each analysis, so that only complete data sets, and thus sub-samples, were included in the analysis in each case. The distribution of the characteristics is described based on the adjusted data (cf. STEIN 2019: 126).

The hypotheses are tested using a group comparison between dependent and independent variables. To do this, the three diversity characteristics as dependent variables were tested for significance with the categories *orientation* and *hierarchical level* as independent variables in each case. This analysis serves to find factors that potentially influence the distribution of the characteristics (cf. STEIN 2019: 120ff.). First, each variable of the hypotheses was subjected to a comparison

of mean and standard deviations, before being tested for a significance level of 5% using a suitable test. For the variables *gender* and *origin*, a chi-squared test was used (cf. PEARSON 1990). This tests whether two categorial variables are linked (cf. UNIVERSITÄT ZÜRICH 2021: n.p.).

If there were perfect statistical independence, the frequencies of the characteristic combinations would be as expected in theory. If the observed frequencies differ from those expected, there is a statistical correlation (cf. DIAZ-BONE 2013: 82f.). The p value shows whether there is a statistically significant difference or correlation.

Furthermore, the chi-squared test was also used to test the strength of the correlation in each case. According to Lakens (2013), the strength of evidence is among the most important results of empirical studies. This was tested using Cramér's V, a measure of association on a scale of 0 to 1 (cf. DIAZ-BONE 2013: 85). V=1 would denote a very strong correlation.

A Levene's test was used to measure the metric variable *age*, as the breadth of the distribution is what interests us for this characteristic. The standard deviation, rather than the mean values, are therefore what matters here. Standard deviation and variance are the most common measures of dispersion for metric variables. If the difference between the characteristics is low, these values are small (cf. DIAZ-BONE 2013: 51). The Levene's test measures whether there are different variances between the groups (cf. WALTHER 2020: n.p.). If $p<0.05$, this means that there is a statistically significant difference between the variances.

Results

In order to answer the overarching question of how diverse the staff of German newspaper editorial offices are, the distributions by gender, age, and origin will first be described and compared with population statistics. The hypotheses are assigned to the sub-questions accordingly and will be assessed based on the analysis results.

To what extent does the distribution of the characteristics gender, age, *and* origin *among journalists in German newspaper editorial offices currently reflect diversity?*

The characteristic *gender* comprises 1,503 data points (= n). The total sample contains 954 men (63%) and 556 women (37%) (Fig.1). Women are thus clearly under-represented, given that they make up around 51% of Germany's population in 2021 (cf. DESTATIS 2024a: n.p.).

The mean *age* in the sample (n=1,169) is 46.6 years, with a median of 46 years. The lowest value is 25 years and the highest value 91 years. The age range is therefore relatively large, starting relatively high and exceeding retirement age. Figure 2 shows the difference between this and the distribution of employees subject to social insurance contributions in 2021. The difference is also reflected in the

mean, which is almost three years higher than that of the working population (cf. Methodik; DESTATIS 2018: n.p.).

The analysis of the origin (n=1367) shows a disproportionate proportion of people of German nationality and/or origin. While the proportion of people of non-German nationality in Germany in 2021 is around 13% (cf. DESTATIS 2022: n.p.:), the figure in our sample is just 3% (Fig. 3). This result is approximately the same as those of previous studies that estimated the proportion of journalists with a background of migration in Germany at 5 to 10 % (cf. BOYTCHEV et al. 2020).

Fig. 1.1
Gender distribution in the sample (2021)

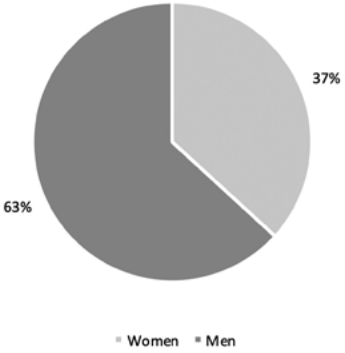
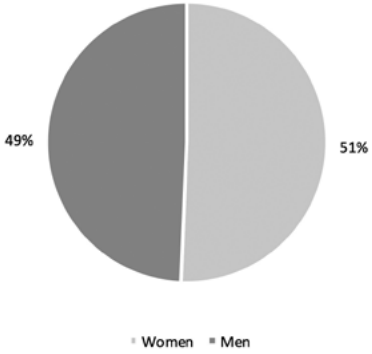


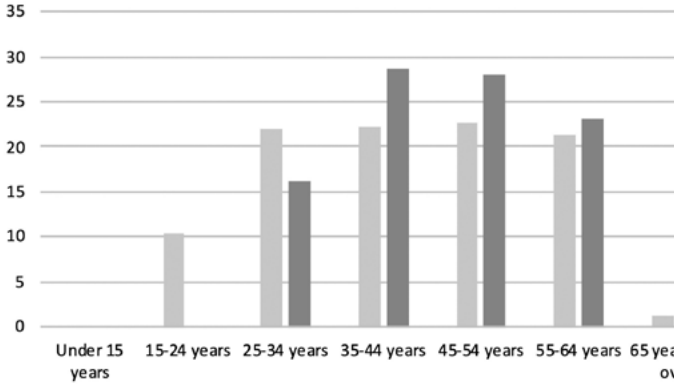
Illustration by the authors

Fig. 1.2
Gender distribution in society (2021)



Source: DESTATIS 2024a: o.S; illustration by the authors

Fig. 2
Age distribution in the sample compared to all employees subject to social insurance contributions in 2021



Source: DESTATIS 2024b: n.p.

In order to assess the hypotheses, the data was subjected to a chi-squared test [χ^2] (*age*, *origin*) or a Levene's test (*age*).

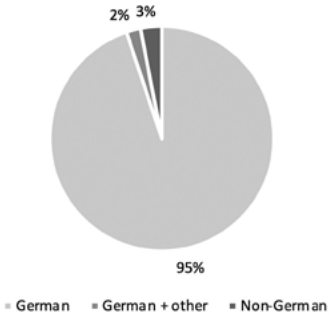
Are there differences between newspapers of different political orientations with regard to the diversity characteristics gender, age, *and* origin?

Only the editorial offices of contrasting political orientations were investigated for this analysis. Freelance authors were excluded from the sample, as they may work for multiple newspapers. The sample size was thus reduced to n=1120.

H1a supposes a lower proportion of women at bourgeois-conservative newspapers than at left-wing liberal papers. Although there is indeed a slightly lower proportion of women at bourgeois-conservative newspapers, the difference is not statistically significant (Fig. 4).

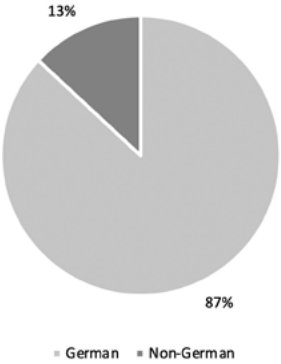
H1b supposes that the age distribution at left-wing liberal newspapers will be larger than that at bourgeois-conservative papers. No significant differences could be measured here, either. The hypothesis must therefore be rejected (Fig. 5).

Fig. 3.1
Distribution of the sample by nationality (self-declaration by respondent)



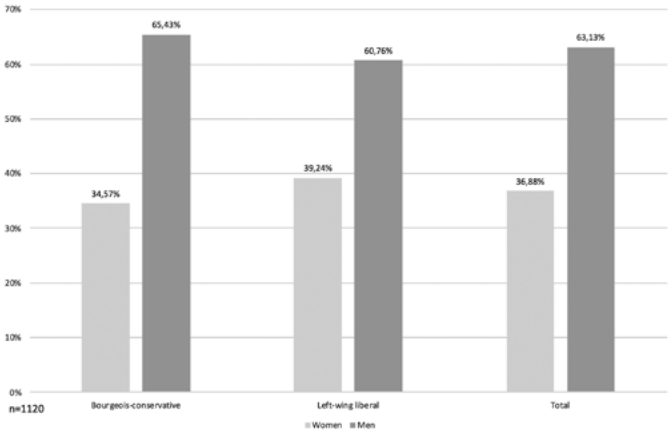
Source: Authors' own

Fig. 3.2
Distribution of nationalities in the population of Germany in 2021



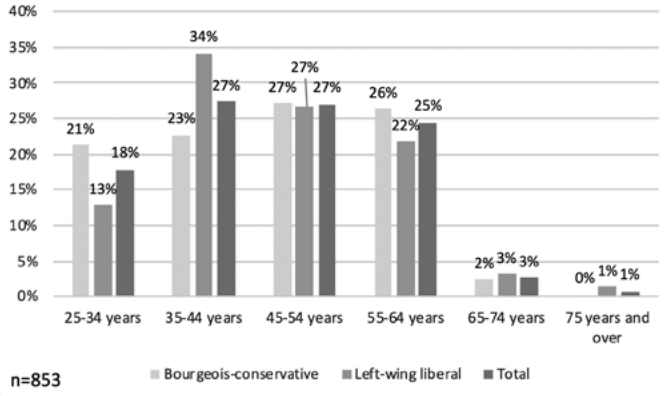
Source: DESTATIS 2024a: n.p.

Fig. 4
Gender distribution in the editorial offices of contrasting political orientations



Source: Authors' own

Fig. 5
Age distribution in the editorial offices of contrasting political orientations

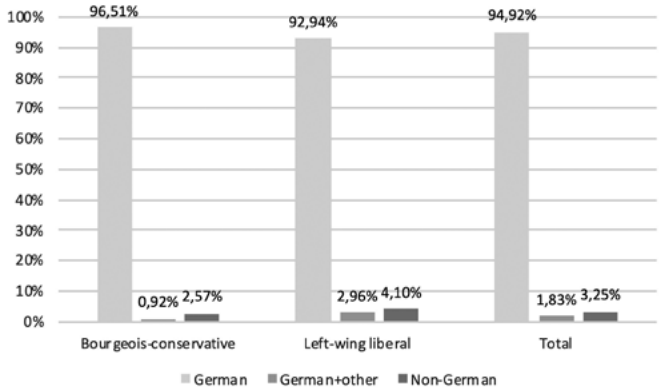


Source: Authors' own

H1c supposes a lower proportion of people of non-German origin at bourgeois-conservative newspapers. Figure 6 shows the difference. The analysis also

shows that there is a significant difference between bourgeois-conservative and left-wing liberal newspapers with regard to the proportion of non-German journalists.

Fig. 6
Nationality (self-declaration) in the editorial offices of newspapers with contrasting political orientations



Source: Authors' own

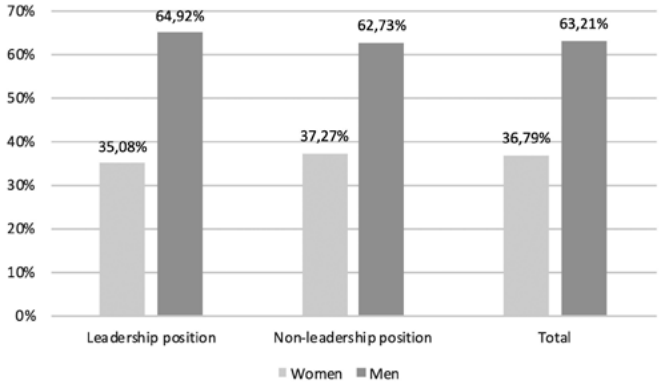
Are there differences between the editorial office and leadership position levels with regard to the diversity characteristics gender, age, *and* origin*?*

Hypothesis H2a supposes a higher proportion of women in the editorial offices of the newspapers than at the leadership level. Figure 7 shows that the proportion is around 37% in editorial offices and around 35% at leadership level. According to the significance test, however, this difference is not significant. The p value is around 0.47.

H2b supposes a broader age distribution in the editorial office than at the leadership level. Figure 8 shows that the age range is indeed wider in non-leadership positions. The Levene's test gives a value of $p < 0.05$ here, meaning that the difference is significant. H2b can therefore be confirmed.

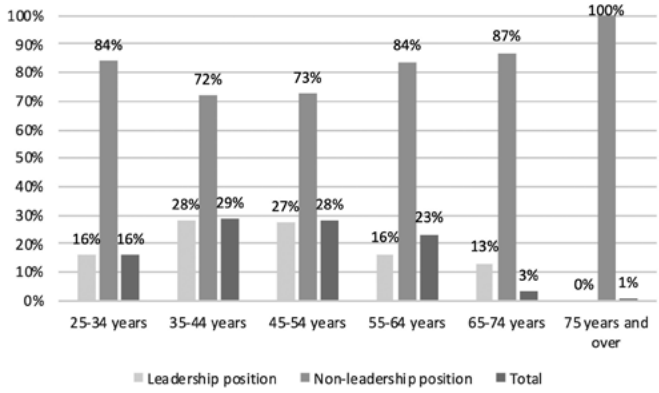
Hypothesis H2c predicts that there is a higher proportion of people of non-German origin in the editorial offices than at a leadership level. There is indeed a difference in the absolute figures (see Fig. 9). However, just as for H2a, the difference is not significant, but corresponds to the extremely low proportion of people of non-German origin in the total sample.

Fig. 7
Proportion of women and men in the sample by hierarchical level



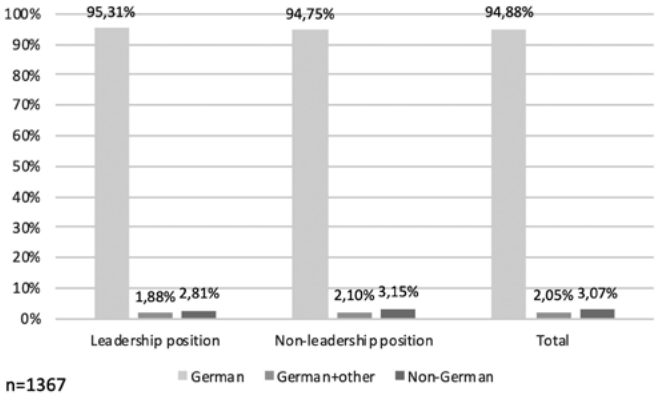
Source: Authors' own

Fig. 8
Frequency distribution of the sample by age group and hierarchical level



Source: Authors' own

Fig. 9
Nationality of the sample and leadership position



Source: Authors' own

The data analysis proves that there is a correlation between a newspaper's political orientation and the proportion of staff of non-German origin, but not between the orientation and the gender distribution or age range. According to the results, left-wing liberal newspapers have staff with a more diverse range of origins than bourgeois-conservative papers. In addition, the hierarchical level has a significant influence on the age range, but not on the diversity characteristics *gender* and *origin*. Editorial offices were found to be more diverse in terms of age than leadership positions. Hypotheses H1c and H2b are confirmed. Hypotheses H1a, H1b, H2a, and H2c must be rejected.

Table 1
Results of the analysis of hypotheses H1

Political orientation	Left-wing liberal	Bourgeois-conservative	Significance
H1a) Gender	Proportion of women 39.24%	Proportion of women 34.57%	χ^2= 2.626[a] p=0.105
H1b) Age	Mean=47 years (SD=10.91)	Mean=46,28 years (SD=11.39)	p=0.077
H1c) Origin	Proportion of German+other & non-German 7.06%	Proportion of German+other & non-German 3.49%	χ^2=7.633[a] p=0.022*

Answer: There are no significant differences in the gender and age distribution in the newspaper editorial offices of contrasting political orientations; however, there is more diversity of origin at left-wing liberal editorial offices.

Table 2
Results of the analysis of hypotheses

Hierarchical level	Editorial office	Leadership position	Significance
H2a) Gender	Proportion of women 37.27%	Proportion of women 35.08%	χ^2= 0.5256[a] p=0.469
H2b) Age	Mean=46.91 years (SD=11.55)	Mean=45,61 years (SD=9.01)	p<0.001**
H2c) Origin	Proportion of German+other & non-German 5.32%	Proportion of German+other & non-German 5.08%	χ^2=0.026 [a] p=0.987

Answer: There are no significant differences in the gender distribution and origin between editorial offices and the leadership level; however, the age range in editorial offices is broader than at leadership level.

Discussion and conclusion

The results show that women are under-represented in newspaper journalism: Just 36.8% of the journalists in the sample are women. In fact, the proportion of women journalists actually fell slightly compared to the results of the study by Hanitzsch et al. (2019) from 2014/2015. The proportion of women then was 40%, although it is important to note that the samples in 2014/2015 were significantly smaller than in this study, with 775 German journalists surveyed (cf. STEINDL et al. 2019: 45). Neither the political orientation of the newspaper nor the hierarchical level has a statistically relevant influence on this discrepancy.

From this investigation, we can thus conclude that, despite measures such as Germany's statutory quota of women, there is still an unequal gender distribution in newspaper journalism. As a general rule, many years of professional experience are needed in order to advance to a leadership position. On average, women journalists have around six years less professional experience than their men colleagues (cf. DIETRICH-GSENGER/SEETHALER 2019: 59). This could be one reason for the gender inequality at leadership levels.

The mean age of the total sample is 46.6 years (median: 46 years). The working population in Germany in 2017 was 44 years old on average (cf. DESTATIS 2018: n. p.). Furthermore, the youngest person in the sample was 25 years old and the oldest 91 years old; the youngest age group, 15-24-year-olds, is not represented

at all. This may be in part due to the strong increase in academic qualifications required in the profession in recent years. According to Dietrich-Gsenger and Seethaler (2019: 60), even in 2015, around three quarters of German journalists had an academic degree. The comparison with all employees subject to social insurance contributions also clearly shows that newspaper journalists are relatively old – no-one is under 25 years old, and the over-65 age group is significantly over-represented. There is no significant difference between left-wing liberal and bourgeois-conservative newspapers in this regard. The age distribution in editorial offices is significantly broader than at leadership level. This can be explained by the fact that both those starting out in the profession and employees with many years of experience work in the editorial office. Leadership positions, on the other hand, are usually held by people who already have a certain amount of professional experience. This is also clear from the mean age of people in leadership roles in Germany, which was 51.9 years in 2018 (cf. CRIF BÜRGEL GMBH 2018: n.p.).

The investigation showed that journalists with a history of migration are still under-represented in newspaper editorial offices. Of the 1,367 respondents in the sample, just 42 stated that they were of non-German heritage and 28 that they had an additional nationality – a total percentage of 5.1%. The 3% of journalists of non-German nationality contrast with the figure of 13% for the population as a whole (cf. DESTATIS 2022: n.p.). The political orientation of the newspaper is significantly related to the nationality of the journalists. At left-wing liberal newspapers, the proportion of journalists of non-German or dual nationality is around 7%; the figure at bourgeois-conservative newspapers is just 3.5%. This could be due to the more open-minded, tolerant attitude of left-wing liberalism and its efforts to achieve social equality (cf. HUG 2019: n.p.). This investigation found no significant correlation between hierarchical level and origin. People of non-German origin are under-represented in the sample as a whole and thus also at leadership level.

A core challenge for the empirical investigation of diversity in newspaper editorial offices is the access to personal data. As a result, the data sets for the individual newspapers are neither complete nor of equal size. The number of data sets depended on the digital presence on the respective website and social media, and on the respondents' participation. We can assume that not all journalists who write for the newspapers investigated have agreed to be named on the company website. Journalists who were newly employed during the data collection period presumably are not yet listed on the website either. Additional research on LinkedIn and Twitter could only compensate for this deficit to a limited extent, as not all journalists have a profile there. However, the return rate of 80% among the journalists contacted in person indicates that the target group is very willing to support research in this field.

We were only able to investigate a selection of newspapers and diversity dimensions. Sexual orientation, social background, and level of education are all examples of further aspects that could be important in an investigation of diversity in journalism. Gender identities beyond simply men and women were also excluded in this case. The nationality alone is not sufficient to draw conclusions on ethnic origin. Extensive collection of primary data could improve the quality of the results, but also runs the risk of distorting the picture through lower return rates and people's tendency to give responses they believe to be socially desirable.

When it comes to the results on the political orientation of newspapers, it is important to remember that, because small sub-samples were used, our results cannot be used to draw overall conclusions. Furthermore, the political orientation of a newspaper is often an external classification. Investigating based on the political orientation can therefore only ever be an attempt to uncover factors that could potentially influence diversity in journalism, and cannot be used as a decisive criterion. Incorporating journalists working for regional publications in the analysis would also be useful.

All in all, this paper reflects a sample of the totality of journalists in German newspaper editorial offices and their leadership positions. The results allow initial insights into the diversity of journalism. Further research could look at the social background, political attitude, and worldview of journalists. In addition, it could consider different career paths for journalists, such as journalists with academic degrees and others with traditional vocational training. Other newspaper titles could also be investigated. More detailed analysis by topic areas or departments would also be useful in order to provide comparisons within the editorial offices. Comparisons of the diversity in editorial offices with that in television, radio, and online journalism would also be interesting. Another role of further research would be to find out the reasons why people with a background of migration are under-represented in newspaper editorial offices – clarifying whether this is due to the language requirements, a lack of permeability in the education system, a lack of networking and cultural capital, or discrimination in the broadest sense (cf. OULIOS 2009: 140-143).

It falls to journalism to develop the necessary strategies. Despite progressive developments in recent years, there is still insufficient diversity among newspaper journalists in Germany in terms of gender, age, and origin. This study highlights the need for action.

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Translation: Sophie Costella

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HERBERT VON HALEM VERLAG

Essay

Thomas Hauser

Journalism under threat, democracy under threat

Remarks on media development in an age of digitalization

Abstract: **Digitalization and economization are not only changing the public space and thus the public discourse. Today, anyone can communicate with anyone. In theory, this enables discourse free from domination – in reality, the result is a Babylonian mix of media, with fake news, propaganda, and PR on an equal footing with serious information. Many are talking, few are listening. It is a development that undermines the business models of conventional media and throws journalism into a crisis of legitimacy. This text analyzes this development and names the greatest challenges facing media and society.**

Keywords: civic participation, democracy, digitalization, deliberative public life, Habermas, journalistic media, media education, social networks

> »Almost four out of five citizens see [...] democracy in Germany as increasingly threatened. 78.9 percent agree [...] with the statement that democracy is being attacked more strongly today than it was five years ago. This is the finding of a representative population survey published on Monday by the German Centre for Integration and Migration Research (DeZIM). Only 3.4 percent think that democracy is under attack less than it was in the past. According to the survey, the population would like to see the attacks being countered more strongly.« (N.N. 2023a[1])

This news story brought me up short in May 2023. Why? Because we should be concerned about it? Stories like this appear almost every day at the moment; I

1 The report refers to Kleist et al. 2023.

should have updated this long ago. What alarmed me was the second finding in the report on the survey, namely that 84.9 percent of respondents saw it as the role of the federal government to do something about it (cf. N.N. 2023a). That is not what I learned. A democracy is only strong and lively when it is carried and developed by a strong and lively civic society. But that civic society has become lazy. If the state is expected to be the sole entertainer, this can often lead to authoritarian forms of rule or perhaps dangerous overextension. Of course, the state can and must support civic society in its role – in particular through clever policymaking. There is plenty to talk about there.

One could also gripe further about how the process of opinion polling has gone off course, its excessive role in the political process, and the pitfalls and consequences of incorrect or suggestive formulations. That would be a paper in itself, although it is certainly a tangent of the issue under discussion here. After all, opinion polling is also an actor in the public sphere in which everyone today tries to shout over one another, and hardly anyone listens.

In order to understand the challenges, a few fundamental remarks must be made first. I will then briefly turn to the phenomenon of the public sphere and the question of what exactly is the structural change that has hovered over the public discourse, not only in the feuilletons, since Jürgen Habermas published his postdoctoral thesis (HABERMAS 1971). Next, we will turn our attention to the development of the media, concentrating on the newspapers and their digital forms, even though the lines between the various media genres are today increasingly blurred. Given the limited space here, however, it would be impossible to conduct a serious examination that also included the development of (public service) broadcasting. Finally, we will look at society and attempt to trace what impact the development of the media has had on society and democracy. And we will keep an eye out for something or someone to rescue the situation.

1. Democracy requires a public sphere

The first person to mention is Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, a former judge in Germany's Federal Constitutional Court and an expert in constitutional law. A dictum named after him describes a dilemma:

> »The liberal-democratic, secular state relies on conditions that it itself cannot guarantee. [...] On the one hand, it can only exist as a liberal-democratic state if the freedom it grants its citizens regulates itself intrinsically, from the moral substance of the individual or the homogeneity of society. On the other hand, it cannot attempt to regulate these forces of regulation itself, i.e., through legal coercion and authoritative decrees, without giving up its liberal-democratic nature.« (BÖCKENFÖRDE 1976: 92ff.)

Libraries are full of papers in which academics have slaved away on this dictum. For our purposes, supplementing Böckenförde with the work of Habermas is sufficient in order to emphasize the challenge currently faced. In his theory of communication, Habermas finds that modern societies can no longer rely on this binding background consensus. Conflicts that arise must therefore be managed through the medium of communication. A constructive interplay must be found between the decision-oriented discussions, regulated through democratic processes, and the informal opinion-forming processes of an informed public sphere (cf. HABERMAS 1992: 13).

Incidentally, this unmasks the basis for the deliberative democracy that was so important in Winfried Kretschmann's program of government in Baden-Württemberg (one of the 16 German states), where it was known as the »politics of being heard« (cf. Kretschmann et al. 2011); and to which Gisela Erler, long responsible for the field as State Councilor for Civil Society, repeatedly added »being heard, but not being listened to« (e.g., HAUSER/WINKLER 2022: 44).

Pursuing this now, however, would lose sight of the fact that, with Habermas, this ominous »public sphere« enters the stage as the central actor. When we search for threats to democracy, it demands our full attention.

Who or what is this »public sphere«? The obvious answer would be, ›everything that is not private.‹ But then we would have to define ›private.‹ In the age of the global data network, we would quickly end up in quicksand. Some have even discussed the end of privacy in this context (cf. e.g., WHITAKER 1999).

Habermas, however, develops the concept precisely in this distinction out of the Greek city-state, by separating the sphere of the polis, shared by the free citizens, strictly from the sphere of the oikos, which belongs to each individual. Although, argues Habermas, public life, *bios politicos*, plays out on the market square, the *agora*, it is not tied to a locality, but develops out of conversation (cf. HABERMAS 1971: 15ff.).

In simple terms and applied to today, one could say that the public sphere is the space in which individuals relate to social entities. In liberal societies, the public sphere on the part of the state means transparency about what it does; on the part of society, it means interested and active citizens who form a critical opinion through sources accessible to all and who take part in the state's process of will-forming and decision-making both directly, such as through elections, and indirectly with the help of political parties, citizens' initiatives, citizens' councils etc.

This public sphere is subject to permanent change. Jürgen Habermas described this change for the period up to the 1960s – from the representative public sphere of pre-democratic times to the bourgeois-literary public sphere, to its depletion through economization and concentration (cf. HABERMAS 1971). The fact that his analysis ends at a point at which this bourgeois public sphere and

its media were on the verge of a rare heyday is another story. The fundamental finding remained accurate: Professional media should ideally draw attention to »important« topics and organize discussion of them. They force transparency on behalf of the citizens, thus helping citizens to make informed decisions.

This model brings with it prerequisites, assumptions, and impositions. Journalism presumes to know which topic is important and in need of public discussion. It lives off the trust of its readers, listeners and viewers; on their belief that it is pursuing no other goal than to provide information and arguments – that it is an honest service provider for bourgeois society.

On the other hand, journalists are subjected to attempts to influence them from all sides. They are needed, courted, harassed. And, unfortunately, journalists have repeatedly been locked up or even killed. Author Gustav Freytag described the challenges more than 170 years ago: »The whole world complains about it [journalism], and everyone wants to use it for himself« (FREYTAG 1988: 71). The journalists themselves, however, need to remain unfazed and objective.

This cannot go well, and frequently does not. History is full not only of excellent research, reportages and analyses, but also of journalistic hubris, errors, poor behavior, and contempt for the audience. Helmut Schmidt was right:

> »Politicians and journalists. Both are categories of people that have to be treated with great care: After all, both range from almost-statesmen to almost-criminals. And the average remains average.« (quoted in RAUE 2015[2])

But, I would like to add that the same applies to independent, professional journalism as to democracy itself: It is the worst option apart from all the others.

2. Journalistic media in the digital crisis

Journalistic media have always been both a cultural and an economic asset – and of course an instrument of power. An aspect that Habermas believed only applied until the mid-19th century actually remained in place for a long time:

> »The publishers secured the commercial basis for the press, but without commercializing it as such. A press that has developed from the reasonable consideration of the audience remained an institution of this audience itself: effective in the way of a mediator and amplifier, no longer simply an organ for transporting information and not yet a medium of consumer culture.« (HABERMAS 1971: 219)

This was possible because the strict separation between the editorial office and the publishing house remained largely in place. Into the 1990s, confident editorial offices were able to occupy their role without harming the business

2 According to concurring reports in various media – including *spiegel.de*, *tagesthemen.de* –, the sentence was uttered during a speech to students in Freiburg. However, as for many common quotes, it is difficult to tell whether the different sources are drawing on one another and what the precise wording was.

interests of their publishers. Then, however, the connection between the media and the audience began to loosen; the circulation of printed newspapers began to sink – first slowly, then ever faster. When the dot-com bubble burst in 2001, advertising revenue also plummeted. The growing success of the large internet corporations sucked the financial oxygen out of the journalistic newsrooms. Today, they account for more than 50 percent of global advertising turnover. Google alone generates more advertising revenue in Germany than all the daily newspapers combined.

Regional newspapers – a key pillar of German democracy for decades – suffered particularly badly. Their income mix – two thirds advertising, one third sales and subscriptions – disappeared overnight. The internet was dominated by the discounter principle, with large numbers and small margins. Most newspapers do not have the size or the reach to keep up. Editorial offices always find it easier to be independent when their publishing houses are in a strong financial position.

Even with rising prices for subscriptions, the old business model could not be transferred to the digital world. Internet users quickly learned that online news was free. The large platforms made a fortune, in part by using the services provided by traditional media. The latter were left , as publisher Hubert Burda once complained, with just »lousy pennies« (quoted in MEIER 2009[3]). The dispute over whether the publishing houses should have put up paywalls earlier, however, appears absurd. Those who did, had no reach; those who did not, at least had readers. Neither earned any money.

Even today, journalistic income from digital business cannot compensate the decrease from print journalism. In the brave new media world, income from traditional business collapsed, while the major cost factors – printing and sales – could not be reduced in the same way. Major rises in subscription prices did manage to slow the fall in income in the short term, but exacerbated the crisis in the long term. This was because savings were also made in the cost factors that could be influenced quickly: staff and the product. It was like committing suicide for fear of death. There was also a wave of mergers at the same time. Today, one newsroom often produces dozens of newspaper titles.

The situation can be seen especially dramatically in local journalism. Being present on the ground demands a great deal of time and personnel, and is therefore especially expensive. The alternative *regional reporting*, sold as a way of moving closer to readers as income fell, is actually a move further away. Reportages tell stories whose relevance is measured on assumed reader interest. One takes the pulse of the town not to attract attention to important issues, but mainly

3 Hubert Burda said this at the Digital Life Design Conference in Munich in 2009 and referred to it again a year later in his opening speech at the same event.

to attract attention to oneself. The result is not only depoliticization, but also a reframing of the term relevance. Today, something is relevant when it attracts users to the platform and keeps them there as long as possible.

This turning point in journalism began when electronic data processing began to make its way into editorial offices in the early 1980s, changing their work radically. First, typesetting, layout, and proofreading shifted into the editorial office. Today, the finished pages are sent straight from the editorial office to the printing press. Articles for the digital edition are published directly. This brought with it a double change in perspectives. In the past, journalists designed their articles for print earlier and posted them online later; now, it is usually the other way round. In the past, they addressed their articles at empowered citizens; now, they woo the consumer.

People today no longer live with, but in the media. The media is where they communicate, organize, buy, gain information, and start, maintain, and end relationships. This results in a competition for attention – the scarce commodity of the digital economy. What counts is loyalizing users – a revealing term in itself. For this reason, marketing is also increasingly shifting into newsrooms, where the behavior of media users is observed in real time and examined for consequences for the service offered in future. All this alters the topics, the language, the storytelling, and the tone.

And it shakes the very foundations of the journalistic concept. Around 90 percent of newspapers in Germany, excluding tabloids, are sold as subscriptions. Journalists encounter readers who both complain about and expect schoolmasterly attitudes. They pay money for their newspaper to filter out the news they need in order to play their role as citizens from the background noise of information; to provide them with arguments and background that allows them to keep up with the democratic discourse.

3. Journalism in the digital public sphere

In the digital world, people can get fit for the discourse on their own. They do not want prompting or preselection. They are able to follow events in real time without having to be at the site of the action, can access numerous original sources directly and chat with key actors, can define their own filters or create their own public sphere.

Journalism not only loses its gatekeeper function here. It becomes a supplicant who has to strive to be noticed and to be allowed to offer its services. It therefore comes as no surprise that the internet works by the rules of the tabloid. Topics from the fields of ›red light, blue light, floodlight‹ are always popular; politics works at most in the form of the expectation of immediate solutions. Outrage

replaces engagement with the issues. More in-depth descriptions and analysis of complex issues become a topic for a minority only; John F. Kennedy's call for people to consider what they can do for the state becomes an imposition. And the etiquette is free from any restraint. Cabaret artist Christian Ehring described this digital public space as an »Empörium« [a play on the German word for ›outrage‹][4]. Bernhard Pörksen sees us as the »Fifth Estate« within it, acting in a »mental puberty« (PÖRKSEN 2021: 26[5]). Either way, the result is the same: The public is stoking exactly the development of democracy that it complains about.

Today, we see in the public sphere a phenomenon that is familiar from restaurants or family gatherings: Everyone wants to talk to everyone else so, in order to be heard, everyone talks over one another, louder and louder. By the end, everyone's head is spinning.

The public sphere today has become an overfilled room. As well as journalism, it is inhabited by new, professional gatekeepers like the large internet platforms with their opaque algorithms. This is where propaganda and PR are active, with their massively increased staff and budgets. Opinion polling is also playing an increasingly obtrusive role, as are the strange satire-information-disinformation shows associated with the name Jan Böhmermann in Germany. And in amongst all this, influencers, bloggers, and we ourselves all throng social media to a greater or lesser extent. Migration has made the national public sphere global. Migration of people is followed by the migration of their media and their issues. Ultimately, countries like Russia and China can also become involved with targeted disinformation campaigns.

All of this has consequences. Reputable information is found intermingled with fake news, PR, propaganda, and nonsense. When everything appears to be of equal value, nothing has value at all. And when politicians like Friedrich Merz triumphantly state »we don't need them anymore« (quoted in N.N. 2020)[6], meaning journalists, because parties and interest groups can now communicate

4 In a television program *Extra 3* on ARD. It is hard to say who coined the word. For example, there is also a song by Aut of Orda entitled *Das Empörium schlägt zurück*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HY54yN_mlhs (25.11.2024).

5 The full quote is: »We are living in a phase of mental puberty in dealing with new possibilities, shaken by growing pains of the media revolution, which we need to face with conceptual intelligence.« In interviews, Pörksen speaks of an »age of digital puberty,« for example in an interview with Marie-Christine Werner on SWR 2 on October 19, 2019.

6 The full quote is: »At the moment, there is a real power shift between those who disseminate news and those who generate news. It is in favor of those who generate news. We don't need them anymore. And that is the good thing. Today they can use their own social media channels, YouTube, to reach an audience that the public service broadcasters, and the commercial institutionalized media, often no longer reach. If this is used properly, if it is done well, these channels give you an opportunity to attend to your own interests, to retain your own interpretational sovereignty about what you have said. In a very different way from what we previously thought. So, that is the good news of digitalization.« Friedrich Merz said this on January 21, 2020 at AKV-Rittertalk in Aachen. There is a video clip, numerous media reactions, and a protest by the Deutscher Journalisten-Verband; cf. *Der Standard*, 17.2.2020. https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000114666921/cdu-politiker-friedrich-merz-haelt-herkoemmliche-medien-fuer-verzichtbar (25.11.2020).

directly with voters and followers, this should ring alarm bells. The same goes when Elon Musk, the owner of X (a platform that began life as the harmless tweeting of a bird) states on the Russian Gazprom channel NTW that, »All news is to some degree propaganda. Let people decide for themselves« (quoted in SHTEYNGART 2023: 20). The dream of discourse on the internet free from domination – dreamed of by its pioneers and claimed by Jürgen Habermas to be the essential moral-theoretical factor in a lively, working democracy – has now become a nightmare.

Yet the internet does serve up all the basic ingredients for discourse free from domination. After all, digitalization brings with it a wealth of opportunities. Empowered citizens are no longer limited to receiving media – they can become broadcasters themselves. The fight for press freedom in England in the 18th century centered around the desire to be allowed to report from parliament. Today, we all have access to many original sources that were long reserved for insiders, politicians, academics, and journalists. Without leaving our sofas, we can consume media from all over the world and talk to people all over the world (as long as we speak the relevant language or use translation programs). We have more freedom than ever before when it comes to choosing our sources of information. So free that we run the risk of drowning in the flood of information.

While in the past we needed a service provider to seek out issues and sources, today we must act as pearl divers, picking out issues and information that is truly relevant in order to adequately fulfil our role as citizens. Artificial intelligence (AI) can help with this search, but how much do we want it to decide for us?

The increasing use of AI is exacerbating another challenge: When the lines between people and machines, fact and fake become so blurred that it becomes almost impossible to differentiate between true and false, we have to rely on belief. And that would be the end of enlightenment.

The conclusion we must come to is sobering. Digitalization first debunked and then destroyed the (sometimes effective, sometimes less effective) symbiosis between journalism and society. Debunked because the media audience that became empowered through digitalization was suddenly able not only to become broadcasters themselves and spread their information directly to others largely without limits, but also to examine the work of journalists more easily. In doing so, they discovered something that they should have known all along: Journalism is not objective. It selects, weights, and conceals information, makes mistakes, and sometimes pursues its own agenda. The accusation of the lying press suddenly seemed more plausible, in part because many of those shouting it so loudly neglect to mention that those making the accusation have put lies and falsehoods at the heart of their own program. And that they are fighting independent media because they fear its power to enlighten.

With so much chaos all around, the grand master of communication theory, Jürgen Habermas, felt driven to intervene from his retirement home by Bavaria's Starnberger See.

> »An entire democratic system is damaged when the infrastructure of the public sphere is no longer able to direct the attention of the citizens to the issues that require decision-making, nor to guarantee the formation of competing public spheres, i.e., *qualitatively filtered* opinions. [...] It is therefore not a choice of political direction, but a necessity under constitutional law, to maintain a media structure that enables the inclusive character of the public sphere and a deliberative character in the process of forming opinion and will in the public sphere.« (HABERMAS 2022: 65-67[7])

Professional journalism is a public service. That is why it is protected under Article 5 of the German Basic Law. But this is only justified if it succeeds in its most important task: to enlighten civil society such that it is able to fulfil its role in democracy. But what if it no longer wants to? For younger generations in particular, newspapers, especially local newspapers, are now barely relevant. They get their information from digital platforms (TikTok, YouTube, Instagram). It would be fascinating to investigate where the sources of the news they consume there are. My personal, but not representative, experience with students allows me to present the working hypothesis that many traces lead back to traditional media after all.

4. Society and politics in the digital culture

Time for a change in perspective; a look at society. It has become a truism to say that the state and society are suffering multiple crises. The first tremor was the bursting of the dot-com bubble and the terrorist attacks on the USA on September 11, 2001. The German Chancellor at the time was Gerhard Schröder. Almost all of Angela Merkel's tenure as Chancellor was spent in crisis mode: The financial crisis, the Euro crisis, the refugee crisis, Putin's invasion of Crimea, flight and unplanned migration, Afghanistan, Syria, Donald Trump's first term as president, Covid-19, the surge of right-wing populism around the world and in Germany all preceded Olaf Scholz' premiership – not to mention climate change, digitalization, and China's increasing dominance on the world stage.

The world we were used to is foundering, the future is unclear, and the best we can do about many problems is manage them. Yet the public expects policymakers to solve the problems quickly, with as little change as possible, and, above all, without no losses for anybody. Angela Merkel was an expert in making us believe

7 First published in: SEELIGER, MARTIN; SEVIGNANI, SEBASTIAN (eds.) (2021): *Ein neuer Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*. Sonderband 37 der Berliner Zeitschrift für Sozialwissenschaft Leviathan. Baden-Baden: Nomos.

that she had everything under control, even though, as we now know, many things were ignored and, as a result, some challenges have since resurfaced even greater than before. »You know me« was the slogan that won her elections, albeit with decreasing majorities. It was given the name ›asymmetrical demobilization.‹ To many, Olaf Scholz appeared her logical successor in this regard.

But this is only part of the truth. Looking at the 2021 election results, it was already clear that society was just as divided as the ›traffic light‹ coalition they had elected. Modern liberal societies, especially those with high levels of immigration, are not homogeneous communities, but complex and therefore fragile constructs. Sociologist Andreas Reckwitz first diagnosed a society of singularities (cf. RECKWITZ 2017) and then a new class society (cf. GERWIEN 2018), dominated by a new middle class – highly educated and largely urban – that benefits from globalization and values personal fulfilment and quality of life highly. This middle class squeezes out the old middle class of the industrial age, which had stronger regional roots and valued order, discipline, and status. This process of squeezing out triggers experiences of devaluation and fear of loss, which are discharged in the form of conflict and offer populists a wide range of business models for their »entrepreneurship of loss« (cf. JAKOBS 2023).

In addition, there is a growing service sector proletariat, who have very limited opportunities for upward mobility. This group includes many migrants, making their integration more difficult and leading to further conflict. Multi-ethnic societies like Germany also import international and revive nationally suppressed historical conflicts. With models of society as vulnerable as this, their complexity and fragility are indisputable. Societies like this need to constantly renegotiate their common ground with themselves in difficult processes – assuming that such common ground is possible at all.

This is the explosive situation with which Olaf Scholz was confronted from the very day he took office, along with sky-high expectations and latent mistrust. Modern consumer citizens expect everything from policymakers, but do not trust them an inch. Scholz was equipped for this mission with the smallest voter mandate of any Chancellor since 1945 – and with two coalition partners whose goals could not be more different. With majorities like that, the let's-do-it Chancellor that many wished for would quickly become the »Vati« described in the song *Vatis Argumente* by Franz-Josef Degenhardt, in which the father is permanently furious at realizing that no-one takes him seriously anymore.

The traffic light coalition's analysis must have seen all this coming before they embarked on their adventure. It is worth remembering the selfie they took to document their resolve. In his book *Mehr Zuversicht wagen* [Daring to be more optimistic], Hamburg's Culture Minister Carsten Brosda has an idea of what they needed to achieve, and refers to the co-founder of the Black Lives Matter movement, Alicia Garza:

> »The individual groups are now too small to relate only to themselves and to sense solidarity through similarity and identity. What matters is building alliances across differences, because we are all affected by similar challenges. We need political movements that can bear complexity. This is the only way for us to learn how to reach one another, even if it makes us feel uneasy.« (BROSDA 2023: 323)

What matters, therefore, is to use dissent constructively in order to find new solutions.

Then came Putin's invasion of Ukraine – the *Zeitenwende*, the change in times, diagnosed by Olaf Scholz. It not only laid waste to the post-war global order, but also shook the foundations of the promise of prosperity. The story told by all reformers – that the hard work involved in the process of change would be followed by a better, successful future, became implausible. And the Chancellor's mantra that the country was on the right path, became strangely surreal, not least given the technical errors and exhibition fights within his coalition. The result is a mood that makes the real situation sound worse than it is.

This coalition failed because of a fight about the state finances. Yet a key cause is probably also its failure to develop a unified position for dealing with the »Empörium.« The clearer it became that the challenges of today can no longer be handled using the German carnival motto »good to all, harm to none,« the harder the steady hand of the Chancellor of few words clashed with his coalition partners' impatient wrangling for position and the excessive expectations of many citizens. Writing checks in order to form alliances across differences, as called for by Brosda, is no longer possible, not least following the Constitutional Court's ruling on the federal budget on November 15, 2023.

But this paper is intended to look not at the state of politics, but at the development of media and journalism. Situations like the one we face today require journalism that separates what is truly relevant from agitation and sensitivities, describes complex situations carefully, and uses words to disarm and objectivize the fiery public debates.

The reality goes the other way. Media that stare at what their users want and (have to?) exaggerate in order to be heard, reinforce concerns and aggressions rather than rationalizing them through objective enlightenment. They pillory and become alarmist, thus reinforcing the hysteria in political debate. They also support the consumer attitude of the citizens, who demand that policymakers solve problems quickly. All this results in the frustration with politicians and democracy that is then proven in opinion polls in order to be complained about. French author Silvain Tesson described the result for his country so fittingly that the lines even found their way into the second part of the comedy film *Monsieur Claude*: »France is a paradise inhabited by people who believe they are in hell« (quoted in KUPER 2022). The same could be said for Germany.

So are »the media« at fault yet again? This kind of knee-jerk polemics does not do justice to the seriousness of the situation, nor does it help in the search for solutions. Many people and many things have played their part in the current situation, most of them driven rather than drivers. The question of ›whose fault it is‹ merely results in everyone pointing to everyone else.

I have an image in my mind. It shows politics as an enormous mobile in which numerous contradictions have to be balanced with one another. Freedom and security are one of the pairs; individuality and solidarity another. There are thousands of these pairs. The task is made even more difficult by the fact that, every time one tries to balance one pair, something else that one had not even considered suddenly becomes imbalanced.

Many of us are lucky enough to have been born at a time in which this balancing act was successful – in part because we outsourced the risks and side-effects of our prosperity, or pushed them to the back of our minds. We lived in stable, peaceful conditions for decades and forgot that, in historical terms, this is the exception rather than the rule. All too often, a wind of change blew and stirred up the mobile.

We are in a phase like this now. We face multiple crises, most of which cannot be solved, but merely managed. We are in the middle of transformation processes in which there will not only be winners. We have a political system in which voters' party loyalty is becoming ever weaker, and the parties are therefore tempted to play on »trigger points« to gain attention, as sociologist Steffen Mau and others have analyzed (cf. MAU/LUX/WESTHEUSER 2023). And we have media where even the reputable outlets exaggerate, emotionalize, personalize, and scandalize in order to be heard above the rising noise of the digital public sphere. At the same time, it is clear that we will not be able to tackle these challenges with citizens focused on consumption and rage, with populist or even opinion poll-driven policymaking that does good to all and harm to none, with an economy that puts profit above morals, or with media that see themselves as part of consumer culture.

So far, I have analyzed what is going wrong and what does not help, and made use of the privilege of doom-mongering behind which academics and journalists sometimes ensconce themselves. But it is only possible to draw the right conclusions if one asks the right questions and is careful to observe and describe reality accurately – even if that sometimes makes one a Cassandra, like Andreas Reckwitz, who wrote in *Handelsblatt* in August 2023 that, without growing prosperity, western democracies were at risk of implosion (cf. JAKOBS 2023).

It is high time to plant an apple tree. Not because there is suddenly cause for optimism. As the philosopher Susan Neiman argued in an analysis in *Zeit* in early January 2024, referring to Immanuel Kant, who would have celebrated his 300th birthday on April 22, 2024: »Optimism is not hope. Optimism is failure to recognize the facts. Hope aims to change facts« (NEIMAN 2024).

5. How can the situation be rescued?

What can be done to counter the crisis in the liberal public sphere that threatens democracy? Or, to put it another way: How can the digital public sphere be civilized? There is no silver bullet. We must not trust anyone who offers us one. Every level of politics and society must play its part.

Let's start with politics. Policymakers face the challenge of not only defining rules for the major digital platforms, but enforcing them, too. These platforms are based in the USA or China, are active worldwide, and, if in doubt, do not feel responsible for the content they carry. Data also flows all over the world and is usually saved on servers outside Europe. Yet policymakers must still define rules. In order to be taken seriously, they should do this at least at a European level. The EU has therefore passed various laws, including the 2022 Digital Services Act, which came into full force in mid-February 2024.

Yet the fight to delete hate speech and fakes is just one example that demonstrates how difficult it is to enforce rules like this. Platform operators have an obligation to check for hate speech and fakes, react to reports of it, and act. but what can the law do when the companies, as in the case of the Russian-dominated messenger service Telegram, are based in Malta and simply do not react to legal rulings? When the internet giants ally themselves with power at the start of Donald Trump's second term as President and either fight or simply ignore all regulation? When, as in the case of Twitter, now X, owner Elon Musk himself spreads hate and fake news? Insiders describe how X has become an unpleasant, inhospitable place (cf. e.g., KÜHL 2023; N.N. 2023b; COHEN 2023). But it is a central marketplace for communication between policymakers and professional media.

One could follow the conflict between the primacy of politics and the rule of law on the one hand and the audacity of libertarian turbo-capitalists on the other with interest – if it did not have the potential to put an end to constitutional democracy. However, the front lines are not always as clear-cut as we saw in the struggle over rules for artificial intelligence in Europe, for example. After all, at stake are markets worth billions and the threat of dependency on the USA and China. Policymakers and the law thus face extremely difficult considerations and debates. We as a society should share in this responsibility. Society as a whole must overcome its media puberty and grow up. Every individual must play their part in this.

Education could help. Today, we conduct our lives in the media and are – perhaps – able to use them, but we have not mastered them. We do not need to explain to our children and grandchildren how the technology works. They are far ahead of us there. What is missing is *media education*. The first step would be training for school and kindergarten teachers, as well as massive investment in technology and staff for schools, and adding dealing with the opportunities

and risks to the interdisciplinary curriculum. The federal and state ministries have known this for a long time. But shockingly little has been done. We are still discussing basic questions, while AI applications are developing at lightning pace and the next tsunami is coming.

What needs to change in the media? Nothing less than their fundamental attitude. Media that see themselves as an instrument of consumer culture are part of the problem, not the solution. They need to become more political, not least in order to enable them to force policymakers to become more reputable. Being the loudest to shout ›scandal‹ does not deserve attention; facing up to the complexity of the challenges and attempting to understand and explain it do. In this light, the discussions about the German Buildings Energy Act – Minister for the Economy Robert Habeck's ›heating hammer‹ – and about the Federal Constitutional Court's ruling on the limit on public debt were low points in the public discourse.

Media also need to become more local. Democracy lives from the bottom up. Those who want democracy need to live it. One key reason for the decline in the major political parties is the loss of their local base. They have become anonymous companies, influenced more by political advisors and opinion polls than by lively discussion with their base – if they even still have one.

Regional newspapers, for decades a vital stabilizing force for democracy, are undergoing a similar development. Robbed of their role as the Agora of democracy, many eke out an existence as peddlers of outrage and entertainment. Local issues have always been a place where democracy is learned. When local journalism disappears – and that is happening, even if the marketing wants us to believe otherwise – democracy is damaged. Media therefore need to return to their role as informers, platforms for discussion, and sought-after neighbors. But how?

If it is true that modern societies have difficulty dealing with loss, and that societies like ours probably cannot expect to see their prosperity increase over the next few years, at least not for the broad base, then this society is suffering not least from the loss of positive outlook.

Constructive journalism is therefore a logical response from the sector. But misunderstanding this approach as a call to gloss over the situation would be fatal. What is needed is a return to long-neglected roots. Journalism should not merely look for the negative and describe the problem or failure – it should present the challenges in all their complexity and be involved in the search for solutions. Or for examples of success.

Other potential responses can be seen in the USA, where developments often take place many years before they do in Europe. By observing the USA, we can look into our future and potentially avoid some undesirable developments. Unfortunately, we rarely succeed in this. Large stretches of the USA are now completely devoid of professional local media. But while media companies let more

and more staff go, renowned charities and foundations there are increasing their spending on regional news.

In Ohio, for example, an initiative called Cleveland Documenters has been set up. It pays a small fee to around 600 Clevelanders – not experienced reporters, but curious citizens – to make notes at local government meetings. These are then published online. The initiative does not call this approach journalism, but information. The foundations that fund it are not looking to provide journalism for journalism's sake, but primarily to improve voter turnout. Studies show that turnout falls (along with other forms of civic engagement) when people feel that they do not have enough information. The initiative has now not only given rise to a network in other cities, but has also seen the development of a full news editorial office employing around 25 journalists and four »community listeners,« who gather ideas for stories from a district in which two thirds of people live in poverty.

A similar project is now planned for Indianapolis. Before charitable foundations agreed to provide funding, 1137 people in 79 of the city's 90 districts completed a detailed survey. The most common request voiced was not for detailed reporting on government errors and scandals, but to find out what is happening in their area. Gerry Lanosga, Associate Dean of The Media School at Indiana University: »One way you can avoid needing investigative stories on corruption in government is having regular reporting« (quoted in GREENWELL 2023).

Our ancestors could hardly have put it better when they fought for press freedom. We must not squander this freedom, or democracy itself.

About the author

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HERBERT VON HALEM VERLAG

Essay

Fred Vultee

The culture wars

Right-wing media and the salience of societal security in the 2024 elections

Abstract: **The 2024 US election points to the political value of insecurity: a sense that mutually cherished cultural referents are in peril, fueled by a steady flow of episodic yet correlated news. This information does not have to be false; through repetition and salience, isolated events create an image of a country in peril and a leader-in-waiting prepared to rescue it. In a closely divided electorate, a well-oiled partisan press aimed at half of the voters has the edge over a traditional media system trying to reach all of them.**

Keywords: Fox News, crime, desinformation, Agenda Setting, securitization theory

The 2024 US presidential election underscores the role of securitizing discourse in shaping how the voting public sees and understands issues – particularly how issues are elevated as threats that require extreme measures and a firm hand to apply them. This discourse brought issues as disparate as immigration, women's sports, and corporate diversity policies together into a single target for the right wing of a closely divided electorate. The results of this media-fueled »culture war« reflect recent elections in other NATO nations and offer insights on elections to come.

Securitization theory (BUZAN/WÆVER/DE WILDE 1998) reflects tensions in the late 20th century between orthodox security studies and efforts to broaden their reach (VULTEE 2022). A fundamentally constructivist approach, securitization creates a space for societal/cultural matters – for example, »the sustainability ... of traditional patterns of language, culture and religious and national identity and custom« (BUZAN/WÆVER/DE WILDE 1998: 119) – alongside such traditional

sites of security as the political system, the economy, and the military. In the structure outlined by Buzan et al., a »securitizing move« begins when an actor makes the case for an existential threat to a cherished »referent object,« seeking consent to move the issue beyond politics and into the anything-goes realm of security for the duration: a »global war on terror,« for example, or Donald Trump's 2015 demand for a »total and complete shutdown« on Muslim immigration. Though securitization is a theory of politics rather than media, these messages gain strength through media processes: agenda-setting (the prominence of issues) and framing (how properties of those issues shape events into »news«).

Identity – an »us« to share »our way of life« – is »the organizing concept of the societal sector« (1998: 119), in this case the imperiled identity of the beleaguered white Christian male (or at least of the world he sees himself as destined to rule). This is the »hijacked victimhood« (HRONEŠOVÁ/KREISS 2024) employed by leaders like Trump and Viktor Orban »to preserve or expand a dominant group's power« (2024: 1). In the US, the target might be the liberals who have »marginalized them from mainstream political discourse«; in Europe, a »Brussels dictate« might let »migrants and minority groups … victimize nation-states and their pro-family policies« (2024: 6).

The idea of a socially constructed threat to a socially constructed victimhood creates particular challenges for the beleaguered media system through which political information reaches the public. Storied US newspapers that have come under control of technology barons found their editorial autonomy compromised during the campaign. The *Los Angeles Times's* owner blocked an editorial endorsing Trump's Democratic opponent, Kamala Harris, and promised a »bias meter« (RAINEY 2024) to address the concerns of the conservative audience it hoped to win over; with the support of owner Jeff Bezos, *The Washington Post's* new publisher declared that, »returning to our roots,« the paper would no longer editorially endorse presidential candidates (LEWIS 2024).

On social media, the tech entrepreneur Elon Musk became a lavish and vocal supporter of Trump and his causes before turning his attention to Europe. He has streamed his conversation with Alice Weidel, leader of Germany's far-right AfD, and shares content promoting that party as a »movement to rebuild Germany and lead Europe out of globalist control.« While his relations with the UK right wing are more complex, he has also promoted the anti-immigration cause there – while maintaining his attacks on the supposed threat of DEI (diversity, equity, inclusion) to the cultural values he advocated. In an electorate as closely divided as the US in 2024 (Trump's margin of victory in the popular vote was about 1.5 percentage points), the role of social media in boosting and sustaining issues for the partisan press leaves the professionalized media at a disadvantage. The existential threats portrayed at the highly popular Fox News Channel – to public safety and the economy as well as to an embattled »our way of

life« – might be built from exceptionally small events, but through repetition and amplification, they look bigger and more constant for that audiences.

Newspaper endorsements, of course, are less a reflection of public opinion than of publishers' prerogatives; their goal is admittedly persuasive, and their outcome is largely symbolic. The role of social media stands closer to the original concept of media agenda-setting: in the phrase that McCombs and Shaw (1972) borrowed from earlier work on the coverage of foreign policy, the news does not tell people what to think as much as what to think about. As McCombs and Shaw (1993) affirmed in a retrospective two decades later, agenda-setting is less about attitude change than about a transfer of knowledge: the facts out of which a threat is constructed.

Not all of that knowledge is equal. Political parties' spread of misinformation on social media is associated not simply with populism but a »radical-right populism« reflecting »exclusionary ideologies« (TÖRNBERG/CHUERI 2025: 2) – and a »misinformed electorate« works to those parties' advantage. Earlier research supports the idea that the right-wing media's audiences are more likely to know things that are not true and not to know things that are true. Presented with three misperceptions about the second US-Iraq war – about »weapons of mass destruction,« strong connections to al-Qaida, and world support for the US invasion – Fox users were the most likely to hold at least one of those views; users of US public broadcasting services were the least likely to hold any (KULL/RAMSEY/LEWIS 2003). Survey research in fall 2024 found that users of Fox and farther-right media outlets not only prioritized different issues than users of national newspapers or other cable networks but knew different things about those issues. They were more likely to give wrong answers about data trends in crime, immigration, and the economy, and those giving wrong answers were more likely to lean Republican (IPSOS 2024).

Those findings do not by themselves show that people learned false information from Fox News, or that Fox never presented accurate information on those issues. But a study of top stories at the Fox homepage, foxnews.com, from 2022 through 2024 underscores the importance of salience and frequency in the transfer of information. Put another way, if episodic crime connected to immigration, particularly when those seen as the most vulnerable are the victims, is always the top story, aggregate data about declines in immigration or crime is less likely to leave a lasting, or opinion-shaping, impression, if it reaches the audience's attention at all. As with McCombs and Shaw's (1972) study of the newspapers of 1968, no method could – or should – capture every bit of content in an issue, but a determination of »major stories« can stand as a measure of editorial practice and audience reception. Episodic crime helps illustrate the process.

A bill that advanced rapidly through the newly seated US Congress in 2025, which would »mandate federal detention of immigrants lacking legal status accused of theft, burglary and other similar crimes« (SUTER 2025), was named for a nursing student who was murdered while jogging in Georgia in February 2024.

(A Venezuelan man who had entered the US illegally was convicted of the murder that November.) Her death was the top story at the Fox homepage at least once a day for the next eight days: the search for a suspect, comments from the expected presidential candidates (Trump and incumbent Joe Biden), and reactions from friends. Other stories about immigration, the border, and crime attributed to Venezuelans also reached the top of the page. On the ninth day, the Georgia story did not appear among four captures of the top 10 stories – but two other articles attacking the administration's border policies did.

A similar case that had been among top stories for a week in 2023 – a woman found dead near a hiking trail in Maryland – returned to the top of the page in 2024 when a Salvadoran who had also immigrated illegally was accused in her death. Her family later spoke at the Republican convention that formally nominated Trump for the presidency; on the first day of his return to office, Trump declared a »national emergency« at the US southern border (*Guardian* 2025).

The cultural connections among immigration, media, and right-wing anger were clear after rioting followed the stabbing deaths of three young girls – falsely blamed on Muslim immigrants – at a party in England. A columnist for the *New York Post* (a corporate cousin of Fox News) saw »huge lessons for America« in the unrest: essentially, since the police »were clearly holding back something about the identity of the suspect,« the rioting was an understandable response to the resulting online rumors (MURRAY 2024). In other words, if the public had only been told it was a Black person born in Wales in the first place, they wouldn't have had to attack those mosques.

On either side of the Atlantic, the border is an issue of both physical and societal security. Another of Trump's first-day proclamations – declaring it federal policy that there are »only two genders, male and female« (GUARDIAN STAFF 2025) – points to the unique role of gender diversity as a peril to right-wing culture. That order landed on fertile ground, as had Trump's campaign discourse. Stories about a trans athlete on the woman's swim team at a Pennsylvania college were among the top stories on the Fox homepage for 18 of 33 days beginning in January 2022; a trans athlete on a college volleyball team in California, six times in the month preceding the election – and nine times in the ensuing four weeks. At a rally the weekend before the election, Trump praised another women's team that, in his terms, had defied »the radical left's gender insanity« (MORIK 2024).

With economic topics, the issue is less an overflow of episodic information than a deficit in ongoing information. In 2022, the monthly government report on US consumer inflation was among the top stories on the Fox News homepage at least once on the day of its release – until September, when its continuing decline apparently made inflation less enticing. Hurried readers, or even attentive ones, can surely be forgiven if they do not update their knowledge from information that isn't made salient for them.

Misperceptions or misinformation can also reach the news agenda through a side door. An accusation that partisan bias, or DEI-driven ineptitude, hindered the response to a natural or technological disaster might have little staying power by itself, but once it draws a denial – or a demand for further inquiry from friendly legislators or social media commentators – it receives another boost beyond the original. The sparks of existential danger do not have to be large when they land on the dry tinder of self-proclaimed victimhood. Even if parts of a security claim are made from whole cloth (a supposed surge in drug-smuggling from Canada), the securitization structure is clear: Trump's order imposing tariffs on imports from Canada, China, and Mexico proclaimed that »the extraordinary threat posed by illegal aliens and drugs … constitutes a national emergency,« with tariffs lasting »until the crisis is alleviated« (THE WHITE HOUSE 2025).

Commentators have suggested for much of this century that US candidates can seem to be speaking to two different countries in the same campaign. The 2024 results suggest that it is at least safe to say that candidates are heard through two different media systems: a well-oiled party press creates one reality, and a fractious set of organizations still adhering to public service ideals creates another. The party press seems content to serve its half of the country a select menu of existential peril. As for the other, *The Washington Post* announced a new mission days before Trump's inauguration: »Riveting storytelling for all of America.« Whether it is contested or not, a securitizing move is news for both.

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HERBERT VON HALEM VERLAG

Debate

Mandy Tröger, Hendrik Theine

On the impact of the Trump administration on media and media regulation in Europe

Abstract: **Donald Trump's second term in office leads to profound changes in media and communications, platform regulation, and the political influence of Big Tech – also in Europe. In particular, the close ties between the Trump administration and wealthy business owners such as Elon Musk reinforce the oligarchization of US politics. One consequence is the strategic use of digital platforms for political purposes. At the same time, US technology and media policy could oppose European regulatory measures. These developments highlight the need for and strengthening of independent research and investigative journalism. This paper analyzes the global impact of power shifts in the United States and possible countermeasures.**

Keywords: Trump-Administration, Media, Media Regulation, Big Tech, Europe

January 20, 2025, marked Donald Trump's return to the office of President of the United States. Four years earlier, his rhetoric had led to a violent attack on the Capitol, resulting in multiple casualties. Now, as Trump assumes government responsibility for the second time, the international community is closely monitoring developments in the United States, given the far-reaching consequences of its political dynamics on governments and societies worldwide.

This influence is also evident with regard to media and communications. Regardless of the extent to which journalistic content in Europe is directly funded by the US government (PHILIPPIN/CANDEA 2024), information from Trump and his administration play a central role in media reporting. Journalists across Europe rely on these sources, including content disseminated via the platform X. The platform's owner, Elon Musk, strategically leveraged its reach of over 200 million users for the US election campaign (TRÖGER 2024). Under Trump, Musk has now been appointed head of the newly created Department of Government Efficiency

(DOGE) within the White House. In this role, Musk recently gained access to the US Treasury's payment system, which contains sensitive personal data on millions of Americans receiving Social Security payments, tax refunds, and other government disbursements (STEIN 2025). This development exacerbates concerns about the influence of major tech corporations and their owners on information and communication infrastructures in both the United States and Europe.

On the one hand, dominant corporations such as Meta (Facebook) and Alphabet (Google) are headquartered in the United States but at the same time dominate the digital markets in Europe and compete with each other here. In Germany, they have invested in major publishing houses (DACHWITZ/FANTA 2020), as well as in journalistic initiatives such as the »Neue Deutsche Medienmacher« (New German Media Makers), which pushes for diversity in journalism. They also fund academic institutions, for example the Technical University of Munich where Facebook endowed an Ethics Institute for Artificial Intelligence (KAHN 2019). On the other hand, these corporations jointly lobby against stricter regulations on the tech and digital industries at both national and European levels (SEVIGNANI/THEINE/TRÖGER 2025). With Elon Musk as a representative of the technology industry within the Trump administration, it is likely that the interests of these corporations will receive even stronger political backing in US politics.

Simultaneously, Donald Trump continues his aggressive rhetoric against critical media professionals. He has repeatedly labeled the press that scrutinizes his policies as »the enemy of the people« (quoted in SAMUELS 2019). According to the British newspaper *The Guardian*, Kash Patel, a candidate for FBI Director under Trump, explicitly expressed his intention to target journalists (VINER 2024). These developments raise the question of the extent to which Trump's renewed presidency could have an impact on journalism and the regulation of media and communication in Europe.

The following analysis explores three interrelated aspects that highlight how the consequences of Trump's second term extend far beyond the borders of the United States. It not only influences political structures and media discourses but also raises fundamental questions about the future of the global information order.

Increasing pressure on the media – also in Europe

During his first term, Donald Trump was highly critical of established US media outlets. He declared their reporting to be false, deliberately undermining the credibility of journalists (MEEKS 2020; DOWNIE/SUGARS 2020: 10ff.). To spread his political agenda, Trump primarily used the platform Twitter, which ultimately

banned him in January 2021 for violating its policies, particularly regarding hate speech and incitement to violence (CONGER/ISAAC 2021). Trump's communications intensified societal debates about factuality, truth and consensus – for example on issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and criminal charges against him (SUMMER 2021). While similar debates existed before (HONIG 2018), they have since escalated into highly polarized media conflicts, also in various countries in Europe. Further, a report by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) from 2020 illustrates how the Trump administration at the time pursued legal actions against journalistic sources, influenced US media companies, and restricted journalists' ability to enter the country (DOWNIE/SUGARS 2020).

These events took place during Trump's first presidency, when his administration was often unprepared and faced internal resistance to some of his initiatives. However, conditions are fundamentally different in his second term. The so-called »Project 2025« (DANS/GROVES 2023), developed by around 400 conservative academics under the auspices of the conservative Heritage Foundation, outlines political priorities and strategic goals for Trump's second presidency in a nearly 900-page document. Although Trump has publicly distanced himself from the document, many contributors are well-connected within the Republican Party and are likely to hold key positions in the new administration. Trump's first administration already heavily relied on the Heritage Foundation's policy recommendations, implementing nearly two-thirds of its proposals within just one year in office (see *Trump Administration Embraces* 2018).

»Project 2025« contains proposals for foreign and domestic policy, as well as education, economic, and media policy. Regarding media and communications, the plan calls for a comprehensive reform of public broadcasting in the United States.[1] Specifically, it accuses the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and National Public Radio (NPR) of political bias, arguing that they disadvantage conservative positions and fail to contribute to public education. As a result, »Project 2025« proposes cutting government funding, revoking their status as non-commercial educational broadcasters, and imposing high licensing fees (see MUENSTER 2024).

Just two weeks after taking office, Brendan Carr launched an investigation into PBS, NPR, and their affiliate stations. Carr had previously been appointed by President Trump as chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). His justification for the investigation was that non-commercial broadcasters might be violating national law by partially relying on commercial advertising

1 In the United States, a predominantly commercial broadcasting system has been established. NPR (National Public Radio) and PBS (Public Broadcasting Service) are the closest equivalents to the European public broadcasting models. They are primarily funded through donations and taxes and play only a marginal role in opinion formation in the United States (GRASSMUCK 2020: 10).

revenue (SWERDLOW 2025). Should the investigation lead to sanctions or new regulations, it could significantly reshape the US media landscape.

Beyond public broadcasting, »Project 2025« calls for a fundamental reassessment of the relationship between the government and the press. For instance, it suggests reviewing the extent to which journalists should continue to have access to the White House. Additionally, the concept includes proposals to facilitate the monitoring of journalistic activities, such as increased seizure of email and phone records (see MUENSTER 2024). According to Kelly McBride, Senior Vice President at the Poynter Institute for Journalism, these measures pose a serious threat, particularly with regard to the protection of journalistic sources (JONES 2024). Weakening this protection would constitute a major assault on press freedom in the United States.

These developments will have both direct and indirect impacts on media and communications in Europe. On one hand, journalists from Europe will likely face stricter access restrictions at the White House, making coverage of US political decision-making more difficult. On the other hand, debates about the funding and political orientation of public broadcasting in the United States could serve as a reference point for similar discussions in Europe – for example in Germany. Here, right-wing and far-right parties such as the Alternative for Germany (AfD) have long called not just for a reform, but for the abolition of public broadcasting. Their demands include eliminating broadcasting fees (Rundfunkbeiträge) and dissolving broadcasting councils (Rundfunkräte) (*AfD Program* 2021: 164ff.). Additionally, right-wing populist media platforms such as *Exxpress* and *Nius* are strengthened discursively, which enables them to further propagate their often entirely fact-free criticism of public service media (GÜRGEN 2023; GUTSCHI 2024). Developments in the United States could strengthen these lines of argument and generate political dynamics with long-term consequences for media and communications across Europe.

Regulating Big Tech at the European Level Under the Second Trump Administration

During his first term, Donald Trump maintained an ambivalent stance toward large corporations. His administration repeatedly criticized Big Tech and other conglomerates – though primarily when it was politically expedient. Examples include the attempt to block the merger between telecommunications giant AT&T and Time Warner (AGATHOKLIS MURINO/MCCORMACK/DRUMMONDS/HSU 2021), calls for higher shipping costs for Amazon through the US Postal Service (JOPSON/WATERS 2018), and early discussions about a potential ban on the video platform TikTok (CHANDER 2023). Despite these debates, no substantial

regulatory measures were taken. Media scholar Philip Napoli (2021) therefore argues that technology policy during Trump's first term was largely symbolic and did not lead to significant structural changes.

Since then, Trump's stance on Big Tech has fundamentally shifted. He is now closely connected with key players in the tech industry, as reflected in the funding of his re-election campaign. Trump received a total of USD 273.2 million in donations from the technology sector, including significant contributions from Elon Musk (USD 242.6 million), Marc Andreessen (USD 5.5 million), and Jan Koum (USD 5.1 million) (HERNANDEZ/ARATANI/CRAFT 2024). These close ties between Trump, his second administration and leading Big Tech players will undoubtedly have an impact on future technology and media policy. During the campaign, Elon Musk – the single largest individual donor to Trump's campaign – announced via his platform X that the chair of the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC), Lina Khan, would be dismissed immediately after Trump's election victory (BANK/DUFFY 2024). Furthermore, Andrew Ferguson, whom Trump appointed as the new FTC chairman, stated that he aims for minimal or no regulation of Big Tech and artificial intelligence (GODOY 2024).

At the same time, the future of the video platform TikTok in the United States remains highly controversial. During his first term, Trump attempted to ban the platform, citing national security concerns. Under the Biden administration, a corresponding ban was enacted, leading TikTok to go offline on January 18 and 19, 2025. Trump's assurances that he would delay the implementation of the ban have since allowed the platform to return, but its long-term future remains uncertain. Current legislation aims to separate TikTok from its Chinese parent company, ByteDance (MAHESHWARI 2025). However, Trump recently stated that he would no longer pursue the ban, likely because the platform is highly popular among Republican influencers (HUYNH 2024). A recent study also suggests that TikTok's recommendation algorithm, with over 170 million users in the United States, tends to favor Republican content (IBRAHIM/JANG/ALDAHOUL/KAUFMAN/RAHWAN/ZAKI 2025).

At the European level, Trump's second presidency is likely to significantly hinder or challenge the regulation of Big Tech. Even under the Biden administration, the United States threatened countries such as Austria, France, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom with tariffs after they introduced digital taxes that primarily affected US tech giants (see USA drohen Österreich [US threatens Austria] 2021). The European Digital Services Act (DSA), which came into force in February 2024, along with the Digital Markets Act (DMA) and the AI Act, will impose significant regulatory burdens on US-based platform and search engine operators. The DSA, in particular, enforces stricter regulations for very large online platforms and search engines (DSA 2025).

Given the significant lobbying power of Big Tech in the European Union (EU) (Lobbymacht der Digitalkonzerne [Lobbying power of digital corporations] 2023), there is a possibility that US conglomerates may leverage their close ties to the Trump administration to weaken or bypass EU regulations. A shift toward deregulation or the dilution of regulatory measures poses serious risks for the control of central digital infrastructures. This could further limit the European Union's ability to assert public interests against powerful transnational players. If global efforts to regulate these corporations continue to erode, the economic, political, and cultural power of US-based Big Tech will expand further, ultimately jeopardizing the sovereignty of democratic institutions in the digital sphere (SEVIGNANI/THEINE/TRÖGER 2025).

The Increasing Oligarchization of US Politics and Its Impact on Europe

Previously discussed ramifications of the second Trump administration on media and communications in Europe are closely linked to the increasing oligarchization of US politics. While wealthy individuals and the »ultra-rich« (*Überreiche*) (SCHÜRZ 2019) have long exerted significant influence over political decision-making – both in the United States and globally – Trump's second presidency is shaping up to further consolidate political power in the hands of a select few. These ultra-wealthy players are closely aligned with Trump, which is why sociologist Brooke Harrington (2024) describes this group as »Broligarchs« – a blend of »oligarch« and the colloquial term »bro.« The term refers to US billionaires who work together actively resisting taxation, regulation, and democratic oversight (HARRINGTON 2024).

In the Trump administration, these individuals assume de facto governmental functions – without having been officially elected or nominated for office. One example of this shift emerged already in November 2024, when it was revealed that Elon Musk, a central figure in Trump's inner circle and now a government official, had privately met with Iran's United Nation's ambassador. Such informal but high-level diplomatic activities suggest that the economic interests of certain tech billionaires are becoming increasingly intertwined with official US foreign policy. In response, *The Guardian* has referred to Musk as »Trump's shadow vice-president« (ROBINS-EARLY 2024), highlighting the tech billionaire's opaque power to control transnational communication regulations. This dynamic raises concerns that future US policy – such as NATO commitments – could be influenced by European regulatory actions against Musk's platform X. Republican politician J. D. Vance hinted during the election campaign that continued US

involvement in NATO might depend on the extent to which the EU imposes regulatory restrictions on X (SCHWARZ 2024).

This deepening oligarchization of US politics suggests that future EU regulatory efforts will not only face resistance from Big Tech but could also provoke retaliatory measures from the US government. A case in point is Meta: Mark Zuckerberg recently announced in a widely discussed video that Meta would eliminate its fact-checking teams in the United States (DAMPZ 2025). If Meta extends this measure to the European market, it would conflict with DSA requirements for content moderation and fact-checking. Given Zuckerberg's close ties to Trump, it is conceivable that the Trump administration might threaten to impose punitive tariffs on European imports if the EU requires Meta to continue conducting fact-checks.

Beyond economic and regulatory implications, the entanglement of business and politics directly affects political discourse and public opinion formation in Europe. Elon Musk, in particular, has leveraged his platform X as a strategic tool to mobilize right-wing players both nationally and transnationally. In late December 2024, Musk published a guest op-ed in the German newspaper *Welt am Sonntag*, explicitly endorsing the far-right AfD, calling the party »the last spark of hope« and rejecting its classification as an extremist party (DE RUITER 2024). In early January 2025, he intensified his involvement by inviting AfD leader Alice Weidel for a live discussion on X. Days later, Musk personally shared the livestream of the AfD party convention, amplifying its reach to millions of users (Musk verschafft AfD [Musk manages Afd] 2025).

These developments underscore that the increasing entanglement of economic and political interests in the United States cannot be viewed in isolation. Instead, they are directly shaping political discourse, and media and communications in Europe. The growing direct interference of corporate players in political processes and the expanding use of digital platforms to influence democratic elections will have lasting consequences for the balance of democratic structures in both the United States and across Europe.

The Growing Importance of Independent Media and Critical Research

The publication of Elon Musk's political statement in *Welt am Sonntag* sparked significant criticism from various organizations in Germany, including the German Journalists' Association (DJV). Critics particularly objected to the fact that Musk was given a platform to promote his political agenda and that of the AfD. At the same time, media professionals pointed out that not only *Welt am Sonntag* but numerous other German and European media outlets picked up on Musk's

statements, thereby amplifying his message and increasing its reach (SCHULTZ 2024). These developments raise fundamental questions about how media should cover the future US administration and its political strategy.

Against the backdrop of the growing oligarchization in US politics and the accompanying erosion of democracy, it is crucial to critically analyze, document, and contextualize these processes. This applies both to media coverage and to research. The influence of powerful economic players on political decisions and public discourse requires rigorous journalistic and academic scrutiny that sheds light on both the mechanisms of this influence and its social implications.

This includes detailed analyses of the interconnections between political and economic power, media concentration, and media regulation – across traditional media, social media, and digital platforms. The second Trump administration is no longer merely relying on the spread of misinformation and disinformation as a core strategic tool. Rather, it is already clear that a rigorous political disempowerment of democratic institutions is being legitimized with a communication strategy in which political, economic and media interests converge. It is no coincidence that the CEOs of all major digital corporations attended Trump's inauguration and made substantial financial contributions to his campaign. Their goal is to expand their political and economic influence, further underscoring the need for independent media and academic institutions to critically observe, fact-check, and make these developments accessible to the wider public. In addition, independent media and research must formulate structural reform proposals that point the way out of the crisis of democratic institutions and increasing oligarchization (TRÖGER/VAN DER ECKER 2023: 269).

Given these challenges, journalistic reporting and scientific research play an essential role. Public scrutiny and academic analysis of political and economic power structures are fundamental pillars of a functioning democracy. However, such analyses face significant limitations when researchers are financed and selected by Big Tech and granted only restricted access to selected corporate data (RYAN-MOSLEY 2023). This most certainly leads to distorted or incomplete research findings. Therefore, strengthening independent research and investigative journalism is crucial – potentially through reforms in public broadcasting systems. Only through fact-based reporting and research can political discourse in Europe be conducted on a solid, evidence-based foundation. This is essential to safeguarding, developing, and institutionalizing democratic principles in the long term.

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HERBERT VON HALEM VERLAG

Initiative Nachrichtenaufklärung / Forgotten News

The »Top Ten Forgotten News of 2025«

Topics that have been neglected by the media

Once a year, the German non-governmental organization »Initiative Nachrichtenaufklärung« (INA), in collaboration with the Deutschlandfunk (German public radio) news department, releases a list of ten important issues that have been overlooked by the mainstream German-language media. The goal is to draw attention to omissions, agenda-cutting and disinformation as well as to highlight some topics for further investigation. Given the extensive coverage of the Russian war against Ukraine and the Gaza conflict, the U.S. election, and the German government crisis including new elections, along with the ongoing threats faced by journalists, investigators and whistleblowers worldwide, the search for »forgotten news« is particularly crucial.

This year, a jury comprised of experts in communication and media studies, as well as professional journalists, selected the top ten topics of »Forgotten News«. Students from various German universities assessed the relevance of the proposed topics and whether they had indeed been neglected by most German mainstream media. All qualifying topics were presented to the jury with detailed reports. During a one-day meeting, jury members convened in person to determine which proposed topics they deemed most significant.

Individuals can reach out to Initiative Nachrichtenaufklärung via email, mail, or a web form to highlight important yet overlooked topics. This ensures that concrete experiences from the public, rather than just the agendas of interest groups and other institutions, are reflected in INA's top ten lists for news enlightenment.

Top 1: Child soldiers fighting with German small-caliber weapons

Worldwide, over 250,000 children and adolescents are involved in military conflicts and warlike actions, with small-caliber weapons playing a central role. Germany, as the second-largest exporter of small-caliber weapons, has not sufficiently adjusted its weapons policy despite international agreements. Export permits for small-caliber weapons are often issued without strict controls, leaving the final destination of the weapons unclear. NATO, EU and equivalent states are preferred in exports, which leads to facilitating the flow of weapons to countries which violate children's rights. In sum, the control and enforcement of export rules are inadequate, but a rethinking of the German federal government's weapons policy is not yet in sight. Yet, this issue is hardly reported on in German media.

Top 2: Refugee camp on Samos is inhumane

Following the media outcry over the destruction of the Moria refugee camp in 2020, a new »Closed Controlled Access Centre« (CCAC) was built on the Greek island of Samos, allegedly to improve the living conditions of refugees. However, critics complain about the continuing inhumane conditions, inadequate care and lack of prospects for refugees. Media attention to the deplorable conditions in the camps has declined sharply – the pressing problems have disappeared from public awareness. The issue is also relevant for Germany as the situation on Samos reflects European refugee policy and the integration of refugees. In particular refugees are needed as workers to counteract the shortage of skilled labor, a situation that plays a crucial role in the political debate on asylum law and the labor market.

Top 3: Ban on human rights organizations in Ethiopia

The Ethiopian government is intensifying repression. Several human rights organizations were banned in the country in November 2024. Germany, as a member of the UN Human Rights Council, has weakened international control mechanisms by abstaining from important votes, which has encouraged a culture of impunity in Ethiopia. Given Ethiopia's geopolitical significance and its upcoming elections in 2026, increased international pressure is needed to protect human rights and ensure long-term stability. However, Ethiopia has largely ceased to be a topic in German and international media since the end of a major war that began with the central government's invasion of Tigray and affected

large parts of Ethiopia. The bans of human rights organizations since past year have gone virtually unreported.

Top 4: Homeless despite having a job

More than half a million people in Germany live without a roof over their heads – some of them despite being full-time employed. The number of urban, working nomads has doubled in recent years, as they cannot afford even a room in the outskirts of cities. The problem of homelessness has long reached the middle of society but is largely neglected by the media.

Top 5: Disciplining civil servants: Faster dismissal through changes to civil service law

The German parliament [Bundestag] has passed a contentious law: Instead of a decision-making process through disciplinary lawsuits by courts, superiors are now empowered through disciplinary proceedings to decide on the dismissal of civil servants with anti-constitutional attitudes. The Federal Ministry of the Interior promises a more efficient approach against extremism in government agencies. However, the opposition and civil service unions have sounded the alarm – they see this development as opening the door to a potential abuse of power. The democratic principle of separation of powers will be further undermined. While the law has received little attention in the media and has not been the subject of public controversy, the central question remains: Is this really the right way forward?

Top 6: Educational equality for children in foster care?

When families face problems, children and adolescents are often placed in foster families. The question arises whether the children receive adequate access to education in foster homes. The topic is particularly relevant because it concerns a vulnerable group in our society that also deserves more attention in media coverage. Yet, this topic has not yet been addressed comprehensively in any major media outlet to date.

Top 7: Significantly fewer workplace accidents

A positive piece of news that has received little coverage: The number of fatal workplace accidents in Germany has recently decreased significantly. Notably, there are large differences between industries. Experts emphasize that long-term progress can only be achieved through greater safety awareness. In general, topics from the world of work receive little space in the media, although they are such an important part of life.

Top 8: »Morbus Mediterraneus« – When cultural bias influences diagnoses

Imagine this: you are lying in a hospital bed, experiencing severe pain, but it is ignored by doctors and nurses. You receive no or insufficient pain medication because the staff assumes your pain is exaggerated. People with Southern European roots or names are particularly likely to report such experiences. The medical term for this is »Morbus Mediterraneus« – a derogatory term for allegedly exaggerated sensitivity to pain among people from the Mediterranean region.

Top 9: Fraud against contract workers from Mozambique – Germany evades responsibility

Over the past 30 years, they have been fighting for what is rightfully theirs – yet their claims are in danger of being dismissed: Around 17,000 Mozambicans came to the German Democratic Republic (GDR) as contract workers but were never fully paid. Up to 60% of their wages were withheld and used to offset Mozambique's debt. Although the injustice suffered by these people is now being recognized, compensation payments to those affected have not been made yet.

Top 10: Tax burden limits – When tax burdens threaten people's livelihoods

The tax burden limit is intended to prevent taxes that threaten a person's sheer existence, but its exact level is decided by courts on a case-by-case basis. This means, for example, that when a property tax is levied, the amount of the tax must not disproportionately restrict the taxpayer's personal and economic freedom. A tax must not have a strangling effect that endangers the livelihoods of citizens. The topic is neglected because – although the media report on tax

increases and their consequences – the topic of the tax burden limit as a legal limitation is not addressed.

Further information: www.derblindefleck.de

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HERBERT VON HALEM VERLAG

Reviews

Nea Matzen (2024): *Online-Journalismus für die Praxis. Fachwissen für Netzpublikationen*. [Online journalism for practice. Expertise for net publications.] 4th fully revised edition. Cologne: Herbert von Halem, 420 pages, EUR 39

Reviewed by Gabriele Hooffacker

This practical textbook by Nea Matzen has more than tripled in length since it was first published in 2010, then entitled simply Onlinejournalismus. Now extending to 420 pages, the fourth edition is an extensive teaching and reference work for practical online journalism. Although the work remains true to its original structure, the new volume is more than just an update.

A new chapter at the start, »Digital publishing on all channels,« not only looks at the switch to cross-media ways of working in editorial offices – it also provides an overview of the activities of an online editorial office and the ways that generative language AI can be used in practice. Warning words on algorithms and dependencies have also been added – a must in the age of Meta, Alphabet, und Elon Musk.

»Texts for the internet« has become »Texts and prompts for the internet.« The section on prompts itself is brief and helpful, although some tips on prompting for ChatGPT, for example, would have been a welcome addition. Eye tracking is presented in detail, and readers will enjoy the many color illustrations throughout the book. However, there is too little on usability; when the topic does arise, it is in the context of user experience and search engine optimization (SEO). It is a little surprising that, although »mobile first« also receives appropriate attention under the SEO aspect, the development towards research via voice input and output and its effect on SEO is not mentioned.

Chapter 3 looks at social media, while Chapter 4 is dedicated to forms of presentation online. This chapter, too, is more comprehensive than in the first edition, although not to the same degree. Participative formats, the core competency of online journalism, are covered mainly in the chapter on social media and briefly again later on page 308 in relation to cross-media. Compared to this, the

section on »involving readers,« starting on page 352, is relatively short: The only formats it mentions are chats, surveys, and quizzes.

A few little complaints: The wonderful Floskelwolke project is recommended on page 118, despite having ended in August 2023. The annual editions of the ARD online study are quoted multiple times. The study was merged with the ARD-ZDF-Medienstudie in 2024, although this was not announced until September 2024 – evidently after the book was printed.

In the references, the journalist and author Björn Staschen is listed as »J. Staschen.« Mistakes happen. But it is a shame that Stefan Primbs' outstanding work *Social Media für Journalisten* is not used or quoted, given its good description of how to turn users into allies, rather than seeing social media channels merely as additional outlets addressing specific target groups. In fact, unlike in the first edition, the reference section does not list any comparable works on practical online journalism. Instead, it includes some academic literature and numerous current online sources.

A positive aspect regarding social media: Nea Matzen does not tire of stating the risks and limits of the third-party platforms and their algorithms. She even presents the Fediverse as an alternative in the chapter providing an introductory overview (cf. 75). Gems like the news factors and notes on approach and attitude (both in the social media chapter) are sprinkled throughout the clear, well-structured chapters. The information that videos on social media platforms do not work the same as conventional television journalism is also important.

The author's enormous experience – from her origins in the online editorial office at *tagesschau.de* to providing workshops and training – is clearly on display throughout the book. It is almost a shame that, with such a wide range of useful information and descriptions of the problems of online and social media, the »how to« focus that made the first edition in 2010 so handy and practical has faded into the background a little.

All in all, this is a comprehensive book that is enjoyable to read at leisure. The numerous text boxes with practical tips, the overviews of tools, and additional information are all clearly highlighted. This fourth edition is certainly a good investment for online editorial offices, even those who already have the first edition on the shelf.

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Lorenz Lorenz-Meyer (2024): *Digitaler Journalismus* [Digital journalism]. Bielefeld: transcript, 354 pages, EUR 29

Reviewed by Vera Katzenberger

Journalism is in a period of upheaval. A fiercely competitive advertising market, an audience that is often tired of news, rapid technological change, and the constantly high pressure to innovate that comes from artificial intelligence, big data, etc. are just a few keywords in the current transformation. How is journalism changing in the digital age? Which are long-lasting trends, and which just short-lived hype? In many media organizations, the constant uncertainty is releasing creative energy: They are experimenting in their reporting with interactive forms and multimedia formats, testing innovative strategies for refinancing their services, and integrating algorithms into their editorial processes.

This situation is the starting point for Lorenz Lorenz-Meyer's textbook *Digitaler Journalismus*, published by transcript. The introductory work extends to 354 pages and is divided into three parts. The first part traces the development of journalism under the influence of digitalization. The second concentrates on various journalistic activities, looking both at fundamental activities like topic selection, research, and knowledge and project management, and at innovative fields such as multimedia, social media, data journalism, and the automation of reporting. The third section of the book focuses on editorial marketing and examines aspects such as content management and (re)financing journalistic services. Throughout its 17 chapters, the textbook provides specific examples from the media sector and provides the content in an educational way. This demonstrates the profile of the author, who worked as an online deskman for *Der Spiegel*, *Zeit* and Deutsche Welle and taught as a professor of online journalism at Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences from 2004 to 2022.

How does the textbook define digital journalism? Like most authors, Lorenz-Meyer assumes that the »effects of digitalization« (13) have transformed journalism. While online journalism has long been talked about both in practice and in research, and the internet was seen as one outlet among many, digital journalism has now asserted itself as a watchword that brings with it a more holistic view. Lorenz-Meyer, too, understands digital journalism as a multifaceted practice under the constraints of digitalization, covering the entire value chain from production to distribution and reception. He presumes the existence of a colorful »media cosmos« (34) that is spreading across all digital platforms and moving forward in all its diversity. In doing so, digital journalism needs to subsist in a dynamic area of tension between creativity, consumption, commerce, and new technologies. This includes, for example, the spread of false

information and deep fakes, and the dependency on large platforms like Facebook, Google, YouTube, etc.

In the first section of the book, Lorenz-Meyer looks back at the origins of digital journalism, arguing that the first decade of its development had its origins in the precision journalism of the 1950s (cf. 18). Further development, he continues, began with the opening of the internet and the establishment of search engines, social networks, and mobile devices. In the third decade, the focus is on how digitalization has affected journalism from the mid-2010s. Yet Lorenz-Meyer dedicates just half a page to a brief description of this crucial period, and fails to mention the influence of artificial intelligence and algorithms. He does at least go on to dedicate an entire chapter to automation in journalism later in the book.

The second section of the book, looking at the craft of journalism, has enormous practical relevance and provides a corresponding density of application examples. This textbook does not teach the reader how to compose a news item, a comment piece, a reportage, or an opinion piece – Lorenz-Meyer states as much right at the beginning (cf. 13). Fortunately, there are enough other introductory works that cover the classic forms of style and presentation, including in the digital space (e.g., LIESEM 2014, HOOFFACKER 2020, MATZEN 2024). Instead, Lorenz-Meyer presents new processes like open source intelligence (OSINT) (cf. 62) and formats and channels like social media stories (cf. 123), news games (cf. 125), and podcasts (cf. 179). For example, there is more detailed discussion of various formats on YouTube, Instagram, and Tiktok by the content network Funk from ARD and ZDF (cf. 141), and data journalism stories from Zeit and the Berliner Morgenpost (cf. 208). Interaction with one's own audiences and new interactive formats like Spiegel Debatte from Spiegel Online are also mentioned (cf. 306). The aforementioned chapter on the role of automation in journalism is also located in the second section. Lorenz-Meyer sees automation in journalism as »the editorial application of technologies from the field of artificial intelligence« (223). The chapter mainly provides definitions, such as of symbolic and sub-symbolic, discriminative and generative AI (cf. 225ff.).

Finally, at the heart of the third section is the strategic integration of marketing methods in editorial content in order to increase both range and reader loyalty. Lorenz-Meyer addresses fields like community management (cf. 297), editorial analytics (cf. 320), and digital paid content (cf. 339). In his view, the greatest challenge here lies in finding a balance between informative content and promotional elements without endangering journalistic integrity. The author once again uses clear, practical examples to tangibly demonstrate how media organizations can achieve this balance, including the Krautreporter magazine that used crowdfunding in its start-up phase (cf. 343) and RiffReporter with its mix of sales revenue and donations from private individuals and institutions (cf. 344).

All in all, the educational style of the textbook is a major plus point. Lorenz-Meyer begins every chapter with a brief overview of the learning unit and the various learning objectives. Explanations of terms and key messages repeatedly provide a concise summary of the information presented. For each chapter there are tests on the publisher's website, accessed via a link in the e-book or a QR code. These quizzes are a little cumbersome to access at times (the reader must set up and activate an account). Lorenz-Meyer also provides practice exercises, offering ideas and inspiration for lecturers and students. Each group of topics ends with a list of selected recommended literature, allowing the reader to explore the various topics from a theoretical and research-oriented perspective. Should readers want to deepen their expertise further, the hand-picked recommendations are a good starting point for further research. After all, apart from this recommended literature, Lorenz-Meyer's textbook does not provide any sources at all.

The formats and tools of digital journalism are constantly developing at a rapid pace. A textbook is therefore only ever a snapshot in time and can only reflect the current situation. Lorenz-Meyer provides a versatile practical textbook. It examines the key terms and approaches associated with the digital transformation of journalism, including interactivity, multimediality, and the increasing personalization of content. The educational style and practical application examples make the textbook a good resource for training journalists in an ever more unpredictable and fast-moving media sector.

About the reviewer

Vera Katzenberger is a junior professor at the Institute of Communication and Media Studies at Leipzig University. Her current teaching and research focuses on digital journalism and podcasts.

Translation: Sophie Costella

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This review first appeared in rezensionen:kommunikation:medien, 23 January 2025, accessible at: https://www.rkm-journal.de/archives/25292

Badura, Laura (2023): *Riskante Rezeption. Der Vertrauens- und Risikoprozess bei Rezipierenden informationsjournalistischer Berichterstattung* [Risky reception. The process of trust and risk in recipients of information journalism reporting]. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 407 pages, EUR 89

Reviewed by Beatrice Dernbach

If the reviewer leaves a 400-page specialist reference work for too long after reading it, she runs the risk of forgetting some of what she thought about it. If she writes the review immediately after reading, (too) many details will still be swirling around her head and blocking her view of what is important. It is best to allow a few days to cool off and order one's thoughts. Then, the balance sheet becomes clear: Laura Badura has presented a monograph in which she has set herself and achieved a challenging goal. In addition, she has made a key contribution to the research field »trust and communication in the digitalized world,« supported predominantly by her doctorate supervisor Bernd Blöbaum at the University of Münster. Numerous publications appeared during and after the period of the project, including dissertations by Katherine M. Engelke (2018) and Bernadette Uth (2021).

What makes Laura Badura's work special is the way she has theoretically coupled journalism with the constructs of risk and trust – not viewed from the position of media professionals, but analyzed from the viewpoint of those who use the service of information provided by journalism. Badura sees risks not as phenomena that are perceived, processed, and published by journalism as the result of natural or societal events, but as features »that are inherent to the journalistic content itself and bring with them the possibility that their consumption is detrimental to the objective of enlightened opinion-forming and formation of will« (19).

The author bases her work on a normative understanding of journalism: the idea that the information disseminated by journalism is relevant, credible, and supportive of democracy. Trusting it requires autonomy of action on the part of the recipient, which may be rational or reflexive. This is determined »by a set of individual influencing factors« (21). The relationship between journalism and trust has been described comparatively frequently; where Laura Badura rightly sees a deficit is in the analysis of the relationship between journalism and (intrinsic) risk. She goes on to add a second question to this first open question: »How is the perception of journalistic risk linked to an action of trust or risk?« (23; in more detail 201-202).

Having convincingly presented and critically evaluated the status of research and the context of her research, the author outlines her complex model of risky

reception step-by-step (200). At its heart is the timeline of the use process: Badura examines causes for risky reception in the pre-phase, risks during the reception process, and the consequences of risky reception. The middle phase is the most important – it is here that risks are perceived and assessed, and the question of willingness to take risks controls the risk action. On the other hand, the expectation of trust, the decision to trust, and the act of trusting all play a key role. This is all underlaid by characteristics of journalism, above all quality and reputation, and individual characteristics of the recipient, such as the tendency to trust and take risks; experiences, expectations and needs; media use; and media competence.

How can this complexity be empirically traced and implemented? Laura Badura takes a two-pronged approach. She develops an online questionnaire and distributes it widely. After three months, she has 221 completed questionnaires to analyze. From all those who stated that they were also willing to take part in a qualitative survey, the researcher selected 16 subjects to participate in a qualitative survey conducted by her via Zoom using the think-aloud method.

The results do not lend themselves to brief summary. Let's start with the limitations: Although links to questionnaires are very easy to send via the digital channels with their many branches and extensive reach, such questionnaires do not generate an ideal sample in either qualitative or quantitative terms. The 221 questionnaires unquestionably provide information in some aspects, in the sense that the results corroborate connections that have also been found in other studies. In this example, there is positive correlation between the need for cognition and the self-assessment of news competence; the lower the motivation for use and the interest in news, the lower the frequency with which information journalism is used. The main purpose of the quantitative survey was to find a suitable group for the qualitative part. This ultimately comprised nine people who tend to trust the media, and seven who are skeptical. The results of this substudy are presented in Chapter 11 (286-336) using many tables and quotes, and reflected upon in the subsequent section (337-357).

Individual aspects can only be picked out here in very, very cursory form. Characteristics of journalism (quality and reputation) and of the recipients (political attitude, trust, involvement) steer the risk perception regarding the reception. During the reception process, the focus is on the risk of distorted information and the perceived partisan nature of reporting. In Laura Badura's view – and that of so many academics before her – media professionals have a duty of transparency, and both educational institutions and media users themselves have a duty to take the process of media use more seriously once again, to reflect upon it, and ultimately to bolster media competence. She is unlikely to be heard – and large-scale measures for providing information and media education are not in sight.

About the reviewer

Dr. Beatrice Dernbach is Professor of Practical Journalism in the program Technical Journalism/Technical PR at TH Nuremberg. Her focus areas include specialized journalism, sustainability, and ecology in journalism, narration and trust in journalism, and science communication.

Translation: Sophie Costella

This review first appeared in rezensionen:kommunikation:medien, 29 November 2024, accessible at: https://www.rkm-journal.de/archives/25220

Anna Sophie Kühne (2023): *Zwischen Anpassung und Selbstbehauptung. Identitäts- und Handlungsmuster ostdeutscher Journalist*innen* [Between adaptation and self-assertation: Patterns of identity and behavior of East German journalists]. Springer VS, 93 pages, EUR 46.99

Reviewed by Stine Eckert

Anna Sophie Kühne's study about the patterns of identity and behavior of East German journalists was published in the »BestMasters« series by Springer VS. The series publishes master's theses which received the highest grade by »renowned universities« in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Hence, the 93-page publication is structured like a master's thesis, providing readers orientation via its many chapters and subchapters. Beginning on page 57, readers find the most interesting part of the book, as the findings chapter gives voice to eleven journalists that Kühne interviewed in two focus groups.

Remarkably, among these journalists, all five men are cited with their real names, while all six women chose a pseudonym (which is not further analyzed). Hence their brief biographies remain vague, but provide an overview over the participants' careers. Kühne was particularly interested in the construction of East German identity by different generations of journalists, socialized before and after the reunification of Germany. The group of those born in 1986 or later included Thomas Vorreyer, who reports for the East German public broadcaster MDR, and Martin Machowecz, the head of the »Streit« [»Argument«] department of the national weekly paper *Die Zeit*, who previously had co-founded the sister paper *Die Zeit im Osten* [Die Zeit in the East], as well as three women journalists. They worked as freelancers or for public broadcasters. The older group, born in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) between 1949 and 1972, was represented by six participants: Jörg Wagner who works for the East German public broadcaster RBB as a media journalist, Christoph Dieckmann who writes for *Die Zeit*, the sports journalist Thomas Skulski for reports for the national public television station ZDF, and the correspondent Henry Bernhard who covers the East German state of Thuringia for the national public radio station Deutschlandfunk as well as two women journalists. One was retired; the other one wrote for the literature department of the national newspaper *Neues Deutschland*.

Kühne's selection of participants considered a variety of media in which East German journalists work and achieved near parity of women and men journalists. Yet, as one participant, and Kühne herself, noted, her sample was limited to successful journalists. Those who were not able to enter or remain in the profession – especially in the older cohort after the reunification – were not part of her data collection.

Kühne summarized her findings along five propositions, which confirm extant scholarship on East German identity, but offer especially interesting insights into the experiences of the younger journalists and their understanding of journalism as a profession. Moreover, she highlights nuances in the experiences of the older cohort and shows commonalities and differences between both groups. Her analysis of the intersection of age/generation with GDR/East German socialization foregrounds the complexity of East German identity. She found that both groups showed »specific East German structures of expectations and interpretations, which influenced the participants in their decision to become journalists« (p. 58). The younger cohort was shaped by growing up in the 1990s and early 2000s, a time immediately following the reunification that saw many difficulties, leading them to develop a fine antenna for inequalities. The older cohort was characterized by a heightened sense to detect political vibes and was impacted by the status of their parents and the education available in the GDR. All participants confirmed that their East German identity first came to the fore when they travelled to the West, and all said they especially appreciated the freedom of the press in Germany. Further, the older journalists emphasized their antenna for ideologies, while the younger cohort, as Kühne puts it, drew parallels between their experiences as East Germans and people who experience racism: while people of color in Germany were often burdened with being the ones who had to explain racism, in a similar vein East Germans had to repeatedly explain East Germany. The younger journalists expressed their solidarity with marginalized groups and empathy for the burdens caused by discrimination. Yet, both cohorts saw themselves as facilitators between East and West Germany.

In her second proposition, Kühne highlights that the older journalists criticized that the oppositional work and tricks that journalists in the GDR used to undermine censorship was not sufficiently recognized right after the reunification and still has not been appreciated enough to this day. In this vein, Jörg Wagner recounts how live broadcasts in the GDR were used to spontaneously air critical voices, along the motto of asking for forgiveness later, rather than permission first. In pre-produced reports such criticisms would have been cut out. The detailed direct quotes from participants give a stage to the journalists and the treasure trove of experiences they can mine. They enliven this academic publication tremendously. They make it at times an exciting page-turner in which contemporary witnesses can offer their views of journalism in the GDR that makes history come alive, albeit framed by Kühne's research context.

Regardless of age, all interviewed journalists saw the current media landscape in Germany critically. Their criticism concerned personnel as well as content about East German topics. Once again, it is confirmed that East German journalists are underrepresented in German newsrooms, especially in positions of leadership. In this regard Christoph Dieckmann speaks about the »devastating

consequences for East Germany society« (p. 67). Kühne quotes his conclusion: »In the fall of 1989 the people [of the GDR] found a public language, but this discovery was lost again as the overall German public sphere turned out to be a public sphere for West Germans only, without the West Germans seeing it that way« (p. 67). Similarly, Jörg Wagner put it succinctly: »The Ossis [East Germans] to this day have little say in the [German] media landscape« (p. 67). Since the reunification journalism as a profession has been opened up to everyone, but participants noted that only well-off East Germans with supportive parents can afford to become journalists. At the same time, a financial gap between East Germans and West Germans continues to loom large, participants said. Moreover, climbing the career ladder in media was impeded by West German elites which would recruit amongst themselves, according to the participants, while apprenticeships and jobs in media were lacking in East Germany. Regarding the representation of East Germans in journalistic content, Kühne stated that coverage of East Germany continues to emulate foreign reporting, perceived by both groups as cliché-ridden. Moreover, a medium that could contribute to identity building among East Germans was missing as well as a news medium headquartered in East Germany with impact across all of Germany. The outlet *Die Zeit im Osten* was mentioned as the only positive example heading in the right direction.

In her fourth proposition, Kühne argues that discrimination of East Germans affects all generations: The younger and older cohorts both had experienced discrimination as journalists by West German colleagues due to their East German origins. Only a few said they did not have such experiences. The participants also noted that during the 1990s West German journalists showed little to no interest to learn about the journalistic realities in East Germany. Kühne summarizes that knowledge about East Germany continues to be lacking in West German newsrooms, linking this circumstance to discriminations. She cites a journalist from the younger group who said that during her work in Cologne she »worked incredibly hard to rid herself« (p. 78) of her Saxonian accent so as not to be teased about it anymore. Kühne concludes that East Germans continue to be judged and condemned by an assumed universal West German standard.

Her fifth, and last, proposition spreads some hope. The younger cohort's self-confidence regarding their East German identity has slowly started to bring change. Here, as in other parts of the book, gender pops up as an important category in society and media. Only given a gendered backdrop, the participant Martin Machowecz, quoted directly by Kühne, can state that being »ostdeutsch« is an »awesome label«: »For me as a white man there is no other unique selling point than being an Ossi [East German]« (p. 79). Another young journalist also speculated that her East German socialization may have been a decisive factor for a successful application. Alas, the author does not, as in other parts that touch on parental leave, birth of children, child care and loss of work, and the

status of working women in German society, drill deeper into the gendered dynamics affecting East German journalists. Although gender was not a focus in the study, salient examples of gendered experiences between women and men journalists are noted throughout the publication. One participant in the older cohort recounts her story. After she went on parental leave from working for the local newspaper *Thüringer Tageblatt* in the late 1980s she was ready to join the newsroom again. But history had played her a trick: The reunification had killed her paper – and job. Her subsequent application to work in PR for a church was without success as she said a man who was a former editor-in-chief already got the position, despite having been involved with the Stasi. Yet, in instances such as these the gender component is not further analyzed.

Following her overall conclusion that East German identity is impacting journalistic work, Kühne offers several recommendations. She argues that while it may not be a stigma anymore for young journalists to be East German, and in some cases may be an advantage for entering journalism, structural and material barriers would continue to block their path into the profession. Kühne recommends scholarships, mentoring, and an increased presence of journalistic role models in schools and educational institutions. She further urges West German media publishers to more systematically recruit and support East German talent. She advocates for influential media located in East Germany to impact societal discourse in a sustainable manner and closes with the plea to talk more with each other, among East German and West German journalists, but also among different generations of East German media workers, to fill in gaps in understanding each other's experiences.

Kühne provides an important study as it contributes to keeping the focus on the asymmetrical German media system and the sustained impact of the German reunification and the immediate time after the Fall of the Berlin Wall on journalism. While her recommendations are in line with extant scholarship, her plea comes across as strong as it addresses a younger generation and shows that their East German identity continues to play a significant role in journalism as a profession. This identity needs to be intersected with other dimensions, such as age, as she does. In order to push back against an »ossification« of differences in an »unequally united« Germany (MAU 2024), or to at least better understand them, continued research into the intersections of East/West German identities is needed for all kinds of areas. Applied to journalism studies in the context of Germany this means that research endeavors should always consider this historic intra-German dimension of identity as a factor. Younger East German journalists clearly demand a new discourse and new media. Their potential should be harnessed and can only be a boon for democracy.

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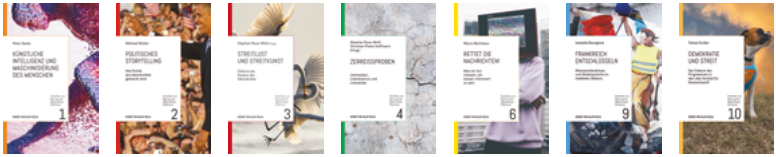
About the reviewer

Stine Eckert, born 1982, is Associate Professor of Journalism in the Department of Communication at Wayne State University in Detroit und co-publisher of *Journalistik/Journalism Research.*

Schriften zur Rettung des öffentlichen Diskurses



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Was läuft da schief im Journalismus? Warum es mit den Medien bergab geht und wie man ihnen aufhelfen kann
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Journalismus

VOLKER LILIENTHAL (Hrsg.)

»Sagen, was ist«.
Journalismus für eine offene Gesellschaft – Rudolf Augstein zum 100. Geburtstag

2024, 264 S., Broschur m. Klappe, 213 x 142 mm, dt.

ISBN (Print) 978-3-86962-698-7 | 28,00 EUR
ISBN (PDF) 978-3-86962-699-4 | 23,99 EUR
ISBN (ePub) 978-3-86962-700-7 | 23,99 EUR

Rudolf Augstein (1923–2002) war ein brillanter Journalist und auch als Verleger des Spiegel höchst erfolgreich. Das Leitmotiv seiner publizistischen Arbeit »Sagen, was ist« liest sich heute wie ein Aufruf zu konsequenter Sachlichkeit. Dabei war Augstein stets auch ein meinungsstarker Kommentator.

Wie kann diese Sentenz heute und in Zukunft verstanden werden? Wie sollten Medien und Berichterstattung beschaffen sein, damit sie die freiheitliche Gesellschaft bewahren helfen? Darf sich Journalismus gegen Krieg und Klimawandel engagieren? Falls ja, wie?

In diesem Sammelband äußern sich prominente Journalist:innen und Wissenschaftler:innen. Mit dabei sind Sonia Mikich, Nicole Diekmann, Melanie Amann, Armin Wolf, Christian Stöcker, Albrecht von Lucke und viele andere.

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Kommunikationswissenschaft

HANS POERSCHKE

Das Prinzip der Parteiliteratur.
Partei und Presse bei und unter Lenin 1899 - 1924

2020, 240 S., Broschur, 213 x 142 mm, dt.

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Es ist eine Tatsache, dass die Presse im Staatssozialismus von der jeweils herrschenden Partei kontrolliert wird. Oft wird behauptet, diese Einschränkungen der Pressefreiheit seien darauf zurückzuführen, dass Lenins Ideen von den sozialistischen Führern fehlinterpretiert worden seien. Der vorliegende Band widerlegt dies. Eine genaue Betrachtung von Lenins Schriften zeigt, dass die strikte Kontrolle der Presse bereits im 1905 ausformulierten Prinzip der ›Parteiliteratur‹ angelegt ist.

Davon zeugen die unter Lenin geschaffenen Tatsachen – von der Zerstörung demokratischer Öffentlichkeit in Russland durch rigorose Unterdrückung Andersdenkender bis zum Verbot der gesamten Presse. Aus dem so geschaffenen System konnte wenige Jahre später der Stalinismus erwachsen.

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