

Journalism Research

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Editorial

The categories in our journal

Dear Readers,

This year's first issue of *Journalism Research*, now in its ninth year, features a series of articles that all deal, to varying degrees, with developments and challenges facing the journalism profession in the age of digitalization and artificial intelligence (AI). In the article by Inken Thiel and Uwe Krüger, digitalization plays only a minor role in the background – as so far – online media apparently have had little significance in the dissemination of innovations such as community-supported agriculture through constructive journalism. However, Marcus Bölz observes changes in Finnish journalism resulting from Russia's digital disinformation campaigns since Finland's accession to NATO, and Lea Möller examines digitally mediated communication between women radio hosts and their audiences, as well as the positive and negative influences on the listeners' emotional experience.

These articles are categorized under the heading *Research Paper*, the standard format in an academic journal. Additionally, this issue features the new section *Research in Brief*, where we highlight particularly insightful studies in a concise format. We frequently receive submissions that rather resemble excerpts from academic theses than journal articles, which is why we're introducing this section. Nevertheless, there are worthwhile works among them that should not be left gathering dust in a drawer. This issue features Matteo Emmanuello's work on the influence of »think tanks« on war reporting and Kaylin Lane and Jennifer Proffitt's study of the profitable »Florida Man« and »Florida Woman« phenomena in U.S. news media.

Reviews also belong to the standard content of academic journals. Less expected, however, are some of our sections, which are based primarily on the fact that we are an academic journal for the journalism profession and therefore should not entirely neglect its characteristic qualities. This includes *book journalism*, which differs from traditional reviews as it provides concise information about books by journalists worth reading and invites readers to explore them. The

selection made for this purpose reflects the journalistic quality criterion of importance. Martina Thiele and Boris Rohmahn selected the ten books recommended in this issue not only to critique them, but also because they represent a genre that is easily overlooked in day-to-day journalism they represent a genre that is easily overlooked in day-to-day journalism – a genre that, given the flood of free and therefore unprofitable news, may even hold an economic opportunity for the future of the journalism profession.

The new section *Projects* also reflects our magazine's connection to journalism, as it showcases practical projects that address challenges and opportunities, so that journalists – as well as media executives – can take note of them and incorporate them into their work. In this issue, that is the »Initiative Nachrichtenaufklärung« (INA) [Initiative News Enlightenment], which, with its annual »Top Ten« list, draws attention to neglected and therefore exclusive topics so that they can be taken up by the media.

The *Essay* and *Debate* sections, which we have maintained to date and intend to continue in the future, also have a journalistic character. The *essay* is a relaxed journalistic form of presentation that traces its roots back to Montaigne and thrives on ingenuity. Anyone writing an essay on a question they consider relevant does not need to know at the outset whether they will arrive at an answer by the end – or what that answer might be. This is what makes the genre both spontaneously accessible and, at the same time, challenging. For despite its lightness and the resulting clarity, the journalistic standards of accuracy, consistency with observable reality, and rigor of the line of reasoning must still be upheld.

Debates are so important in journalism because they are not only about the accurate reporting of important events and facts, but also about the accessibility of possible opinions on facts and conceivable assessments of events. Since opinions and assessments differ and may even contradict one another, divergence and controversy must be able to be openly addressed – not only to reach possible agreements or at least compromises, but also to foster understanding and respect for the other side, even if one does not personally agree with it. In previous issues, we have presented debate contributions in various forms: sometimes controversial positions within a single article written by multiple authors, sometimes opposing positions juxtaposed across several articles, and sometimes just a pronounced position in a single article to provoke contradictions.

Highlighting the *essay* and *debate* sections in this issue may seem strange, as both are left void due to a lack of suitable and available texts. But that was precisely the reason to do so: We extend a warm invitation to potential authors among our readers to submit suitable manuscripts for essays or contributions to debates.

The same applies to manuscripts on historical topics, which are also missing from this issue. Human-made phenomena – including the profession of

journalism – can only be explained and understood if one knows something about their origins, their development, and their history.

Despite some gaps, we hope our readers will gain new insights and also enjoy reading this issue.

Horst Pöttker

PS: Please also note our Call for Papers on the upcoming special issue topic “Journalism, Media, Generations, and Aging”.

Call for Papers (CfP)

Journalism, Media, Generations, and Aging

Journalistic portrayals of generations, age, and aging are often shaped by stereotypes. This applies to both older and younger generations. As early as 1969, sociologist Robert Butler coined the term ageism to describe forms of discrimination analogous to sexism and racism, referring to exclusion and disadvantage based on age. At the same time, age was already being discussed in connection with other social categories – that is, an intersectional perspective was being pursued. For example, in 1972, Susan Sontag pointed out the »double standard of aging« and criticized the fact that women are more severely affected by age discrimination.

These concepts remain relevant today, as does the issue of demographic change, which challenges societies worldwide while simultaneously opening up new perspectives on aging. While old age was long associated with deficiency and decline, views on older age have shifted since the 1980s. In tandem with developments in the advertising industry, more positive portrayals of aging have also emerged in journalistic media. New target groups were identified, and marketing terms such as »silver generation« or »best agers« were coined. At the same time, »youth« remains a relevant target group and a recurring topic in journalism.

What is striking is a structural imbalance in perspective: the middle generation often writes about »the elderly« or »the young.« This dynamic raises questions of interpretive authority, representation, and responsibility. Journalists shape perceptions of age and generations and, thereby, society's understanding of aging as well as the more or less conflict-ridden coexistence or competition between generations.

At the same time, journalistic media are under growing economic pressure and face competition from social media platforms and influencer-driven communication. Service-oriented topics – such as health, prevention, and lifestyle – are gaining importance. Terms such as »longevity« suggest that aging is primarily a matter of individual self-improvement. Such media narratives give rise to societal models of »successful« aging that promise empowerment but may also entail new forms of standardization and exclusion.

For our double issue 3-4/2026, we welcome scholarly articles, essays, and debate contributions that, from the perspective of journalism and journalism studies, and in engagement with fundamental concepts such as age, aging, youth, generation, cohort, and life stage, critically address topics including, but not limited to, the following:

- Media constructions of age, aging, and generations in the context of demographic change
- Ageism and the avoidance of discriminatory age and generational stereotypes
- Prevention and preventive healthcare as journalistic topics; longevity as a societal ideal: between the imperative of performance and a focus on health
- The »double standard of aging« and gender-specific images of aging
- Inclusion/exclusion and intersectional perspectives on age and generations
- Age, generations, and protest movements nationally and internationally: from *Fridays for Future* and *Last Generation* to *Grannies Against the Right* [Omas gegen Rechts]
- Generational perspectives in journalism: Who writes and speaks about whom, and with what consequences?
- Journalists' responsibility in dealing with images of age and generations
- Economic pressure and its impact on reporting on age and generations

Please submit your contributions by **September 1, 2026**, to redaktion@journalistik.online

Research Paper

Inken Thiel and Uwe Krüger

The role of constructive journalism in the diffusion of social innovations

The example of community-supported agriculture

Abstract: The alternative reporting approach of constructive journalism has been extensively researched in recent years in terms of its effects, albeit primarily in the form of individual psychological experimental research. Its effects on the emotional state and behavioural intentions of recipients are well documented. But to what extent can constructive journalism promote social progress, for example by contributing to the spread of ecological or social innovations? In this study, we expand the impact research on constructive journalism by applying the theoretical approach of ›diffusion of social innovations‹ to the question and retrospectively asking the adopters of a specific social innovation, namely community-supported agriculture (CSA), about the influences on their decision. The quantitative online survey of 431 members and operators of CSA farms in Germany shows that constructive media or media formats did not play a role in the diffusion. Instead, interpersonal communication with CSA farm members was decisive for the initial contact, followed by local print and TV journalism, as well as advertising materials and events organized by CSA farms. This is also in line with diffusion theory for later stages of innovation diffusion. It cannot be ruled out that constructive media coverage of other social innovations (especially those more recent than CSA) plays a greater role in the respective early stages of the diffusion process.

Keywords: Constructive journalism, media effects, community-supported agriculture, social innovation, innovation diffusion, socio-ecological transformation, decommodification

1. Introduction: Hopes for the effects of constructive journalism

Since constructive journalism emerged in the media industry in the early 2010s, a great deal of hope has been placed in it: it is expected to counteract widespread news fatigue and avoidance (cf. Behre et al., 2023, p. 17) as well as polarization and factionalism in society (cf. McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2018, pp. 668-669; Constructive Institute 2022; Alpuim & Ehrenberg, 2024). It is intended to be a tool for media companies to tap into new target groups and strengthen audience loyalty, as well as a way to increase trust in the media (Kretzschmar et al. 2025, pp. 281-282). It shall strengthen »prosocial behavioural intentions« (cf. Steinigeweg, 2021) and prevent recipients from becoming apathetic, cynical and depressed in view of the state of the world. After all, it is empirically well established that constructive journalism brightens the mood: According to a meta-study of 22 relevant experiments, it triggers positive emotions or weakens negative ones (cf. McIntyre & Lough, 2023).

As if these hopes were not already enough of a burden on the narrow shoulders of constructive journalism (after all, the media specializing in it are often small and precariously financed), it is also expected to promote social progress in general and show the way to a better future. Its initiators and pioneers already hoped for this: The futurologist and journalist Robert Jungk, who published what was probably the first constructive medium, the *Good News Bulletin*, in New York in 1948 (cf. Krüger, 2016, pp. 101-102), not only wanted to criticize the threatening and bad things in the world, but also to focus on »social inventions and experiments that attempt to educate differently, work differently, live differently, build differently, generate energy differently, inform differently« (Jungk, 1990, p. 204). Journalist and German newspaper *taz* co-founder Ute Scheub, who (inspired by Robert Jungk) was already practising »encouraging journalism« before the idea broke through, calls herself a »midwife of eco-social innovations« (Krüger & Gassner, 2014, p. 25). And Ulrik Haagerup, founder of the Constructive Institute at Aarhus University and the most influential multiplier of the approach in Germany (cf. Krüger et al., 2022, p. 68), says that innovations do indeed spread through appropriate reporting: A Danish television report produced under his aegis on the subject of antibiotic resistance in humans due to the consumption of pork containing antibiotics presented a Dutch farmer who sprayed probiotics instead of antibiotics in his pigsty as a solution – and this led many pig farmers in Denmark to adopt this innovation (Haagerup, 2017, pp. 91-93).

This study attempts to empirically investigate the effects of constructive journalism on a »higher« than the individual micro level, beyond the already well-researched psychological and short-term effects on the emotions, mood, sentiment and intentions of recipients. If constructive journalism is conceived as a »midwife for eco-social innovations« and as »development communication

for Western capitalist societies in crisis« (Krüger, 2021), does it actually succeed in changing social practices or entire socio-technical regimes (in the terminology of Science and Technology Studies, cf. Krüger 2022, pp. 165-167) in the sense of a socio-ecological transformation towards sustainability? In order to make this question tangible and operationalizable using an example, this article examines the role of media or formats of constructive journalism¹ in the dissemination (diffusion) of a specific social innovation: namely, community-supported agriculture (CSA), which is seen as a socio-ecological alternative to market-based and capital-driven industrial food production.

2. Definitions

2.1 Constructive journalism

Constructive journalism is an »alternative reporting approach« (Meier, 2018, p. 7) that aims to complement traditional news journalism and counterbalance its tendency towards negative bias – which arises from a focus on conflicts, damage and problems – with a focus on »options for action and solutions« (Hooffacker, 2021, p. 4). It adds »What now?« to the classic W questions of who, what, when, where, how and why (Constructive Institute, n.d.). The aim is to highlight perspectives for the future, not through opinion pieces, but through research into possible solutions (Hooffacker, 2021, p. 2) that have been devised and tested by specific actors in specific places and could be replicated and scaled up elsewhere. It is therefore not a question of journalism becoming the inventor of solutions or the advocate or even propagandist of certain approaches, but rather the »observer of attempts to solve problems« (Beiler & Krüger, 2018, p. 181) and thus the illuminator of additional aspects of reality.

Organizations promoting constructive journalism, such as the Solutions Journalism Network in the USA or the Bonn Institute in Germany, emphasize that constructive journalism must adhere to rules and meet quality criteria: Details of the implementation or effectiveness of a solution must be described, evidence of its effectiveness must be provided, the transferability of the approach to other contexts must be discussed and the limitations or boundaries of the solution must be pointed out (Bonn Institute, n.d.; Solutions Journalism Network, n.d.). These rules are intended to ensure that this reporting pattern does not drift

1 In Germany, constructive journalism can currently be found in magazines founded specifically for this purpose (*Good Impact*, *taz.FUTURZWEI*, *Atmo*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Quarterly*, etc.) and online portals (*Perspective Daily*, *Klimareporter*, etc.), in sections and columns of general interest media (the »Future« section of *wochentaz*, the »Green« section and the »Plan D« series of *Zeit*, the *Plan B* series on ZDF, NDR Info *Perspektiven*, etc.) and news services or aggregators such as *Squirrel News*, *Good News* and *bachrauf.org*. Unfortunately, there is no scientific monitoring of the constructive media landscape.

into PR or advertising when presenting solutions, which is a frequently raised criticism.

Krüger (2022, pp. 165–167) sees a great potential in the function of constructive journalism as a benevolent but critical companion to innovations that arise or are developed in social niches and gain in popularity and quality through publicity, so that these innovations can make their breakthrough in times of crisis, rise to the social mainstream and transform established socio-technical regimes. The focus here is not on new technologies and technical innovations (that is the domain of technology journalism), but on social practices – hence the following section takes a look at the concept of »social innovations« and their diffusion.

2.2 Social innovations and their diffusion

We understand social innovation to mean »an intentional, targeted reconfiguration of social practices in specific fields of action or social contexts, initiated by certain actors [...] with the aim of solving problems or satisfying needs more effectively than is possible on the basis of established practices« (Howaldt & Schwarz, 2010, p. 54). The new – the Latin word *innovatio* refers to the new, renewal or novelty – »manifests itself here not in the medium of technical artefacts, but at the level of social practices« (Howaldt & Schwarz, 2021, p. 257). »Social« in this definition is explicitly meant in a non-normative sense and, unlike in activist and political discourses, not in the sense of socially desirable, oriented towards the common good or good, but rather in a descriptive, practice-theoretical sense (Howaldt & Schwarz, 2021, p. 257). Previously, sociologist Wolfgang Zapf had defined it similarly, but in some places more concretely in the context of modernization theory: »Social innovations are *new ways of achieving goals*, in particular new forms of organization, new regulations, new lifestyles, *which change the direction of social change*, solve problems better than previous practices, and are therefore worth imitating and institutionalizing« (Zapf 1994, p. 33; emphasis in the original). Referring to Zapf, Gillwald (2000) places social innovations in the context of social change and discusses relevant examples – also in contrast to technical innovations – such as the development and introduction of assembly line work, fast food chains, social insurance and non-marital cohabitation.

Anthropology and sociology have been investigating how innovations spread in society for over a hundred years; important impetus for research came from agricultural sociological studies in the 1940s and 1950s on the diffusion of hybrid corn (Karnowski, 2023, pp. 35-40). Agricultural sociologist and communication scholar Everett M. Rogers systematized all research on the diffusion process from various disciplines and combined it into an independent field of research and a »diffusion theory«. According to this theory, the diffusion process is significantly influenced

by characteristics that are inherent in or attributed to the innovation: 1.) the relative advantage that an individual expects from an innovation, 2.) the compatibility of the innovation with existing values and practices, 3.) the opportunity to try out the innovation, and 4.) the opportunity to observe other adopters of the innovation (Rogers, 2003, cited in Karnowski, 2023, p. 24).

Rogers described the process of an individual adopting an innovation – the »innovation-decision process« (Karnowski, 2023, p. 14) – in five phases: 1.) Knowledge: The individual learns about the innovation and how it works – mass media communication, especially advertising, plays a major role here; 2.) Persuasion: The individual considers the advantages and disadvantages of the innovation and thinks through the consequences; 3.) Decision: The opinion formed is translated into concrete behaviour, i.e. the innovation is adopted or rejected; 4.) Implementation: The individual uses the innovation, changes their behaviour and often actively seeks information about opportunities and problems. This can lead to reinvention, i.e. the innovation is changed in the course of its use; 5.) Confirmation: The individual primarily seeks information that supports their decision to adopt the innovation in order to avoid cognitive dissonance.

In addition to this process at the micro level of individuals, Rogers also conceptualized the diffusion process at the macro level of the social system or population: If the number of adopters per unit of time is considered, successful innovations result in a bell-shaped normal distribution curve in which five types of adopters become visible. The first adopters are the risk-taking »innovators,« who ideally make up 2.5 percent of all adopters and have many social contacts through whom they spread the innovation. Next, the innovation spreads among the »early adopters« (13.5 percent), who are usually well connected locally and act as opinion leaders in their social groups. Once the »critical mass« has been exceeded, the innovation is adopted by the »early majority« (34 percent), who are no opinion leaders, and then by the »late majority« (34 percent), who tend to act out of economic necessity or social pressure. The last group are the »laggards« (16 percent), who are strongly oriented towards the past and sceptical of innovation (Rogers, 2003, in Karnowski, 2023, pp. 21-23).

Another core element of Rogers' diffusion theory is the communication channels through which information flows. Different channels have different levels of importance in the respective phases: As a rule, at the beginning of the diffusion process, (primarily national) mass media play a major role, effectively reaching many people and bringing information to »innovators« and »early adopters.« As the process progresses, regional media and, above all, interpersonal communication channels become more important when it comes to convincing a large number of potential new users (Karnowski, 2023, pp. 30-31). In the age of digitalization and platformization, the boundaries between mass media and

interpersonal communication are blurring, and recent research has shown that social media – probably due to its similarity to interpersonal communication – has »a significant influence [...] on the persuasion phase of the innovation decision-making process« (ibid., pp. 32-33).

2.3 Community-supported agriculture as social innovation

Community-supported agriculture (CSA) is a concept for food production that views itself as an alternative to conventional market-based agriculture. There is a self-sufficient economic community between producers and consumers in which costs, risks and harvests are shared among members (Falk & Madsen, 2015). Specifically, the community of participating consumers bears the costs of the entire agricultural operation for the coming year; in return, all members receive a certain share of the harvest. This practice removes the link between price and product, as consumers finance the entire agricultural operation, including risks such as crop failures due to extreme weather events and the purchase of new technical equipment (Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft, n.d.). This decoupling of product and price is also referred to as decommodification (Boddenberg et al., 2017a). This form of agriculture is not only based on solidarity with farmers, but also among members themselves, as CSA farm members can choose the amount of their financial contribution within certain limits according to their resources, so that, ideally, members with higher incomes support those with lower incomes. Another innovative component is participation or *prosuming*: members can usually have a say in the course of their CSA farm, but are also called upon to help out or work on the farm. All these factors make CSA a social innovation that differs significantly in its functioning from established agricultural practice with its capitalist marketing structure.

In Germany, CSA began in 1988 at the Buschberghof farm in the Northern state of Schleswig-Holstein, and is in German labelled as »Solidarische Landwirtschaft« (solidarity-based agriculture). It experienced an upswing in Germany comparable to other countries like the USA or Japan (where the concept is named »Teikei«). Previously, the concept of community-supported food production had largely disappeared with the onset of industrialisation (Boddenberg et al., 2017a). The German Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft (2023, p. 12) shows an almost exponential increase in the number of such farms in Germany from 19 in 2010 to 467 in 2023.

Sociological research has identified three different types of CSA farms (Boddenberg et al., 2017a, pp. 134-138): 1.) *CSA as a pragmatic strategy*: Here, the members merely play the role of financiers and consumers. The decision-making authority over cultivation or pricing remains with the operators, and the members' involvement or participation in production is limited to a minimum. 2.) *CSA as*

a spiritual community practice: Here, the aim is to resolve the alienation between people and the soil or nature or food, with the focus on a sense of togetherness, for example by sharing the experience of working together in nature. 3.) *CSA as part of a socio-political change*: Here, the alternative practice is understood as »a step towards [...] emancipation from a neoliberal capitalist economic and social system« (Boddenberg et al., 2017a, p. 135); food production without global exploitation and with high ecological standards is seen as part of a socio-ecological transformation.

Finally, there is also interesting survey data on the socio-demographic characteristics and motives of members and farmers in CSA farms: Members are predominantly academically educated, usually have children, a decent income from stable employment and live in or near the city. Over 50 percent of respondents were aged 30 to 49 years, and around 20 percent were aged 20 to 29. The farmers are similar to the members in this respect, but have a lower income (Boddenberg et al., 2017b, p. 257-258). The motives of those involved in CSA farms are dominated by the desire for regional food (91 percent), good working conditions in agriculture (84 percent), fair prices for farmers (78 percent) and organic food production (75 percent) (Boddenberg et al., 2017b, p. 256). The researchers note a »pronounced awareness of the problems associated with conventional agriculture and, in some cases, with large-scale, market-oriented organic farming« (Boddenberg et al., 2017b, p. 256).

3. Method and limitations

We are interested in the role that constructive journalism has played to date in the dissemination of the social innovation CSA. Against the backdrop of the preceding theoretical explanations, we ask two research questions which target different phases of the innovation-decision process:

RQ1: What proportion of CSA participants first learned about the innovation through media outlets or formats of constructive journalism?

RQ2: What proportion of CSA participants had their decision to adopt the innovation influenced by media outlets or formats of constructive journalism?

To answer these questions, a quantitative, standardised online survey was conducted among farmers and members of CSA farms throughout Germany. This took place between 15 September and 15 October 2023 using the SoSci Survey tool. The Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft, which connects a large proportion of existing farms, served as a multiplier. The call for participation in the survey was sent out via the network's mailing lists (one nationwide and 13 regional), asking farmers to fill out the questionnaire themselves and forward it to their members.

At the time of the survey, 280 SoLawi farms were organized in the network (Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft, 2023, p. 13). With a total of 467 farms at that time (Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft, 2023, p. 12), this means that 60 percent of all farms were potentially reached by our questionnaire.

A total of 454 people took part in our survey, 23 of whom abandoned the questionnaire early on and were filtered out. This means that 431 questionnaires were included in the analysis. The survey cannot claim to be representative: the number of respondents probably did not even account for one percent of all member households in Germany², and three of 16 federal German states are not represented in the sample (as the Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft does not maintain any structures there). What the survey can do, however, is provide an impression of the trends in the dominant channels of dissemination of this alternative social practice. There is no reason to suspect systematic distortions in the recruitment process resulting from the research questions.

The survey focused on the initial contact with the CSA concept, general media use and sociodemographics. When designing the questionnaire, care was taken to ensure that participants were not pushed in a particular direction: for example, when asking about media use or the channel of dissemination, no reference was made to constructive journalism or corresponding media and formats. The aim was for respondents themselves to name a constructive medium if it had played a role in their decision to become part of a CSA farm. When interpreting the data, it must be borne in mind that people may have forgotten (or misremembered) how they learned about the CSA concept over time – unless it was a »formative media experience« according to Leonhard (2025, p. 83), which is subjectively perceived as particularly intense or consequential and is remembered for a long time.

Before the field phase, a pre-test was carried out with five people from different CSA farms. After completing the questionnaire, they made suggestions for improvement, so that some of the wording and possible answers were adjusted.

4. Results

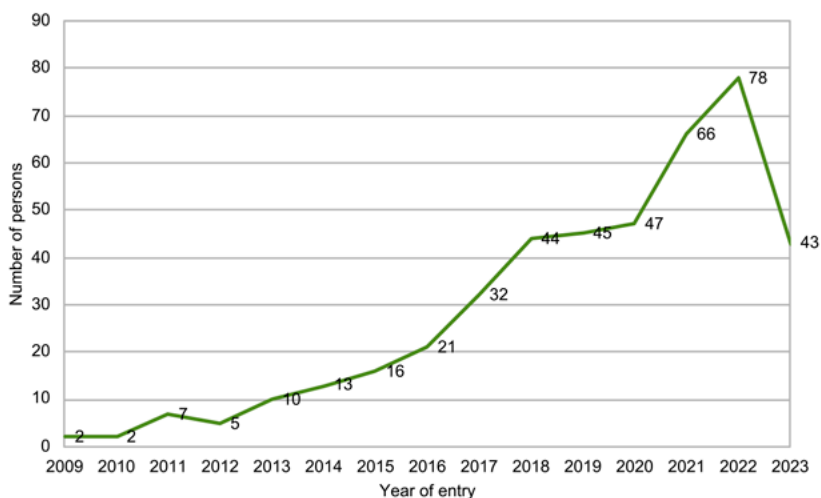
4.1 Sociodemographic data of the sample

Of the 431 respondents, 349 were members of a CSA farm, 26 were owners of a CSA farm, 15 were on the board of a CSA cooperative, and 11 were employees or staff members. Four people described themselves as interested parties, founders or

2 According to a survey, each SoLawi farm supplied an average of 112 members or households in 2013 (Boddenberg et al., 2017, p. 127). If this ratio had been similar in 2023, 467 farms would have supplied over 52,000 member households.

former members. The federal states are unevenly represented in the sample: Hesse (25 percent), Lower Saxony (22 percent) and North Rhine-Westphalia (13 percent) are the most strongly represented, followed by Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg with 7 percent each. Thuringia, Bremen and Saarland are not represented at all, as Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft does not have any regional structures there and was therefore unable to distribute the questionnaire. As Figure 1 shows, most have been active in a CSA since 2022, followed by 2021. A total of 74.9 percent of all participants joined a CSA since 2018. The steady increase until 2022 reflects the overall growth in German CSA farms and thus the increasing spread of this social innovation during the same period (see section 2.3). The ›slump‹ in 2023 can be explained by the fact that the survey started in mid-September 2023 and most participants completed the questionnaire at the beginning of the field phase.

Figure 1
Year of joining a community-supported agriculture scheme



n=431, own representation

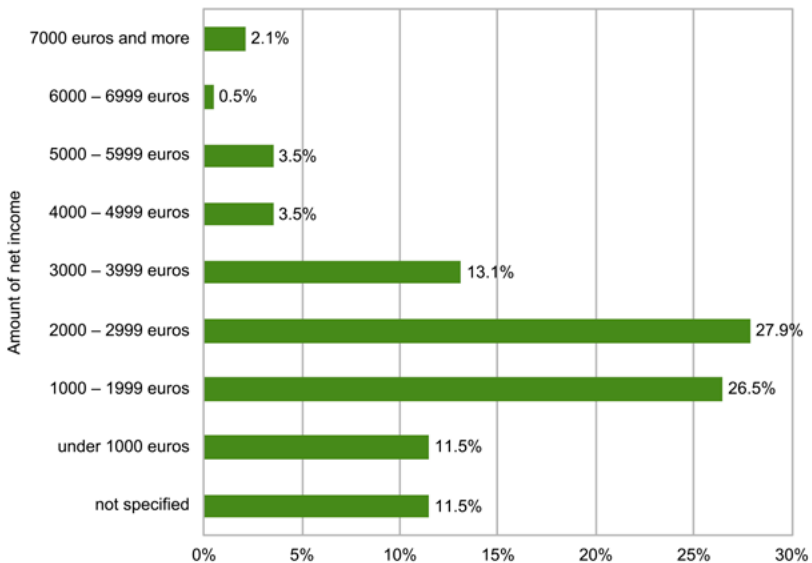
Of those surveyed, 70.4 percent identified as female and 26.8 percent as male (0.5 percent: diverse; 2.3 percent: no response). The age range of respondents was 18 to 76 years, with an average age of 47 and a median age of 45.

The sample is above average (when compared to the general population) in terms of urbanization and academic education: 25.3 percent lived in a larger city (more than 500,000 inhabitants), 18.7 percent in a smaller city (100,000 to 500,000) and a further 24.8 percent in a medium-sized town (20,000 to 100,000).

Small towns (5,000 to 20,000) and rural communities (up to 5,000) were less well represented, at 13.1 and 16.4 percent respectively. When asked about their highest level of education, 62.9 percent stated that they had a university or technical college degree, 7 percent had a doctorate and 10 percent had a high school diploma or equivalent university entrance qualification.

In terms of employment, 54.8 percent stated that they were permanent employees, while a further 15.6 percent were self-employed or freelancers. Ranked third to fifth were pensioners (10 percent), civil servants (4.2 percent) and students (3.5 percent). The personal monthly net income of the respondents (see Figure 2) is probably close to the average monthly net salary for full-time employees in Germany of 2,549 Euro in 2023 (Statista, 2025), although this cannot be calculated precisely because the questionnaire provided the ranges shown in the figure as possible answers.

Figure 2
Respondents' personal monthly net income



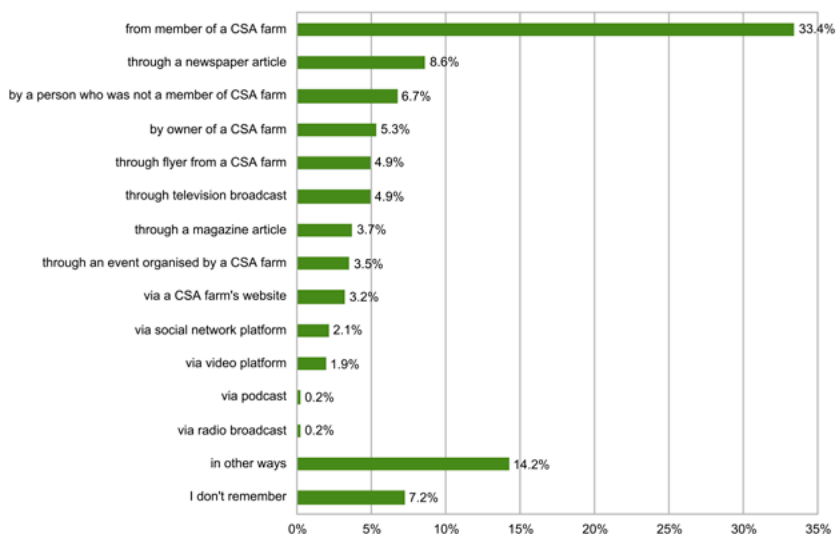
n=427, own representation

4.2 Initial contact with the CSA concept

When asked how they first learned about the CSA concept, a total of 45.4 percent of all respondents cited interpersonal communication channels – primarily people who were already members of a CSA farm, and to a lesser extent non-CSA members and owners of a CSA farm. A total of 17.4 percent cited traditional journalistic products such as newspapers, magazines, television or radio. Advertising materials and activities by CSA farms were also relevant: 11.6 percent said they had learned about the concept through a CSA farm’s flyer, website or event (see Figure 3).

Of the 14.2 percent who had learned about the CSA concept in ways other than those specified, the following channels were mentioned most frequently: through university (8 mentions), at a market stall of a CSA farm (4 mentions) and by friends or acquaintances asking whether the respondent could help set up a CSA farm (4 mentions).

Figure 3
Initial contact with the CSA concept



n=431, own representation

Of the 37 respondents who stated that they had first learned about the CSA concept through a newspaper report, 29 could remember the newspaper. The most frequently mentioned were the regional newspapers *Waldeckische Landeszeitung* in Hesse (4 times) and *Nordwest-Zeitung* in Lower Saxony (3 times). National

newspapers that were each mentioned once were *taz*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Die Zeit*. Of the 16 people who remembered first coming across the concept in a magazine, six could remember the name of the publication, three of whom mentioned *Bankspiegel*, the customer magazine of GLS Bank (which is committed to social and environmental sustainability). In the sector of radio and podcasts, the public broadcaster SWR's podcast *Das Wissen* was remembered, while in the television sector the public channels WDR, NDR and Arte were mentioned, and two respondents specifically mentioned the WDR programmes *Land & Lecker* and *Lokalzeit*. Of the eight people who first heard about CSA via social media, four mentioned Facebook and two mentioned nebenan.de (»Germany's largest social network for neighbours«). Of the eight respondents who mentioned video platforms, seven specified YouTube.

Research question 1 has therefore been answered: *The proportion of CSA participants who first learned about the innovation through media outlets or formats of constructive journalism is zero percent.* Or, to put it more mildly: No one remembered explicitly constructive media (see footnote 1) as their first contact. It cannot be ruled out that, apart from institutionalized constructive journalism, constructive contributions from local or regional journalism or even in the national papers *taz*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Zeit* were meant, as the reporting style can also occur unmarked in »normal« journalism.

People who did not mention a mass media channel when asked about their first contact were asked later in the survey whether there had been a media report that had additionally supported their decision to become part of a CSA farm. Of the 307 participants who were asked this question, 44 said that there had been such a report. Of these, 13 stated that they had seen a report on television. In the open text box, five of them specified that it was a report of a public broadcaster, with NDR being the most frequently mentioned (two mentions). One person also remembered the NDR programme *Das!*. Only one person stated that they had heard a report on the radio that had influenced their decision, specifically on the public radio Deutschlandfunk. Of the 13 people whose decision was influenced by a newspaper, 10 could still remember its name. Once again, the regional newspaper *Waldeckische Zeitung* was the most frequently mentioned (two times), while other newspaper titles were only mentioned once. Of the seven people who were influenced by a magazine article, one could still remember the outlet, namely *Bioland*. Three respondents' decision to join a CSA farm was influenced by posts on social media, one of them recalled the Facebook account of »Wir haben es satt« [We're fed up] (self-description: »Tackling agricultural reform – good food for everyone!«) and one the Instagram account of Imke Tjaden, a music teacher in Aurich (East Friesland). Ultimately, it can be said that there is no explicitly constructive format among the media brands and programmes mentioned. Instead, interpersonal communication and – at a considerable distance – local

journalism formats in print and tv played important roles in spreading the concept.

This also answers research question 2: *The proportion of CSA participants whose decision to adopt the innovation was cast in part due to media or formats of constructive journalism reporting on it is again zero percent.* The same restriction applies here as in the above answer to research question 1 with regard to marked and unmarked constructive journalism.

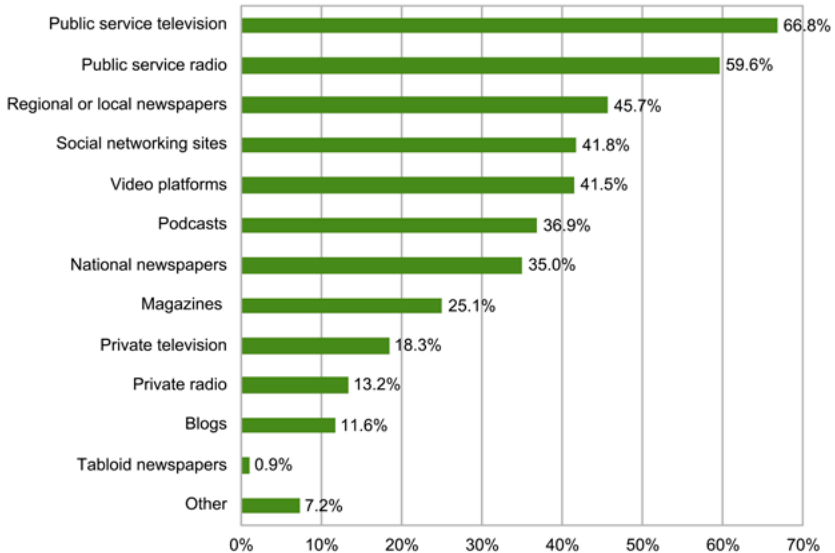
We also tested the hypothesis that »early adopters« of the CSA innovation were disproportionately likely to have first come into contact with it through the mass media – precisely what Rogers’ diffusion theory postulates (see section 2.2). Our data does not confirm this assumption: Of the 55 respondents who joined a CSA farm between 2009 and 2015, only 7 had their first contact through the media, but 27 through interpersonal communication, 17 through »other« ways and 4 could not remember. At first glance, this is a remarkable discrepancy from established diffusion theory. However, it must be kept in mind that the CSA has been on the »marketplace of ideas« in Germany since 1988 and that we do not know when its diffusion will be complete. It is possible that those who joined between 2009 and 2015 are not the »early adopters« at all, but rather the »early majority,« and that the true »early adopters« are not part of our sample.

4.3 General media usage

We also asked which types of media are used frequently or regularly. It became apparent that the majority of respondents regularly consume public service broadcasting, followed by regional and local newspapers and digital platforms (see Figure 4). One participant mentioned national public broadcaster ZDF’s solution-oriented programme *plan b* in the »other« category, the first time a constructive journalism format was mentioned.

In another question, participants were asked to name the three specific media outlets from which they primarily obtain information on political and social issues. Respondents most frequently mentioned newspapers (299 times), with local and regional newspapers being mentioned 74 times, *Die Zeit* 57 times, and *taz* 42 times. This was followed closely by national public broadcasters ARD (290 mentions) and ZDF (76). At this point in the survey, constructive journalism was mentioned for the second time: two respondents stated that *Perspective Daily* and *Good Impact* (until 2022 called *enorm*) were among their main sources of information.

Figure 4

Regularly used media

n=431, own representation

5. Conclusion and outlook

This study expands on previous research into the impact of constructive journalism – which has mainly used experiments to measure short-term effects on emotional well-being – and asked adopters of a social innovation how they found out about the innovation in the first place, enabling us to answer the question what role media outlets or formats of constructive journalism played in the diffusion of this innovation.

The expectation that constructive journalism might have played a decisive role in the relatively rapid rise of community-supported agriculture was thoroughly disappointed by the empirical evidence: Media outlets, formats or programmes that are explicitly dedicated to this reporting style apparently played no role at all in our sample when it came to initial contact with the CSA concept (at least as it is remembered – the limitations of the method were discussed in section 3). Nor is there any evidence of explicitly solution-oriented reporting playing a supportive role in the decision to become a member of a CSA farm. Three respondents did state that constructive media – namely the public broadcaster ZDF's

programme *plan b*, the online magazine *Perspective Daily* and the print magazine *Good Impact* – are generally among their regular sources of information.

However, the dominant channels of diffusion revealed by the survey – interpersonal communication and local print and television journalism – correspond in some ways to Rogers' diffusion theory. While at the very beginning of the diffusion process, national media (and perhaps also national *constructive* media) convey the information to »innovators« and »early adopters«, word of mouth and regional media play the decisive roles on the way to the »early majority«. In this sense, it could perhaps be said that the social innovation CSA has already outgrown its infancy, i.e. it is already so old or established (it is around since the late 1980s) that it no longer has any news value for explicitly solution-oriented media, and when it was new, the reporting style of constructive journalism did not yet exist (it emerged in Germany around 2010). Whether this explanation for our empirical finding is accurate – i.e. that there is no »failure« on the part of the constructive media, but rather a mismatch of historical timelines that did not coincide – could be clarified by a content analysis: Has there been any journalistic content published in explicitly self-described constructive media (formats) on the topic over the last few years and decades that could have had a corresponding impact?

This leads to ideas for further research. On the one hand, it would make sense to reconstruct Rogers' »innovation-decision process« in more detail. It would be useful to conduct qualitative interviews with adopters of an innovation in order to trace the respondents' path from initial contact to adoption (e.g., membership in a CSA farm) as accurately as possible: How exactly did the initial contact take place, at what point in time were which communication channels or media used, and what ultimately convinced them to take the plunge? Here, the concept of »innovation networks« from Science and Technology Studies (STS) could also be useful: STS conceptualize networks as a form of coordination of (technological) innovations and analyses chains of interactions that create or disseminate innovations (Häußling, 2020) – and, in our view, constructive media can be understood as potential nodes in innovation networks, i.e. as actors of knowledge transfer or »brokers« who bridge »structural holes« in these networks (Burt, 1992). It would therefore even be possible to describe the role of constructive journalism in the diffusion of innovation using formal network analyses, calculating and visualising the centrality of its media outlets in innovation networks and the strength of their ties to other actors in the network.

On the other hand, it would be interesting to examine the role of constructive journalism in the dissemination of other social innovations related to the UN's sustainability goals or to a desirable socio-ecological transformation of society. Concepts such as regional currencies, food sharing, car sharing, citizen energy cooperatives, urban gardening, repair cafés, cultural tables and much more

would be suitable. It would make sense to first conduct a content or topic analysis of the most important constructive media in Germany to find out which social innovations have been reported on in recent years, and then to ask the adopters of these innovations about any media influences. We assume that constructive journalism has played a greater role in the diffusion of innovations that are more recent than CSA, especially in the early phases of the respective diffusion processes.

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Research Paper

Marcus Bölz

Journalism in Finland amid changing geopolitical and digital conditions

How humiliating deepfakes are interfering with political communication

Abstract: Since Finland joined NATO in 2023, Finnish journalism has been operating under new geopolitical conditions. The realignment of security policy has not only changed political reporting, but also increased demands on journalistic diligence and source verification. A particular focus is on Russia's disinformation policies, which deliberately attempt to undermine trust in Finnish media and institutions. Digital campaigns, manipulated content, and emotional rhetoric are used to influence public opinion. Finnish editorial offices are responding with increased transparency, more rigorous fact-checking, and international cooperation. This article analyses the quality of journalism in Finland in the context of these developments and the structural challenges Finnish journalists are facing, including media concentration, staff cuts, and the rise of right-wing populist platforms.

Keywords: Finland, media, journalism, disinformation, Sanna Marin

For decades, Finland has been considered one of the countries with the highest journalistic quality worldwide. The country regularly ranks at the top of international press freedom rankings (cf. Reporters Without Borders, 2023). However, geopolitical developments in recent years – in particular NATO membership in 2023 and a rising threat from Russia – have changed the journalistic landscape. At the same time, digitalisation has profoundly transformed everyday editorial work.

Journalism in Finland faces challenges similar to those in other European countries: media concentration, declining circulation, a decline in the number of permanently employed journalists, and growing support for right-wing populist websites. In Finland, too, there are platforms with high user traffic that distinguish themselves from traditional quality media and serve alternative narratives. The Finnish media landscape is under pressure from economic rationalisation and shifting political priorities. Ala-Fossi et al. (2021) show that despite shrinking editorial offices, professional journalistic standards are being maintained – albeit under increasingly precarious conditions. At the same time, Ala-Fossi et al. (2022) document how media policy decisions have prioritised economic competitiveness over democratic media promotion since the turn of the millennium. Amid this tension, the educational function of journalism is gaining importance: Jaakkola (2020) describes journalists as »media educators« who contribute to the communication of democratic values through inclusive boundary work. Finnish media policy thus stands between market logic and democratic responsibility.

Although Finland continues to be considered one of the countries with the highest level of trust in news media in international comparisons (cf. Reunanen, 2023), recent studies show that the first cracks in this relationship of trust are beginning to show here as well. According to the Reuters Institute’s Digital News Report, 69 percent of respondents still trusted the news as a whole in 2023 and 76 percent trusted the sources they themselves used, but this represents a decline of nine percentage points compared to 2015 (cf. Reuters Institute, 2025). Particularly striking is the growing gap between general trust in news and trust in individually consumed content – indicating incipient media fragmentation and polarisation.

This development corresponds with an increasing politicisation of media trust. A study by public broadcaster Yle shows that supporters of the right-wing populist party The Finns (Perussuomalaiset) in particular have significantly less trust in established media brands such as Yle or the national daily newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* (cf. Helenius, 2025).

Linguistic diversity also poses a challenge. Finland is officially bilingual: Finnish and Swedish are considered equally as official languages. While the majority of the total population (around 5.5 million in an area roughly the size of Germany) speaks Finnish, there is a stable infrastructure of Swedish-language media aimed at the approximately 5.2 percent of the population who speak Swedish as their mother tongue (cf. Statistics Finland, 2022). Swedish-language media such as *Hufvudstadsbladet*, *Vasabladet*, and Yle Vega are considered professional, editorially independent, and strongly rooted in the region (cf. Nikula, 2012; Lindgren, 2005).

The Sámi communities also have their own media structures. The founding of Yle Sámi Radio in 1990 was a milestone. It regularly broadcasts news in the

three Sámi languages spoken in Finland – Northern Sámi, Inari Sámi, and Skolt Sámi (cf. Pietikäinen, 2008). According to Statistics Finland, around 10,700 Sámi live in Finland, which corresponds to approximately 0.2 percent of the total population (cf. Statistics Finland, 2025). The language is divided into three main dialects: Northern Sámi (approx. 60%), Inari Sámi (approx. 20%), and Skolt Sámi (approx. 20%) (cf. Lehtola, 2015). Media use among Sámi varies greatly: While public service offerings such as Yle Sápmi are regularly consumed, studies show that younger Sámi increasingly prefer digital platforms; at the same time, this younger group also is also less attached to traditional journalistic formats (cf. Pietikäinen, 2018; Hætta, 2020).

These media not only constitute an expression of linguistic diversity, but also of democratic added value. They promote media pluralism, strengthen diversity of opinion, and offer perspectives that are often underrepresented in the Finnish-speaking majority public (cf. Huss & Lindgren, 2011; Valkonen, 2019).

Sanna Marin and sexism from Russia

The media coverage and political reception of former Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin is paradigmatic of liberal democracies being vulnerable to digital disinformation. The so-called ›party scandal‹ – triggered by leaked videos showing Marin dancing and partying – became the subject of political and media debate not only nationally but also internationally. The focus was less on the content of the videos than on their symbolic significance in the context of geopolitical tensions.

Russia responded to Finland's accession to NATO with a variety of hybrid measures, including targeted disinformation campaigns. Social media in particular were used to sow doubts about NATO membership in advance. Russian troll factories spread false information about alleged troop movements or economic disadvantages. Particularly striking was the discrediting of Marin – young, a woman, Western, free – who was targeted by a digital attack.

Disinformation researcher Christopher Nehring (2022) emphasises that it is »highly likely« that Russian trolls and bots deliberately fuelled the shitstorm against Marin. Although there is no empirical study that explicitly examines this case in Finland, the patterns correspond to known mechanisms of hybrid influence, as described by the NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence (2021) under the term »cognitive warfare«.

The method is old, the goal new: sexualisation as a weapon. Marin was not attacked for her political decisions, but for her femininity, youth, and zest for life. Legal scholar Luana F. Souto describes this strategy as »gender-specific disinformation« that specifically targets women in politics and is based on the

historical assumption that politics is a »man's business« (Souto, 2023, p. 49). Studies from gender media studies confirm that women politicians are more frequently confronted with morally connoted attacks – especially on social media (cf. Springer Reference Gender Media Studies, 2024).

In Marin's case, sexually connoted content was used, along with images taken out of context and rumours of drug use, so effectively that Marin felt compelled to take a drug test, which came back negative (cf. Yle News, 2022).

The media scandalisation of Sanna Marin follows a familiar pattern of public discrediting: first, a private moment – in this case, a dance video – is made public, then sexualised and morally charged. The debate itself becomes a weapon aiming to undermine the person's integrity. Bulkow and Petersen (2012) describe such strategies as »structures for generating public attention« in which performative violations of norms are deliberately staged to provoke outrage. In this context, Christian Schicha (2015) warns against an ethically problematic »scandalisation of the private sphere« that serves not to enlighten but to mobilise emotions. In Marin's case, the criticism was reinforced by gender-specific attributions, as Williams (2022) analyses: the outrage was fuelled less by rational criticism than by an interplay of sexism and moral expectations of women leaders.

The publication of the dance video in 2022 marked not only a turning point in the public debate about the privacy of political actors, but also the beginning of spiralling digital violence, manifesting in the form of sexualised deepfakes. Within days of the leak, the internet was flooded with pornographic material in which Marin's face was superimposed onto the bodies of porn actors using AI technology. This form of image-based violence is not only a violation of personal rights, but also an attack on the sexual self-determination and democratic participation of those affected (cf. Schmidt, 2024, pp. 4f.).

As the Federal Agency for Civic Education notes in a comprehensive analysis, such content constitutes »non-consensual sexualising deepfakes,« which have become a widespread internet phenomenon – primarily to the detriment of prominent women (cf. Schmidt, 2024, p. 9).

The manipulated images appear deceptively real and are often uploaded to pornographic platforms, frequently accompanied by derogatory comments and personal data that enable identification (cf. Schmidt, 2024, p. 10). The perpetrators use publicly available photos, for example from social media profiles, and place them in pornographic contexts with the help of face-swap or DeepNude apps. Those affected experience this form of violence as a »physical sexual assault« that causes considerable psychological distress and often leads to withdrawal from public discourse.

In Marin's case, this technique was used specifically to undermine her political credibility. The sexualised portrayal was not intended for entertainment, but rather for moral discrediting and political delegitimation. The fact that such

content was disseminated on a massive scale demonstrates the structural dimension of this form of violence: it is part of a »continuum of sexualised violence« that systematically reduces women to their sexuality and thereby marginalises them socially (cf. Schmidt, 2024, p. 13).

Particularly insidious about this is the combination of the images' apparent authenticity with the viral dynamics of social media, enabling rapid and widespread dissemination.

The democratic relevance of this development should not be underestimated. When women politicians are forced out of public discourse by sexualised deep-fakes, not only is their individual freedom violated, but the equality of participation in democratic processes is also jeopardised. The targeted production and dissemination of such content is therefore not only an ethical but also a political problem that urgently requires regulatory and social attention.

The Finnish public's reactions were ambivalent. While conservative voices accused Marin of lacking seriousness, she was celebrated as a symbol of a modern, self-confident democracy in the international media. Surveys showed that Marin was able to maintain her popularity among large sections of the public despite – or perhaps because of – the scandal (cf. DW, 2022; ARD Weltspiegel, 2023).

How are Finnish media outlets responding to these developments?

The responses of Finnish editorial offices to the challenges posed by disinformation, digital transformation, and political polarisation are complex and structurally profound. They affect both journalistic work practices and the organisation and ethical integrity of media companies.

A key example is Yle, Finland's public broadcaster, founded in 1926. Yle produces content in Finnish, Swedish, and Sami, fulfilling a comprehensive information, education, and cultural mandate. Since 2022, Yle has been legally obliged to limit its online text reporting in order not to become »unfair competition« for commercial media (cf. Reunanen, 2025, p. 86). At the same time, Yle is publicly criticised by representatives of the right-wing populist party The Finns for pursuing a »green-left agenda« – leading to a politically motivated debate about the role of public service media (cf. Ojala, 2021, p. 2049).

The largest daily newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* (founded in 1889) and the tabloid *Iltalehti* (since 1980) are examples of the tension between quality journalism and populist media criticism. While *Helsingin Sanomat* is expanding its data journalism formats and interactive content, *Iltalehti* uses algorithms to analyse the emotional impact of headlines to better anticipate reader reactions (cf. Reuters Institute, 2025).

Editorial teams are responding to polarisation with constructive journalism that focuses on de-escalation and contextualisation (cf. Schöppl & Schwarzenegger, 2025). At the same time, fact checks and visual analysis formats are gaining in importance. Cooperation with European fact-checking initiatives such as Faktabaari – a member of the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) – strengthens journalistic resilience to disinformation (cf. Nordicom, 2024).

Structurally, there is a shift towards cross-media teams that plan and jointly produce print, online, and social media content (cf. Salovaara et al., 2021). Traditional departmental journalism is increasingly being replaced by topic pools and project-based forms of work (cf. Heinonen & Ahva, 2015). Editorial offices such as *Helsingin Sanomat* and Yle have restructured or merged their departments to be able to respond more flexibly to topics and events (cf. Kuutti & Kangas, 2020).

The »Worlds of Journalism study« by Väliverronen et al. (2023) shows that Finnish journalists are under increasing pressure despite their high level of professional identification: economisation, work intensification, and political polarisation are leading to an erosion of traditional professional standards. Media concentration is particularly problematic: according to MediaDB (2024), a few large corporations such as Sanoma and Alma Media control the majority of the print and online market, limiting the diversity of perspectives and jeopardising editorial independence. The Union of Journalists in Finland (2024) also warns of precarious working conditions, especially for freelance journalists, whose income is often below the subsistence level. At the same time, journalistic work is being fragmented by digitalisation: multitasking, time pressure, and algorithmic reach logic are changing editorial routines and are making investigative research more difficult. Nevertheless, trust in journalism remains comparatively high in Finland – a finding that can be attributed to strong journalistic training and ethical standards. Finnish media policy now faces the task of securing democratic media structures without losing sight of economic competitiveness. The future of Finnish journalism depends on whether it succeeds in reconciling editorial quality, diversity, and social security.

Television journalism is also undergoing its own development. In recent decades, Finnish television entertainment has evolved into an independent cultural field that integrates both national characteristics and transnational influences. While the public broadcaster Yleisradio (Yle) and the commercial broadcaster MTV3 are the key players in the production and distribution of entertainment programmes, audience reception is strongly influenced by a tension between local identity and global formats (cf. Hellman, 2010, p. 112). Studies show that Finnish audiences prefer formats that appear »authentic, calm and respectful« (ibid., p. 112).

The number of permanently employed journalists is declining. According to Nordicom (2022), the number of full-time journalists in Finland fell by around 25 percent between 2008 and 2020. Special beats such as science, culture, and foreign affairs have been particularly affected (cf. Ahva et al., 2017, pp. 825ff). This leads to a weakening of thematic depth and diversity, as Väliverronen & Saikkonen (2020) also emphasise.

Technologically, Finnish editorial offices rely on AI-supported tools such as automatic text generation, semantic search engines, and personalised news feeds (cf. Lehtisaari et al., 2023). While these systems increase efficiency, media ethicists warn of an alienation from the basic skills of journalism (cf. Pöyhtäri, 2023). The challenge is to use AI as a tool without undermining journalistic standards.

Journalistic culture in Finland is strongly influenced by ethical standards. A central pillar of journalistic self-regulation in Finland is the Press Council JSN (*Julkisen Sanan Neuvosto*). Founded in 1968, the JSN acts as an independent body for monitoring journalistic ethics and handling complaints about media content. Institutionally independent, the JSN is supported by the country's major media organisations, including newspapers, broadcasters, and online media (cf. Ahva et al., 2017; Heinonen & Ahva, 2015).

The JSN is based on a voluntary code of conduct that is recognised by almost all relevant media companies. It examines complaints on the basis of journalistic ethics guidelines, which are regularly updated and regulate, and include, among other principles, transparency, source criticism, protection of privacy, and the separation of opinion and news. The JSN's decisions are publicly available and serve as guidance for editorial practice (cf. Salovaara et al., 2021).

The JSN is becoming increasingly important, especially in times of growing polarisation and disinformation. It not only provides a forum for debate on media ethics, but also strengthens public confidence in journalistic integrity. Studies show that the existence and visibility of the JSN contributes significantly to the high credibility of Finnish media (cf. Strömbäck et al., 2021, Ahva, 2024).

In practice, this means that editorial offices such as *Helsingin Sanomat*, *Yle*, *Iltalehti*, and *Hufvudstadsbladet* regularly refer to JSN decisions, for example when correcting errors or justifying editorial decisions. The JSN thus not only functions as a supervisory body, but also as a sounding board for journalistic self-reflection – and as a model for ethical media regulation that has gained international recognition (cf. Hanitzsch et al., 2019).

What can Germany learn from Finland?

An analysis of the Finnish media system thus shows that journalistic resilience does not solely arise from technical innovations or legal frameworks, but from a

deeply rooted culture of self-regulation, media education, and ethical reflection. For Germany, several transferable insights can be drawn from this.

Firstly, the role of the JSN press council as a publicly visible, transparent, and widely accepted supervisory body strengthens trust in the media in the long term. In Germany, there is a comparable body, the German Press Council, but its public visibility and social relevance are significantly lower. The Finnish practice of regularly reflecting on JSN decisions in reporting and using them as an ethical frame of reference could also contribute to strengthening journalistic credibility in Germany (cf. Ahva et al., 2017; Heinonen & Ahva, 2015).

Secondly, systematic media education, which in Finland begins at preschool age and is coordinated by the National Audiovisual Institute (KAVI), is a central component of democratic resilience. Programmes such as Uudet lukutaidot show how media literacy, digital skills, and ethical reflection can be integrated into the educational landscape (cf. KAVI, 2023; Pekkala, 2025). In Germany, there is currently no comparable coherent, nationally coordinated strategy for media education.

Thirdly, journalistic practice in Finland is less characterised by alarmism and scandalisation than in Germany. Studies show that Finnish journalists prefer restrained, factual, and dialogue-oriented reporting focusing on resonance rather than polarisation (cf. Strömbäck et al., 2021; Ahva, 2024). This contrasts with parts of the German media landscape, where tabloid formats and political commentary in particular often rely on exaggeration and emotionalisation (cf. Esser & Brüggemann, 2016).

Fourthly, the integration of AI technologies in Finnish newsrooms is subject to clear ethical guidelines. While tools such as ChatGPT or Yle's own modules contribute to increased efficiency, there is also intense debate about the limits of automated content (cf. Lehtisaari et al., 2023; Pöyhtäri, 2023). The debate on AI and ethics began at around the same time in Germany. In both countries, editorial offices are experimenting and discussing the topic extensively. The question remains for both, Germany and Finland: where is journalism heading against the backdrop of these new possibilities?

Fifthly: Journalistic self-organisation in Finland – for example, through cross-media teams, project-based working methods and data journalism formats – shows how editorial offices can respond flexibly to social challenges without compromising their quality standards (cf. Salovaara et al., 2021; Heinonen & Ahva, 2015).

Overall, it can be said that Finland is meeting the challenges of the (digital) public sphere with structural composure, ethical clarity, and educational foresight. The Finnish model offers valuable inspiration for Germany – not as a blueprint, but as a guide for a journalistic culture that not only expects trust, but actively cultivates it.

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Research Paper

Lea Möller

Between microphone and audience

Experiences of women radio presenters in digitally connected interactions

Abstract: Interaction with the audience is fundamental in journalism, especially in radio, where it contributes significantly to the success of programs. In the age of social media and digital platforms, the interaction between presenters and recipients is crucial for the listening experience and the relevance of the content. Prior research has focused primarily on the audience's perception of interactions, while the perspective of radio presenters has been largely ignored. In light of increasing hate attacks, especially against women journalists, this qualitative study addresses the experiences of women radio presenters in their interaction with their audience in Germany. The results show how structural factors and the use of digital communication tools influence the dynamics of interaction and the emotional experience of presenters. The latter tend to find contact with the audience enriching, both professionally and personally. However, they also mention negative experiences, which vary depending on the type of station and the channels of interaction used.

Keywords: journalism, radio presenting, interaction, social media, gender studies

Despite digital change, radio remains an integral part of the media landscape in Germany: over 40 million people use it every day, a sign of how strongly the medium has established itself in everyday life (cf. Mavrogiannis, 2024). The role of presenters is central to this consistency. They shape content, engage in direct communication with the audience, and therefore create closeness and a sense of community. It is precisely this interaction that is becoming increasingly important in the digital age.

Digital platforms open up new forms of communication between journalists and recipients – and with them, new risks. Studies show that journalists and media professionals, especially women, are increasingly exposed to digital attacks, such as hate comments or targeted intimidation (cf. Papendick et al., 2020; Posetti et al., 2020). Like journalistic practice in general, this cannot be viewed isolated from social power relations. Media content and its production reflect cultural gender orders and contribute to their reproduction or change. The catchphrase »doing gender while doing journalism« (Lünenborg & Maier, 2013, p. 87) underlines how much journalistic activity is also charged with gender politics.

Against this backdrop, the following article focuses on the experiences of *women radio presenters* – in particular, their digital interaction with their audience. Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted to examine the opportunities and challenges they perceive in the digital space. The central question is how parasocial relationships are formed on the radio and how they change when digital violence comes into play.

1. Parasocial interactions on the radio

The increasing intertwining of radio broadcasts with digital formats, especially social media, is fundamentally changing the interaction between presenters and audiences. While previous radio formats were predominantly characterized by one-way communication processes, platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, or X (formerly Twitter) now enable immediate, two-way forms of communication. These real-time interactions create new forms of audience participation and intensify the bond between listeners and presenters (cf. Hillmoth, 2017, p. 595).

Social media not only promote the speed and visibility of responses, but also create greater proximity through targeted communication, interaction, and algorithmically measurable feedback (likes, comments, reach). In the process, the traditional roles of sender and recipient are becoming increasingly blurred. The openness of social media in terms of access and design offers the opportunity to involve listeners in the communication processes – leading to a more active form of participation. Following the dynamics described above, this supports the potential for reciprocal communication and a more responsive orientation of media content – a development that opens up new opportunities for participation, but also harbors risks.

Radio presenters have a special role to play in the context of these media dynamics: as recurring points of reference, they help to shape identity (cf. Lindner-Braun, 1998) and act as key identifying features of a program. This creates a so-called parasocial interaction (cf. Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 215), in which recipients perceive the

presenters as familiar communication partners – even though the communication remains asymmetrical in fact. The illusion of closeness can trigger reactions that resemble real social interactions, but without any social consequences for the recipients (cf. Ayaß, 2005; Godulla, 2022; Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 215f.).

This social absence of consequences becomes a problem, especially in digital spaces. Studies show that journalists and media professionals are increasingly targeted by hate speech and digital attacks – especially women (see Papendick et al., 2020; Duggan, 2017; Dhrodia, 2017). Interaction via social media can therefore lead to emotional stress and professional limitations. In response, those affected develop different coping strategies, ranging from active confrontation to withdrawal and self-censorship (cf. Preuß, 2022, pp. 187-192). In addition to the audience and the presenters themselves, the structural conditions of the broadcasters also influence the forms and types of communication.

Against the backdrop of the increasing digital permeation of radio broadcasts and changing communication relationships, the question arises how women radio presenters experience and evaluate interaction with their audience, especially in the area of tension between closeness, participation, and potential hostility. This question forms the starting point for the following study.

2. »It's like a friend calling«

For the study, a total of nine qualitative online interviews with women radio presenters were conducted between May and June 2021. The interviewees were selected using the snowball principle and combined targeted recruitment calls. Four of the interviewees work in private broadcasting and for various stations with national coverage in the Schleswig-Holstein and Hamburg area. In addition, five presenters from public radio stations were recruited, whose broadcasting areas are primarily regional and located in the Bremen, Hamburg, and Schleswig-Holstein area.

The presenters interviewed have varying lengths of professional experience in radio and are between their late twenties and fifties. Their fields of activity mainly cover presenting in daytime programming, especially morning shows and mid-morning programs, both in private and public broadcasting. Two of the interviewees have 15 years of experience in morning shows and mid-morning programs on private stations. Shorter careers are also represented, including presenters with two and five years of experience in daytime programming. One interviewee has around 20 years of professional experience in radio, previously held a senior editorial position, and has been presenting a public morning show for a year. The sample is supplemented by presenters from the afternoon and night programs of public broadcasting. The variation of professional

backgrounds allows for a differentiated view of the realities of work and professional development in the field of radio presenting.

The interviews were designed to capture how presenters assess the importance of interactions with the audience in their everyday working lives. They were evaluated using Kuckartz's (2018) content-structuring analysis. It should be noted that the small sample size of nine interviews does not allow generalized statements, but rather aims at an exploratory approach to the research topic.

Despite the exploratory nature of the study, clear thematic focal points can be derived from the interviews. The presenters emphasize the central role of interaction in their professional practice. As feedback in »the lonely medium« of radio, they represent an important feedback for them: »This gives you feedback that there are people who like you or who listen to what you broadcast. That's the important thing.« Regardless of differences in station affiliation or professional experience, all women radio presenters describe interaction with listeners as enriching and valuable. Overall, the presenters view this opportunity for contact positively, which is surprising given the currently increasing attacks on journalists.

On the one hand, this positive perception stems from the benefits for the program, as the feedback is inclusive and contributes to generating topics. On the other hand, the interactions also have personal value: the presenters appreciate being able to capture different realities of life and integrate them into their programs. Personal contact provides insights into different areas of life and, in some cases, promotes exchanges that go beyond the professional sphere. One presenter describes the joy of the interactions as follows: »It's like a friend calling. You're friendly and happy when they get in touch. That's how contact with listeners feels.« Many emphasize respectful interaction and closeness to listeners. This closeness is evident in the fact that feedback often relates to the presenters themselves, for example with personal concerns. They also receive requests from listeners on their private social media channels. Surprisingly, some presenters maintain friendly relationships with individual listeners via social media: »I'm friends on Facebook with some listeners from the past whom I met at events. Some of them still wish me a happy birthday years later, which I think is really nice.« The presenters experience this closeness as a friendly relationship and view it positively.

The available communication channels are crucial for interactive exchange. Most presenters use telephone, email, and social media. They do not always have direct access to incoming messages, as some stations have an online editorial team or listener assistance that filters messages. This influences the communication dynamics: on the one hand, presenters can concentrate on relevant interactions, but on the other hand, direct exchange is restricted. This can lead to a bias in perception among listeners, which reduces the authenticity and diversity of interactions and affects the relationship between presenters and their audience.

There are differences in the channels of communication: Contact via telephone, email, letters, or social media mainly relates to presenters and content. The experiences are partly positive and partly negative. Many presenters appreciate the rapid exchange on social media, as they can generate momentum during the program and receive immediate responses: »You ask a question on air and two seconds later you get countless WhatsApp messages.« Social media particularly promotes reciprocity in communication. Presenters actively control communication, respond immediately to inquiries, and also take on the role of the audience. This role reversal is seen as an essential prerequisite for positive interactions and stronger bonds: »It's best to be like someone next door, so that people know they can come to us, talk to us, and ask questions. They are relaxed, friendly conversations; we are on equal footing.« In addition to the role reversal, social media enables rapid exchange and the expression of objective criticism, which helps moderators identify mistakes and make improvements.

However, the presenters also report negative interactions, both on social media and other communication channels. These take the form of unfair criticism, harassment, and an overall unfriendly tone. Some listeners cross boundaries by sending personal information or making advances: »If someone wants to become a pen pal, you have to set clear boundaries.« The presenters often criticize the listeners' subjective communication style. Negative feedback accompanied by harassment, complaints, unfriendly behavior, stalking, and shitstorms is particularly prevalent on social media. »On Facebook, one person kept writing malicious and defamatory messages. At some point, I got fed up because it was no longer about content, but only about personal attacks.«

Overall, negative interactions are primarily characterized by irrelevance, complaints, and inappropriate advances. Targeted digital hostility, for example based on gender, is only mentioned in isolated cases. Compared to the current state of research on digital violence against journalists and media professionals, this result is remarkable, as a greater impact would have been expected. This could be due to the exceptionally close relationship between presenters and their audience: their voices, regular presence, and personal presentation styles create familiarity, which promotes a baseline attitude of respect. This parasocial relationship can have a protective function, as presenters are perceived less as abstract media figures and more as familiar companions in everyday life.

Nevertheless, the presenters are aware of the risks social media poses. Some attribute the negative interactions to anonymity: »A culture has developed in which the lack of real names leads to a lot of unproductive and unobjective criticism.« Social media is viewed ambivalently: it enables quick, direct exchange, but also carries the risk of problematic feedback. The challenges that arise from this can affect the moderators' job satisfaction and the quality of the programs.

Nevertheless, the women presenters have a positive attitude toward their work: »Despite a few troublemakers, the atmosphere is very polite and appreciative, which motivates us to keep going.« The positive experiences of interaction outweigh the rarer negative experiences. At the same time, the presenters know how to draw the line when interaction is no longer beneficial to the program due to its irrelevance.

3. Influence of station types on interaction dynamics

In addition to the various communication channels, the interviews also revealed a difference between the types of broadcasters. The different framework conditions also have an impact on the interactions between radio presenters and their audience. This reveals varying evaluation standards and different levels of listener engagement, which are strongly influenced by the type of broadcaster (public or private). This finding was not clearly foreseeable in the run-up to the study.

Radio presenters from public broadcasters describe a strong sense of responsibility towards their audience. Due to the mandate of these stations to support the free formation of opinion, the presenters see themselves as professional communicators of information. Against this backdrop, a clear division of roles between presenters and audience is established: »I sell a product, and ultimately we are the waitresses and waiters who present the topics, so to speak.«

These structural conditions tend to lead to a distanced attitude toward listeners. Interactions are seen as part of everyday working life that can enrich the program with personal concerns or content. However, the focus is not on the relationship with the audience, but on the practical benefits for the program.

Negative interactions are usually met with indifference and are not taken personally: »Relatively unproductive, unfocused criticism [...] is not something we discuss on air.« Interaction is seen more as a professional necessity than as personal enrichment. It is striking, however, that negative experiences such as harassment or stalking are reported primarily by public broadcasters. One possible explanation lies in the regional nature of these stations: in smaller broadcasting areas, there is greater proximity to the audience, which blurs the boundaries between private and professional life. In addition, interaction is actively encouraged by the stations, for example through images and videos on social media, which may also contribute to negative experiences.

In contrast, presenters on private stations describe a more intimate connection with their audience. They report positive emotions and, in some cases, friendly relationships with their listeners. Aspects such as closeness, communication on an equal footing, and active involvement of listeners characterize the interaction. Some presenters maintain contact with their audience for years – even

beyond their broadcasting time. This intrinsic motivation is fueled by the joy of personal connection and direct positive feedback. In contrast, the motivation of public broadcast presenters appears to be more strongly determined by their social mission.

However, emotional closeness can also lead to stress. Unobjective or offensive feedback is more stressful: »There are some things I don't even read anymore because it always upsets me so much how stupid people are.« Personal closeness makes it difficult for some presenters to deal with negative interactions – an aspect that was discussed more intensively by public broadcasters.

The interviews show that public broadcasters tend to maintain more distant, professional relationships, while private broadcasters describe closer emotional ties and greater commitment. The structural differences are reflected in the nature and quality of the interactions. Hochschild (1983) points out that emotional labor can be associated with identity-related stress. Against this background, the emotional stress described by radio presenters on private stations can be interpreted as a possible consequence of their intense emotional commitment and close bond with their listeners.

Since there has been little research to date on the differences between public and private radio presenters, the findings obtained here suggest that further intensive research is needed, particularly on how women radio presenters deal with stressful or transgressive experiences. The interviews provide an initial insight into various coping strategies that play a central role in professional self-image and psychological well-being.

4. Coping strategies

The experiences of the presenters interviewed reveal different ways of dealing with negative interactions. Depending on the emotional closeness, they use distancing mechanisms, but also confrontational ones. Table 1 provides an overview of the coping strategies identified in the interviews.

Only some of the coping mechanisms identified relate to analog or face-to-face interactions, which suggests that the digital space is perceived as particularly challenging – whether due to the lower inhibition threshold of anonymous users, the high reach, or the constant availability of communication. Although the majority of interactions are described by the women radio presenters surveyed as positive, stimulating, and enriching, and negative interactions occur less frequently in quantitative terms, presenters from both public and private broadcasters discuss the latter in much greater detail and with greater nuance. This suggests that the psychological impact of negative digital communication experiences is more profound and has a longer-lasting effect. The coping

strategies identified are particularly problem-focused and avoidance-oriented. This indicates that those affected not only actively try to resolve specific conflicts, but also want to protect themselves from further stressful experiences. The combination of confrontation and withdrawal illustrates the ambivalent nature of digital interactions: on the one hand, they offer visibility and reach, but on the other hand, they require increased self-regulation and boundaries.

Table 1
Coping strategies

Strategy	Type of interaction
Engaging in dialogue/ confrontation	Face-to-face meeting, telephone, letter, email, social media
Ignoring of the approach	Phone, letter, email, social media
Submission of response	Phone, letter, email, social media
Self-censorship	Social Media
Social devaluation	Social Media

5. Conclusion and significance for media practice

The results of this study highlight the complex nature of interactions between women radio presenters and their audience in the digital age. Despite the increase in negative interactions, particularly gender-specific hate and harassment, many presenters find the exchange with their audience enriching. In particular, the integration of social media is perceived as beneficial for interaction – in contrast to studies that emphasize primarily the negative aspects of digital communication. The opportunity to incorporate the different realities of listeners' lives into program design promotes a better understanding of audience needs and contributes to program optimization.

At the same time, clear differences between public and private broadcasters are becoming apparent. Women presenters at public broadcasters in particular report an increase in negative interactions, especially on social media. They demonstrate a strong sense of responsibility towards their audience and pursue a professional, emotionally detached approach. In this context, negative feedback is understood as part of everyday working life and emotionally distanced.

Presenters on private stations, on the other hand, describe a more intense emotional connection to their listeners. This closeness promotes constructive handling of feedback, but also leads to greater susceptibility to emotional stress when negative feedback is received. The respective framework conditions

therefore shape not only interaction styles, but also how stress is handled. Many presenters report individual coping strategies in this context.

These findings underscore the importance of structural and digital factors for the dynamics of interaction on the radio. At the same time, the different coping strategies highlight the importance of emotional detachment and support in dealing with digital hostility. Despite the positive aspects, the challenges posed by digital violence and harassment should not be trivialized. The use of coping strategies in the digital context points to a need for protection and regulation mechanisms. In particular, the specific stress levels to which women journalists are exposed require critical examination and appropriate support measures. Institutions and broadcasters are called upon to create conditions that protect and empower these journalists and media professionals.

With regard to radio as a medium, the question remains as to whether the changed forms of communication resulting from digital interaction possibilities are subject to radio-specific characteristics and thus to a specific audience structure. The study presented here has revealed initial differences between different types of broadcasters. For future research, it would be important to conduct a more in-depth comparison between different types of broadcasters and other journalistic professions and the associated effects on interaction and the underlying mechanisms. In addition, the influence of gender dynamics on interaction and the effectiveness of specific coping strategies could be examined in a larger sample. Overall, the study shows that the digital transformation in the medium of radio presents both opportunities and risks that need to be addressed in order to ensure the quality and integrity of journalistic communication in the long term.

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Research in Brief

Matteo Emmanuello

Think tanks and war reporting

How selected German media outlets deal with the US think tank ISW in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war

Abstract: Since the start of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022, which violates international law, the conflict has had massive humanitarian consequences and poses particular challenges for war reporting: Complex information situations, strategic influence and the role of non-governmental think tanks shape public perception. This study examines how the German national newspapers *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), *Die Zeit* and the public broadcasters' news outlet *tagesschau.de* use reports (2022–2025) of the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), and what consequences this has for journalistic quality and framing. The ISW engages in strategic communication by presenting the conflict as a resource conflict with clear »good versus evil« dichotomies through selective frames of problem and responsibility as well as economic and military interpretations.

Media often adopt these frames uncritically, presenting the ISW as a neutral authority requiring no plurality of sources, without a transparent classification of its political stance, or reflection on its proximity to the US arms industry. Although ISW information is usually labelled transparently, what dominates are paraphrases without contextualisation, especially in map material. This practice can undermine the democratic function of journalism in times of war when media act as amplifiers of strategic communication rather than critical mediators. This study, which was part of a bachelor's thesis, contributes to media and conflict research, calls for reflective source criticism and the development of standards for dealing with geopolitically positioned actors.

Keywords: war reporting, think tanks, framing, journalistic quality, Russia-Ukraine war, Institute for the Study of War (ISW)

Journalism fulfils key functions in democratic societies: it provides information about political, cultural and economic developments (informative function), creates a basis for open debate and informed decisions (opinion-forming function), and exercises control and criticism, for example by exposing abuses (control function) (cf. Ruß-Mohl & Schultz, 2023, p. 19 ff.). War reporting in particular – understood as media coverage of violent mass conflicts in which states attempt to enforce power-political goals through organised armed violence (cf. Bilke, 2008, p. 141) – is not neutral reporting, but often a constructed representation, characterised by selection, reduction and interpretation. It navigates the tension between ethical responsibility, political instrumentalisation and quality standards (cf. Wolff, 2018, p. 2 ff.). Propaganda, censorship and restricted access to conflict areas make balanced reporting difficult. However, conceptual precision is particularly important, as terms such as »collateral damage« or »anti-terror operation« shape the perception of conflict, while economic constraints intensify the pressure to be up to date and competition from social media (cf. Wolff, 2018). Further, in the digital age, the battle for control of information is becoming a key resource of modern warfare in the form of »computer-assisted propaganda« (Löffelholz et al., 2024, p. 7).

In this context, think tanks are becoming increasingly important. These are organisations that filter »immense amounts of knowledge, facts, data and information« and prepare them for government decision-making processes (Arin, 2013, p. 16). The term originates from military strategic contexts during the Second World War (cf. Riefer, 2020, p. 52); since then, think tanks have been active players in foreign and security policy, forming »epistemic communities« with a shared world view that seek to translate ideas into policy (Arin, 2013, p. 18 ff.). Elite theory approaches position them as key players in a power elite consisting of business leaders, politicians and the media (cf. Arin, 2013, p. 17 ff.). Against the backdrop of a »lean state« and increasing »wicked problems,« the need for such external, permanently operating advice is growing (cf. Falk et al., 2019, p. 9; Vehlken et al., 2018, p. 12 ff.). Think tanks function both as networking platforms and information hubs (cf. Falk et al., 2019, p. 70), and sometimes have clear lobbying characteristics when studies are linked to clear influence goals (cf. Falk et al., 2019, p. 9). The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) is a US security policy think tank, headed by Kimberly Kagan since 2007, specialising in armed conflicts. It is funded by foundations, companies and private donations, including US defence contractors such as DynCorp, CACI and General Dynamics (cf. Ulrich, 2015, p. 123); board members such as General Jack Keane (chairman, architect of the »Iraq Surge« strategy), and David Petraeus (former CIA director) maintain close, ongoing ties to the US defence and financial industries (see the ISW website).

The theoretical framework of this study is based on journalistic quality research and framing theory. Stephan Ruß-Mohl's »magic polygon« defines five central quality criteria of journalism: objectivity, topicality, originality, transparency and factual accuracy (cf. Meier, 2018, p. 242); in the digital age, interactivity is added as a further feature (cf. Geuß, 2018, p. 52). Framing is also used, whereby frames are understood as mental representations that guide perceptions (cf. Goffman, cited in Dahinden, 2018, p. 38). In a qualitative content analysis, categories are deductively formed from the »magic polygon« according to Ruß-Mohl and from framing theory (problem, responsibility, value-based, economic framing and message constructions) (cf. Ruß-Mohl & Schultz, 2023, p. 313). First, ISW reports are examined according to framing categories, and then the coverage of *FAZ*, *Zeit* and *tagesschau.de* is examined with regard to compliance with journalistic quality standards and their use of ISW data.

The analysis shows that the ISW is constructing a consistent problem architecture: in 2022, Russian logistical weaknesses are being emphasised; in 2023, the »gruelling war of attrition« dominates; and in 2025, political actors (Trump, Putin) and drone warfare come to the fore. Responsibility is attributed through causal assertions and geolocated evidence, while value-based dichotomies characterise the reports through moral vocabulary (e.g. »brutal,« »resilient«). Economic framing presents the war as a resource dynamic with deterministic forecasts. Messages construct a coherent narrative by using visual authority and by marginalising divergent reports as »noise«. Overall, the framing analysis shows that the ISW is not a neutral provider of information from various »experts,« but rather a US security policy think tank with close ties to the US arms industry and with a strategic orientation, whose situation reports reveal clear strategic communication elements. The situation assessments are not merely descriptive, but they are characterised by constructions of reality and framing structures that suggest certain strategic interpretations. Despite the inclusion of various available facts, this results in a narrative framing that does not always do justice to the dynamics of the situations and should therefore be assessed as strategic communication rather than neutral reporting.

This strategic communication often transfers into war reporting, especially when journalistic articles uncritically adopt or paraphrase ISW content. An analysis of media coverage shows that both *Die Zeit* and the *FAZ* exhibit a certain degree of source pluralism, but ISW perspectives dominate and contrasting viewpoints are often lacking. Although the *FAZ* includes Russian sources, it largely ignores Ukrainian civil society voices, while *tagesschau.de* strives for multiple perspectives but only provides superficial relativisations. In terms of transparency, the origin of the information is usually consistently stated, but a critical assessment of the ISW with regard to financing or political proximity is almost completely absent – *Die Zeit* merely refers to the ISW's methodology pages without offering

its own critical analysis. With regard to factual accuracy, the media outlets do address general verification problems, but often reproduce ISW data as facts without reflection; qualifying phrases such as »presumed« are rare, with tagesschau.de providing the most relativisation and *Die Zeit* the least. In terms of originality, *Die Zeit* often limits itself to pure ISW paraphrases, especially in the series »Ukrainekarte aktuell« (Ukraine map update), while the FAZ provides independent contributions through expert interviews and historical digressions. Tagesschau.de works predominantly in an aggregating manner and only conducts marginal research of its own. With regard to interactivity, *Die Zeit* relies heavily on cartographic material based exclusively on ISW data; the FAZ offers a greater variety of sources for maps in older articles, but reduces this from 2025 onwards. None of the media outlets examined exercise a comprehensive source criticism with regard to interactive elements.

It is evident that the media outlets consulted almost universally portray the ISW as a neutral, trustworthy source in their reporting, without contextualising it. The ISW is treated as a *prima facie* authority, while other sources are treated with greater scepticism – an implicit hierarchy that undermines objectivity, transparency, factual accuracy and originality. In sensitive war reporting, objectivity must provide a clear classification of the ISW alongside other sources; transparency requires the ISW to be clearly identified as a politically oriented US institution; and factual work requires a reflective approach to uncertainties. This study is not intended as a blanket criticism of the ISW or the analysed media outlets, but as a contribution to journalistic quality assurance in an increasingly complex and highly dynamic information environment. It becomes clear that the editorial selection, embedding and contextualisation of think tank information in accordance with journalistic quality criteria is a key element of democratic information dissemination – especially in war reporting, which can have far-reaching effects on social, economic and political decision-making processes. Overall, the analysis shows that consistent quality assurance in the handling of think tank information is crucial to ensuring transparent and comprehensive war reporting.

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Research in Brief

Kaylin Lane and Jennifer M. Proffitt

Clickbait crime in the Sunshine State

A feminist political economic analysis of the Florida Man and Florida Woman phenomena

Abstract: The Florida Man and Florida Woman phenomena were created by U.S. news outlets reporting on shocking and unusual events committed by people in Florida and has proliferated over time. Yet, these news stories stereotype men and women, poke fun at serious crimes and acts, and bring attention to trivial events through clickbait titles in exchange for profit. Using textual analysis as a method, we use a feminist political economy lens to investigate news coverage of the Florida Man and Florida Woman to explain how news outlets are capitalizing on the Florida Man and Florida Woman to attract readers, while perpetuating stereotypical, problematic news coverage in the process.

Keywords: Feminist political economy of media, Florida Man, Florida Woman, textual analysis, journalism, clickbait, crime media

»Florida Man Assaults Mom with Spaghetti Sauce, Hides in Bushes from Police« (Aurielle Eady, 2024). This headline demonstrates the often-comedic sensation known as Florida Man, which refers to attention-grabbing news headlines about unexpected, typically criminal acts people commit in the state of Florida, that originated after memes of various news stories circulated online in 2013 (Ira Robbins, 2021). While the term Florida Man encompasses bizarre stories of Floridians regardless of their gender identity (Robbins, 2021), journalists now use the term »Florida Woman« when writing stories about women, complicating the term Florida Man as a catch-all definition. Therefore, we need to understand how both the Florida Woman and Florida Man are portrayed. Accordingly, we examine how the Florida Man and Florida Woman are framed in news stories through a

textual analysis of coverage in three U.S. newspapers – two national (*New York Times* and *USA Today*) and one Florida-based (*Tampa Bay Times*) – using a feminist political economy of media framework.

Feminist political economy

While scholars can apply a political economic lens to explore how economic systems and power relations impact societal structures, including media systems, this research »often ignores the gendered nature of capitalism« (see Ellen Riordan, 2002, p. 9). For example, U.S. mass media owners have typically been »corporate, elite, and male« (Caroline Byerly, 2002, p. 130). Owning many media outlets in multiple industries brings one wealth and the ability »to set in motion a particular set of ideas, values, and role models that become self-perpetuating in the messages their industries purvey« (p. 130). Feminist political economy, defined as »the study of the gendered production, distribution, and consumption of goods and resources and the examination of how ideology is used to stabilise the unequal relations« (Micky Lee, 2011, p. 83), helps us to understand how media structure and content are grounded in capitalistic and patriarchal motives. The industry’s capitalistic drive is more concerned with earning a profit than promoting »equality and diversity,« which impacts the media representations that are disseminated (M. Cruz Tornay-Márquez, 2024, p. 312). The profit-over-everything mindset is concerning because news media define and circulate discourses »about things central to women’s lives and status« (Byerly, 2002, p. 131), influencing how women are viewed and treated. We see this in how crime is covered. Media representations are not always accurate reflections of crime patterns (e.g., Jessica Grosholz & Charis Kubrin, 2007) and can reinforce gender norms and skew perspectives regarding crime (see Robert Entman & Kimberly Gross, 2008). For example, Felipe Estrada et al. (2019) found that while news coverage about men and women criminals¹ was similar, women’s behavior was more likely to be rationalized, and coverage of women is more likely to contain details about the perpetrator’s criminal history and occupation and include a discussion of the ubiquity of crime (e.g., Rachel Collins, 2016).

Popular stereotypes for women criminals include the sad, bad, or mad woman. The bad woman narrative includes women offenders »who willfully defy traditional gender-role expectations through their own intentional actions« (Pauline

1 It is important to acknowledge that although studies of mainstream crime coverage of perpetrators have largely focused on men and women, gender is a social construct and a range rather than a binary. Recent research has explored news coverage of nonbinary and genderqueer victims of homicide (e.g., Susana Avalos, 2024; Susana Avalos et al., 2024; Max Osborn, 2021; Hannah Walsh, 2025); and Autumn Bermea (2023) notes that the news media focused their attention in part on the gender identity of the Club Q shooter in Colorado as nonbinary.

Brennan & Abby Vandenberg, 2009, p. 145). For example, with filicidal women, bad women have been framed as extremely deviant, divorced from »appropriate feminine behavior,« specifically »from the motherhood mandate,« and such »deviance is perceived as being unexplainable or inexcusable as a result of mental illness or life circumstances« (Siobhan Weare, 2017, p. 205). The mad or sad woman narrative depicts offenders »as not fully responsible for their actions« because »some external factor excuses the criminal behavior« (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009, p. 146), such as being »out of their minds« (Estrada et al., 2019, p. 141). As Weare (2017) argued, »mad« and »sad« representations not only reinforce, but also *reproduce*, gendered norms associated with appropriate femininity, such as irrationality, passivity, and weakness,« and the bad woman narrative »constructs these women as non-women, non-human, monsters in order to mitigate and nullify the challenge they pose to the motherhood mandate and appropriate femininity« (p. 220). The use of gendered stereotypes normalizes patriarchal ideologies and the discourses surrounding them.

Method

We analyzed Florida Man and Florida Woman coverage from *USA Today Online*, *The New York Times*, and the *Tampa Bay Times*. We collected articles published April 1, 2023, through April 1, 2024, using Nexis Uni. Opinion pieces, duplicates, and articles unrelated to the Florida Man / Woman context were excluded, resulting in 36 »Florida Man« and 20 »Florida Woman« articles, which aligns with previous research that found U.S. newspapers report significantly more cases of men as offenders than women as offenders (Kellie Carlyle et al., 2008). We coded inductively based on Suman Mishra's (2020) framework for textual analysis, focusing specifically on how Florida Man or Florida Woman were represented and the ideological functions of these representations. We originally planned to analyze the intersections of gender, race, and class, but the articles examined did not explicitly mention race or class.

Florida Man

Florida Man is often described as deceitful or a con artist willing to lie, cheat, and steal for his own benefit. For example, one story centered around a man and his children who created a business disguised as a church to sell bleach, claiming that it »could cure Covid-19, Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, H.I.V.-AIDS, and leukemia among other serious diseases« (Orlando Mayorquin, 2023, para. 8). These stories spotlight men who have intentionally wronged others through their

deception, joke about serious events that negatively impacted people, and draw attention to stories that do not necessarily need to be given such exposure without proper context.

Another narrative regarding Florida Man focuses on celebrity culture, featuring men who commit extreme crimes to gain public attention. For example, a Florida man was said to have murdered his wife over »a dispute over whether they should appear together on a home-renovation television show« (Associated Press, 2023a, para. 1). The focus on popular culture themes minimizes the severity of dangerous and cruel acts these Floridians committed in an attempt to become famous.

Other narratives include the Florida Man as angry, irrational, and violent. For example, one headline read, »Florida man charged with battery after puppy sale argument leads to stabbing, police say« (Kinsey Crowley, 2024a), while another stated, »Florida man pointed gun at woman after her friend backed into his driveway, sheriff's office says« (Frank Fernandez & Thao Nguyen, 2023). Florida Man stories also include sexual violence, such as the »Florida Man who police said shot three women last week at a home, killing one after allegedly admitting he wanted a »romantic relationship« with his own daughter« (Natalie Neysa Alund, 2024, para. 1). Such frames sensationalize violence as a Florida Man punchline rather than highlight the very real problems apparent in these stories.

Several Florida Man stories focus on non-criminal, unexpected events that some readers might find unnewsworthy, underscoring the exploitation of Florida Man stories to attract readers. For example, news headlines such as »Florida man to give vasectomies to peacocks« (Douglas Hanks, 2023) and »Man says exploding toilet in Dunkin' left him covered in waste, debris. Now he's suing« (Kinsey Crowley, 2024b) capitalize on unusual acts to grab attention. These stories may be entertaining, but they contribute to news trivialization and click-bait rather than investigative news that takes longer to research, requires more resources, and provides context.

Florida Woman

There are considerably fewer Florida Woman stories, which is not surprising as there is an overall lack of representation of women in news coverage, not only in the U.S. but globally (Global Media Monitoring Project, 2025; Luba Kassova, 2020). Florida Woman articles most often include the gender stereotypes of the sad, mad, and bad woman. An example of the sad woman narrative is the story of a Florida woman who was bitten by a bat and received an expensive bill after seeking lifesaving care; the article focused on her emotions: »I went through all seven stages of grief. I started crying. I thought there must be a mistake« (Skyler

Swisher & Caroline Catherman, 2024, para. 6). This narrative contributes to the stereotype that women are emotional rather than, for example, a discussion of the commercial healthcare system in the U.S., taking attention away from the seriousness of the injury.

Examples of the mad woman narrative are present in headlines like »Florida woman stabs boyfriend in eye with rabies needle for looking at other women: Police« (Kinsey Crowley, 2023a), and »Florida woman partially bites other woman's ear off after fight breaks out at house party, officials say« (Natalie Neysa Alund, 2023). Unlike the violence discussed in Florida Man stories, Florida Woman articles that highlight violence tend to justify their actions by focusing on how women are jealous and angry, consistent with stereotypes of women as hysterical.

The bad woman narrative includes a Florida woman story noting that she »faces criminal charges for allegedly attempting to hire a hit man to kill her 3-year-old son« (Kinsey Crowley, 2023b, para. 1) and that her intention may have been to please an ex-partner who ended their relationship because she had a child. Another example explained: »A Florida woman was charged with aggravated child neglect and arson after her car caught on fire – with children inside – while she was allegedly shoplifting at a mall, according to an arrest report« (Francisco Guzman, 2023, para. 1). This bad woman frame often focuses on Florida women as bad mothers who, as Weare (2017) noted, are »monsters.« The sad, mad, and bad woman stereotypes simplify and minimize complex issues and exploit cases that real people experienced to create sensational media headlines.

Florida Woman stories also included an emphasis on gender not prominent in Florida Man coverage. An example of a gendered frame is the focus on a love interest to guide the narrative, such as displayed in the lede: H. M. »was in a Miami hospital room, high on morphine and down one kidney, when she met her future husband« (Gabrielle Calise, 2024, para. 1). Stories about women that center around romantic relationships often normalize the idea that a woman's identity and prominence are closely tied to her partner. Another example is the focus on feminine traits, as shown in the headline: »Florida woman sues Hershey over Reese's Peanut Butter Pumpkins packaging not being >cute« (Sarah Al-Arshani, 2024). Lastly, women's crimes were rationalized, which aligns with existing crime media scholarship (e.g., Estrada et al., 2019). For example, an article about a Florida Woman who threw wine at U.S. Representative Matt Gaetz noted that her attorney said that Gaetz was an »aggressor« and »agitator« (Associated Press, 2023b, para. 7). The need to justify women's behavior ties into the patriarchal ideology that women should be »appropriately feminine,« pure and nurturing; when women break gender norms, there must be an explanation for their behavior, often negating women's agency.

Conclusion

This study revealed that news organizations capitalize on the Florida Man phenomenon and portray protagonists in a gendered stereotypical fashion in exchange for clicks, as »readers relish in and share the stories, largely on social media« (Robbins, 2021, p. 1). Feminist political economy provides a framework to help us understand the popularity and influence of the Florida Man; if U.S. news media corporations can profit from these stories, which are cheap to cover due to the openness of Florida's public records laws, they will continue to do so, often in gendered ways. By producing such stories, commercial interest takes precedence over fair, accurate representations (see Tornay-Márquez, 2024), leading to the perpetuation of gendered ideologies. For example, Florida Woman is portrayed differently than Florida Man, as Florida Man stories often promote harmful masculine stereotypes that normalize and sensationalize violence, while Florida Woman stories suggest that women are emotional and that their identities are tied to their relationships, and the stories often provide rationales for their deviant behavior that align with patriarchal expectations of how women should behave (see Mary Becker, 1998). Presenting women as bad, mad, or sad is not new, but what the Florida Woman trope does is add mockery and ridicule, encouraging readers to laugh at individual trauma rather than address structural problems that affect women, including domestic and sexual violence. Systemic gender inequities are reduced to punchlines.

Instead of signifying Florida Man and Florida Woman stories as jokes or memes, news outlets that cover events in Florida should refrain from using stereotypical language, avoid sensationalizing unnewsworthy events, stop creating clickbait titles that exploit people facing unfortunate events, and instead provide context in ways that do not trivialize, mock, or demonize. Future research should investigate other ways crime media, in pursuit of profit, have propagated harmful ideologies regarding women.

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Projects

Hektor Haarkötter

Acute cases of media failure

The Initiative Nachrichtenaufklärung (INA) e.V. selects the Top Ten Forgotten News Stories of 2026

The Initiative Nachrichtenaufklärung (INA) e.V. has once again presented a list of stories that have been neglected by the German media in the current year: the Top Ten Forgotten News Stories of 2026. Each year, a jury of scholars, practicing journalists, and students selects the ten most important topics from a large number of suggestions compiled by student research groups. The public is invited to submit topic suggestions if they concern issues that affect a large group of people but receive little or no coverage in the media. These suggestions are reviewed in a multi-stage process and prepared for voting by the jury. INA also conducts accompanying scientific research on neglected news. It uses the concept of »agenda cutting« as a theoretical framework for understanding news neglect. Drawing on the concept of agenda setting in communication research, agenda cutting theory posits that issues of high relevance to large parts of society are systematically ignored in everyday journalism. The reasons for this can lie both within journalism itself and in external pressures. These include economic considerations, such as the need to protect advertisers or the fear of lawsuits. A more recent threat to news diversity arises from the selection criteria embedded in algorithms and artificial intelligence, which steer news flows on the internet in largely non-transparent ways (cf. Haarkötter & Nieland, 2023).

Top 1: Much better than their reputation – African countries with high levels of development

The Human Development Index (HDI) is a more comprehensive measure of a country's level of development than gross national product (GNP) or gross domestic product (GDP), as it incorporates indicators of health and education in addition to economic performance. According to the HDI, the African island states of Seychelles and Mauritius rank above the global average, with several other African countries not far behind. Nevertheless, media coverage often paints a one-sided picture of Africa as predominantly poor and underdeveloped.

Top 2: Poisoned – Microplastics in farmland

Microplastics enter farmland through sewage sludge, compost, improper waste disposal, and slow-release fertilizers. This contamination damages soil quality, disrupts water balance, and harms soil organisms. In the long term, it also threatens the human food chain. Despite its significance, the issue receives little media attention, partly because research is still at an early stage and reliable data remain limited.

Top 3: In bureaucratic no man's land – Stateless persons fail to get help from German authorities

In 2022, an estimated 97,000 people with unresolved citizenship status were living in Germany, and the number is rising. Many stateless persons work and pay taxes but remain in a vulnerable legal position and often wait years for their status to be clarified. Reasons include inconsistent guidelines and overburdened authorities. As a result, those affected face great uncertainty and are often largely excluded from social and political life. Media coverage of the causes, conditions, and consequences of statelessness remains limited.

Top 4: A profitable business – German companies undermine measures for the inclusion of people with disabilities

Instead of fulfilling their legal obligation to employ people with disabilities, many German companies prefer to pay a compensatory levy. This weakens efforts to integrate people with disabilities into the labor market. At the same time, the system can benefit employers: the levy can be reduced by purchasing goods

or services from sheltered workshops. Because employees in these workshops often work below minimum wage, the products are comparatively inexpensive. Companies therefore benefit twice, while exclusion and precarious working conditions persist.

Top 5: Not accessible – Political information remains closed off for people with disabilities

Citizens with disabilities show an above-average interest in politics. Despite legal requirements mandating accessibility, many are effectively excluded from political information and thus from democratic participation. None of the 322 websites of public authorities examined by the Federal Monitoring Agency for Accessibility of Information Technology (BFIT-Bund) meet the legal standards for accessibility. While specialized outlets report on this issue, this structural deficit has received little attention in mainstream media.

Top 6: Law Clinics – Legal advice services supporting disadvantaged people

Law clinics provide socially disadvantaged groups with access to justice while allowing aspiring lawyers to develop practical skills. For many people seeking advice, these free services represent their only access to reliable legal support. However, law clinics rarely receive media attention, meaning many potential users remain unaware of their existence.

Top 7: Child labor – Exploited on tobacco plantations

Millions of children work under dangerous conditions for the tobacco industry. This form of child labor is referred to as exploitative child labor: the children affected suffer massive mental, physical, social, and moral damage. Hours of contact with tobacco plants lead to direct absorption of nicotine through the skin, which can result in green tobacco sickness (GTS), i.e., acute nicotine poisoning. This disease develops particularly quickly in children because they have thinner skin and lower body weight compared with adults. Estimates suggest that at least 1.3 million children worldwide work on such plantations. Child labor on tobacco plantations is an overlooked form of modern exploitation that is virtually unreported by German media.

Top 8: Overshadowing – When people with mental illness do not receive adequate physical examinations

People who have already been diagnosed with a mental illness are not given adequate physical examinations, leading to serious illnesses being detected too late or not at all. This failure to properly diagnose is known in medicine as »diagnostic overshadowing« – the mental illness overshadows a possible physical illness. The consequences can be severe, potentially placing people with mental illness at disproportionate risk due to insufficient medical care. Media coverage of these diagnostic failures remains limited.

Top 9: Imprisoned – Mental health consequences of pretrial detention

People in pre-trial detention in Germany are placed in a legally exceptional situation that can cause considerable psychological stress. However, media rarely report on the mental health consequences of the sudden loss of freedom and social support experienced before any conviction has been reached. Greater attention should be given to both individual experiences and the structural factors contributing to psychological stress in pretrial detention.

Top 10: Arbitration tribunals – How influential corporations are undermining the sovereignty of states

International corporations increasingly use private arbitration tribunals to enforce their interests against states. These tribunals are intended to protect investors from arbitrary state actions within the framework of international trade agreements. However, they have effectively created a parallel private justice system that can limit the regulatory power of states. Transparency organizations and human rights groups have long warned about the risks of investor–state dispute settlement (ISDS) proceedings. These procedures are often conducted in secrecy, without public oversight or participation by affected parties. A key concern is the »regulatory chill« effect: governments may refrain from adopting strict regulations for fear of costly lawsuits. Despite its significance, this systemic issue receives little media attention.

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Books

Martina Thiele and Boris Romahn

Must read: Books by journalists

The decision to continue the »Book Journalism« section (see *Journalism Research* 3-4/2025) has been met with widespread approval. We have also received many tips about recently published books. On the one hand, this is wonderful and very helpful, but on the other hand, we have to decide which ten books to choose from the multitude of new publications. Journalists are obviously very productive, even when it comes to longer forms such as books. We, Martina Thiele (MT, University of Tübingen) and Boris Romahn (Bro, University of Salzburg), are pleased to recommend a diverse selection of books by journalists that are well worth reading. They cover current and historical topics and offer a wide range of perspectives on war and peace, fact and fiction, homelands and identities.

Victoria Amelina (2025): *Blick auf Frauen den Krieg im Blick. Ein Tagebuch von Krieg und Gerechtigkeit* [Looking at Women Looking at War. A diary of war and justice]. With a foreword by Margaret Atwood. Translated from English by Steffen Beilich and Andreas Rostek. Berlin: edition.fotoTAPETA, 304 pages, 22 euros

Ukrainian writer Victoria Amelina, born in Lviv in 1986, became a human rights activist and journalist as a result of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. She researched war crimes, documented injustices, and spoke with soldiers, lawyers, war reporters, and activists. Amelina, mother of a then 12-year-old son, was killed in Kramatorsk in the summer of 2023 by a Russian missile attack. Friends and colleagues ensured the publication of her war reports, interviews, articles, and diary entries. Some of it is still unfinished, remains fragmentary – and is all the more shocking precisely because of this incompleteness. Amelina's texts

have been compiled into a carefully edited volume with numerous references, although the German title is missing a comma or a dash. Margaret Atwood wrote the foreword to the book *Looking at Women, Looking at War*, which was first published in English, and notes: »Her writing style is fleeting, vivid, intimate and personal, detailed and sensual. She thus follows in the honorable footsteps of earlier war reporters such as Martha Gellhorn, who wrote: ›I must report on this war ...‹.«

Through her writing, Victoria Amelina has ensured that the everyday horror people in Ukraine have been experiencing for four years now is recorded. We learn how displacement, destruction, and death affect people. Amelina, who was a keen observer, noted: »It is striking how much we all laugh during this terrible war. Perhaps not in front of foreign reporters, who mostly expect Ukrainian women to display despair or heroism. The truth is that sometimes, when we are tired of crying or simply cannot cry, we laugh like crazy, as if to prove that we Ukrainians are here and still alive.« (MT)

Artur Weigandt (2025): *Für Euch würde ich kämpfen. Mein Bruch mit dem Pazifismus* [I would fight for you. My break with pacifism]. Munich: C.H. Beck, 208 pages, 18 euros

At the beginning of the year, the German Bundeswehr sent out questionnaires to all young men born in 2008 to gauge their general interest in military service. The discussion in Germany about reintroducing compulsory military service is directly linked to the threat posed by Russia's war against Ukraine – and also to concerns about the future of NATO following Trump's verbal attacks on European allies.

With *Für Euch würde ich kämpfen* Artur Weigandt presents a politically very timely book. Starting point is his personal departure from radical pacifism in light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Weigandt, who was born in Uspenska in Kazakhstan in 1994 and raised in Germany, combines autobiographical reflection with political analysis in his new book, as he did in his debut *Die Verräter* [The traitors]. He studied in Frankfurt, attended the German School of Journalism in Munich, and – wanting to do something meaningful – participated as an interpreter in the training of Ukrainian soldiers in Germany. In *Für euch würde ich kämpfen*, Weigandt describes his inner conflict between moral conviction and political reality, critically examining classic pacifist positions and discussing issues of military deterrence, alliance policy, and European security. He offers disturbing insights into everyday life in Ukraine during the war and into trite German debates about arms deliveries and military preparedness. *Für Euch würde ich kämpfen* is committed opinion journalism in book form. (MT)

James Poniewozik (2025): *Alle Scheinwerfer auf mich! Die Geburt Donald Trumps aus dem Fernsehen und der Zerfall Amerikas* [Audience of one: Trump, television, and the fracturing of America]. Translated from American English by Sean Carty and Clara Schilling. Berlin: Edition Tiamat, 423 pages, 32 euros

James Poniewozik begins the German first edition of his 2019 work *Audience of one* with the following scene: »On February 28, 2025, the former star of the sitcom *Servant of the People* met with the former host of NBC's most successful primetime reality show to discuss the future of a besieged Eastern European democracy.« (p. 7) This meeting between Volodymyr Zelenskyi and the re-elected Donald Trump ended, as we know, in a disaster broadcast live on television, in which Trump and his vice president, J. D. Vance, accused Zelenskyi of ingratitude and threatened to withdraw all humanitarian and military aid from Ukraine. Poniewozik notes: »Trump ended his tirade on a strangely cheerful note: ›This is good television.« (p. 7) For those unfamiliar with Trump's role in *The Apprentice*, this was a frightening episode of new realpolitik, but for viewers of the reality tv series, it was a familiar scene: In a room not unlike the Oval Office, Donald Trump demotes candidates to submissive supplicants. They don't know what he actually wants. They fear his angry outbursts and candidate dismissals. Trump, however, according to Poniewozik, always knows what the camera wants: conflict.

The author, a television critic for *The New York Times* since 2015, analyzes Trump's path to becoming a public figure and successful media personality as an American media biography in three parts, following the logic of private television: the background, the antihero, and presidential television. He tells two closely intertwined stories: one about television and how it has changed in the current era of tech monopolies and fragmented audiences, and the other about Donald Trump, »who, over the course of a four-decade television career, has developed a symbiotic relationship with the medium« (p. 20) and who, like no other, has used the media of his time »to become a brand, a star, a demagogue, and a president.« (p. 21)

Poniewozik makes a compelling argument based on the specific intertwining of media and politics in the US: »If you follow American media culture through-out Trump's career, you will better understand how Trump could have happened. And if you understand how Trump happened, you will better understand what has become of us.« (pp. 21-22) The author comes to a sobering conclusion and predicts: »Donald Trump will always have happened. We will always be the country that elected him. He will appear in tv reruns and children's history books. There will probably be a Donald J. Trump library, even if it's just a vcr set.« (p. 402) At present, however, the problem is that Trump, with his narcissistic presidential show, not only receives attention but can also force it. »The whole world is now the backdrop for Trump's reality show. And President Zelensky is

not the only one being treated badly.« (p. 12) Can we withdraw our attention from Trump? (Bro)

Alexander Steinbach and Alfred Schwarz (Eds.) (2025): *Über Morgen. Hilft uns heute das Gestern? ORF-Reporter:innen in Dialogen auf vier Kontinenten* [About tomorrow. Does yesterday help us today? ORF reporters in dialogues on four continents]. Vienna: Mandelbaum, 228 pages, 22 euros

Nine reporters of the Austrian public broadcaster ORF discuss global challenges with colleagues »from all over the world.« Some of them are retired, others are still in the middle of their careers. They talk about what was and what is to come, about journalism, democracy, old and new authoritarianism. But also about favorite dishes and books, artificial intelligence, and hope.

The dialogue format works well for this book, crucially because of the people who engage in the dialogue. Joana Radzyner and Barbara Coudenhove-Kalergi talk to each other. They conclude: »It's not either/or.« Margit Maximilian asks Wycliffe Muga: »Why is Africa so poor?« Carola Schneider and Irina Scherbakowa agree: »If Europe allows the war in Ukraine to end with a victory for Putin, then the whole of Europe will have lost.« Eugen Freund and Ted Koppel are concerned about the North Atlantic Alliance: »The idea that Europe can rely on the us today is completely over.« Alfred Schwarz meets Czech writer Radka Denemarková, and talks with her about fears for the future, hoping that the swallows will return once again. Renate Zeller Heilig and Ángel Verdugo reflect on Mexico and populism worldwide, while Robert Wiesner and Heide Schmidt discuss political parties and civil society. Alexander Steinbach interviews Japanese social philosopher Kenishi Mishima on migration; Gerhard Seifried and Stefan Wachtel ponder freedom of expression and censorship; Alexander Steinbach and Peter Riedl quote the insight of a Buddhist nun: »Without me, life is very simple.« Alfred Schwarz and Michael Christen then address the question of whether AI makes life easier – thereby coming full circle, because in his foreword, Andreas Pfeifer demanded, despite and because of all the AI debates: »There is no way around thinking for yourself.«

Editors Alexander Steinbach and Alfred Schwarz, both formerly employed by ORF, have once again produced a wonderful book after their previous volume, *Fischen mit Lech Wał sa. Weltpolitik aus erster Hand. ORF-Reporter:innen erzählen* (2025) [Fishing with Lech Wał sa: First-hand global politics. ORF reporters tell their stories]. Their current work is a contemporary document, a journalistic reference book, and a political reader all at once. (MT)

Sabine Adler (2025): *Israel, Fragen an ein Land* [Israel, questions for a country]. Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 270 pages, 24 euros

Sabine Adler, a reporter for German national broadcaster Deutschlandfunk, has been reporting from Eastern Europe and the Middle East for decades. In her new book *Israel, Fragen an ein Land*, she talks to people she has known for many years, some of them for decades. One of them is Ruth Goldmann, a Holocaust survivor and doctor who is almost 100 years old. Many members and acquaintances of the Goldmann family were also willing to talk. Despite the author's restraint, *Israel, Fragen an ein Land* is a very personal examination of a country and the people who live there. At the same time, the book offers a great deal of nuance and detailed knowledge.

Thematically, it covers a wide range of topics – from the founding of the state to dealing with the Shoah, the Middle East conflict, the role of religion and the military, and internal social tensions between secular and religious groups. Adler contrasts political decisions with the views of her interlocutors. She avoids assigning blame, focusing instead on historical accuracy, contextualization, and differentiation. The contradictions within Israeli society become clear. It also becomes clear how the external perception of Israel has changed since the Hamas massacre on October 7, 2023. After the complete destruction of the Gaza Strip and the displacement and killing of tens of thousands of civilians, little remains of the initial international solidarity with Israel and understanding for a military strike against Hamas terrorists.

What remains are questions: »Is coexistence still possible?«, »Who sees the victims on the other side?«, »Is this still democratic?«, »Is Israel being criticized too harshly?«, »Was it all for nothing?«, »What could stop the hatred?« Sabine Adler and those she interviews do not provide easy answers. Adler gives space to tell stories. She listens, driven by a desire to understand. In this way, the book promotes understanding without glossing over conflicts; it informs without lecturing. And it is suitable both as an introduction for readers who are dealing with Israel in depth for the first time as well as for a politically interested audience. (MT)

Muhlmann, Géraldine (2025): *Zur Verteidigung von Fakten* [In defense of facts]. Translated from French by Lina Theiß. Vienna: Passagen, 168 pages, 25 euros

Géraldine Muhlmann's book *Zur Verteidigung von Fakten* addresses one of the central questions of our time: How can fact-based journalism survive in a media landscape characterized by disinformation, populist distortions, and an almost unmanageable flood of images and texts? The French philosopher draws on

Hannah Arendt's reflections on factuality, to which Arendt attributed an almost material, physical force. Muhlmann takes up this idea and examines how this force is threatening to disappear under the conditions of digital public spheres.

The starting point for her analysis is the diagnosis that fake news is not only a political instrument, but also a consequence of structural changes in journalism. Media outlets increasingly focusing on speed, storytelling, and entertainment have accepted mistakes and exaggerations as part of the business. Added to this is the ongoing »virtualization of the world«: The sheer volume of news in the broadest sense makes it difficult to grasp reality with the senses. Muhlmann observes that real events such as wars and crises often elicit less empathy than their fictional representations. The philosopher and presenter also criticizes the current culture of media discourse. According to Muhlmann, talk shows, debate formats, and expert panels generate a permanent palaver in which opinions clash, while facts take a back seat.

The author reminds us that journalism was once established in liberal societies to protect »factual material.« She traces the shift from the opinion-driven press of the 19th century to the information-focused press, which elevated objectivity and factual accuracy to central ideals. Rituals of verification, Pulitzer's famous demand for »accuracy,« the journalistic »nose for news,« and the detail-obsessed New Journalism are examples of the attempt to portray reality as precisely, objectively, and impartially as possible. At the same time, she takes a critical look at Jürgen Habermas, whose concept of the deliberative public sphere she considers as too narrowly focused on rational discourse, ignoring other dimensions of public debate such as emotion and dissent.

The concluding chapters use numerous examples from France and the US to illustrate under how much pressure journalism has come: Deliberately constructed »facts,« growing hatred of media professionals, and a noticeable loss of social legitimacy threaten the foundations of the profession. Muhlmann therefore advocates a return to the sensory dimension of factuality – to looking closely and being present, perceiving details, and ultimately the ability to make reality tangible and comprehensible.

The book offers numerous stimulating observations and clever historical classifications. However, the presentation sometimes seems inconsistent: *Zur Verteidigung von Fakten* fluctuates between essayistic lecture fragments on theories of publicity and practical analyses of current problems in journalism. But Muhlmann's reflections are interesting when she not only laments the crisis in journalism, but also addresses its cultural and economic causes. Muhlmann's concluding thought, that facts – like dreams – must be defended against the temptation of quick certainties, succinctly sums up the book's concern. *Zur Verteidigung von Fakten* is thus above all a philosophical wake-up call: a reminder that reality must be constantly re-perceived, re-examined, and re-told. (Bro)

Aline Abboud and Nana Heymann (2025): *Barfuß in Tetas Garten. Berlin, mein Libanon und ich* [Barefoot in Teta's garden. Berlin, My Lebanon and Me]. Berlin: Ullstein, 256 pages, 22 euros

Barfuß in Tetas Garten is a very personal account of the East German-Lebanese origins of journalist and national newscast presenter of the *Tagesthemen* Aline Abboud. Born in East Berlin in 1988 to a Lebanese father and German mother, she recalls summer vacations in Lebanon with her grandparents and relatives. Abboud vividly describes family rituals, smells, and sounds. She combines these autobiographical passages with reflections on migration, racism, and belonging, life between two cultures, and the question of identity in an increasingly polarized society. Abboud is convinced »that the term ›migration background‹ [a common term in German] says more about the society we live in than about ourselves.« (p. 14)

The media reports that appeared in 2021, when Abboud moved from public broadcaster ZDF to the ARD's evening newscast *Tagesthemen*, focused on precisely that: the migration history, origin, age, and gender of the »newcomer« who, at just 33 years of age, was now set to host one of Germany's most important news programs after presenter Pinar Atalay. For journalistic reasons, Abboud can understand the reduction to these points, which are probably the most interesting, and she also describes herself as a »migrant« and an »Ossi« (East German). But her book is an attempt to go beyond two or three keywords about herself. She talks about her journalistic work, news stories that have shaken her, and the expectations of her colleagues, who assumed she could speak Arabic. Abboud, who is from Berlin, grapples with her »Ossi-ness,« even though she hardly experienced the German Democratic Republic (GDR), and with her time in school, which was not very happy. And she tells of her father, who, when he visited his parents in Lebanon, did not know if and when he would see them again.

Abboud's descriptions are so multifaceted and colorful that the photos in the middle of the book are not really necessary – but they are beautiful and insightful nonetheless! The author dedicates *Barfuß in Tetas Garten* to her grandmother, whose warmth she misses, and to her extended family. However, she dedicates the book in particular to her daughter, who was born when Abboud was trying to structure the book's text together with her friend Nana Heymann. Memories cannot be easily squeezed into a structure, but that's not a bad thing. Not all gardens need to have neat flower beds. (MT)

Can Dündar (2025): *Ich traf meinen Mörder. Ein Journalist und die dunklen Seiten der Macht* [I met my killer. A journalist and the dark sides of power]. Translated from Turkish by Sabine Adatepe. Berlin: Galiani, 201 pages, 23 euros

Can Dündar's book *I met my killer: A journalist and the dark sides of power* is a personal account, a political document of our times, and a suspenseful feature story. The Turkish journalist, who has been living in exile for years, describes his encounter with a man who was once commissioned to kill him – a situation reminiscent of true crime literature, but based on facts.

The book focuses on the conversations Dündar had with Serkan Kurtulus in a Buenos Aires prison, together with a television crew of the German national broadcaster ZDF. He reports with remarkable sobriety and detail on the structures of this »organization,« which includes people from politics, the secret service, the judiciary, the police, and the mafia. Particularly striking is the matter-of-factness with which Kurtulus describes how violence against journalists is considered a legitimate means of intimidation. The fact that he refused the contract for killing and later became the target of an international manhunt and political threats lends the story a certain tragedy: who becomes the perpetrator or victim depends on the whims of those in power in a system of terror.

Dündar links the prison conversations to his own story. His persecution was triggered when he reported on secret arms deliveries by the Turkish secret service to Syria in 2015. This was followed by pretrial detention, an assassination attempt in front of a courthouse, a prison sentence for alleged espionage, and finally exile: Dündar was granted political asylum and has been living in Berlin since 2016. The biographical passages lend the book a depressing authenticity, as they make clear the price that investigative journalism can have in authoritarian systems.

In places, the book reads like a thriller. The drama of the prison conversations, the descriptions of secret operations, and the constant threat create suspense. However, the true impact comes from the reality of the events. It is precisely this proximity to the documentary form that is one of the book's strengths.

However, the title and the repeated reference to Kurtulus as a »murderer« are somewhat weak. Legally speaking, he is a man who allegedly received a contract to commit murder, not the actual assassin Murat Sahin. This exaggeration is somewhat at odds with the otherwise thoughtful and nuanced presentation.

Dündar repeatedly returns to the question of whether his high level of personal commitment was worth it. His answer is clear: only if someone is prepared to take risks is it possible to uncover the truth. *I met my killer* is more than the description of an assassination attempt or an extraordinary encounter. It is a powerful report on the threat to press freedom, the intertwining of power and violence – and a testimony to the courage it takes to write about it all nonetheless. (*Bro*)

Katja Gloger and Georg Mascolo (2025): *Das Versagen. Eine investigative Geschichte der deutschen Russlandpolitik* [The failure. An investigative history of German policy toward Russia]. Berlin: Ullstein, 496 pages, 26.99 euros

»Russia is a friendly European country.« (p. 11) This statement by Vladimir Putin raised high hopes during the Russian president's first state visit to Germany in 2001. Today, in light of the war of aggression against Ukraine and the autocratic dictatorship in Russia, known as Putinism, Putin's words seem like pure mockery. And today we also know that Putin's speech in the German Bundestag at the time was written by the German industrial manager and senior civil servant Horst Teltschik. Putin had asked Teltschik, who once negotiated German reunification with Chancellor Kohl, to do so.

In their meticulously researched history of German policy toward Russia, Katja Gloger and Georg Mascolo trace how countless political misjudgments have been made since Putin's presidency began in 2000. Many voices who issued warnings were not heard or could not get through. This is surprising insofar as Putin showed the world from day one of his rule that war is his political weapon of choice and that enemies, at that time the Autonomous Republic of Chechnya, must be »exterminated like vermin« (p. 14). Nevertheless, German politicians, as former GDR civil rights activist Werner Schulz criticized at the time, celebrated Putin as »Gorbachev's grandson« and did not recognize him as »the KGB's protégé« (p. 15).

Gloger and Mascolo look behind the political and economic scenes, reveal the causes and consequences of Putin's rule, and dig through countless files that were sometimes made available to them in a »surprisingly unbureaucratic« manner (p. 17), and sometimes denied without explanation. They talk to contemporary witnesses – a chancellor (not Gerhard Schröder, but Olaf Scholz), ministers, diplomats, high-ranking Bundeswehr and NATO officers, and even the current German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier. In doing so, the authors succeed in tracing Putin's biography as »the steepest career in post-Soviet Russia« (p. 18), making it clear that he has always been a man of the secret service. To this day, he continues to work with intelligence methods. Gloger and Mascolo use key milestones to show when, where, and how German policy toward Russia failed, for example in the Minsk peace process, in decisions regarding the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines, and in Steinmeier's 2008 suggestion for a »partnership for modernization.«

In addition to intensive investigative research and detailed documentation of sources and individuals mentioned in a total of 90 pages, there are three major merits that make this fact-filled book worth reading: First, Gloger and Mascolo make it clear that Putin is not only waging war against Ukraine, but also against what he considers a morally degenerate West. His Russia and he know

no boundaries, which is why we are living in an unpredictable and dangerous present. It is therefore not enough to analyze past failures; rather, lessons must be learned for future decisions. Second, the book does not aim to engage in »personal bashing« and does not pillory politicians and journalists as failures when it comes to Russia. Gloger and Mascolo acknowledge the efforts of many political actors involved with Russia to engage in trust-building dialogue. And thirdly: »It is imperative that we come to terms with Germany's policy toward Russia, again and again, and also because of our own history« (p. 24). (Bro)

Dorothee Krings (2025): *Tage aus Glas* [Days of glass]. Hamburg: HarperCollins, 304 pages, 24 euros

Dorothee Krings brings abstract concepts such as »structural change« and »transformation« to life in her novel *Tage aus Glas*. It deals with the labor disputes at the beginning of the 20th century. In 1901, glassmakers across the German Empire go on strike. The workers at the Gerresheim glassworks and their wives, who toil in the weaving mill, also decide to put their tools down. With fatal consequences, as the heavy, unhealthy work of the glassblowers is soon replaced by machines. The hope for a different, better life is shattered.

This historical novel is based on extensive journalistic research. It tells the story of two women from different social backgrounds whose lives intersect. Bille, the daughter of a glassblower, who wants to emigrate with her boyfriend Adam, and Leonie, the daughter of the company's doctor. Both women see America as the promised land. But the price for a self-determined life is high.

Krings, who works as an editor at the German newspaper *Rheinische Post*, succeeds in portraying social conflicts in a nuanced way, including those within the working class and the aspiring bourgeoisie. In places, the novel reads like a feature story focusing on social justice; the dialogues sound authentic, and the descriptions of hardship and despair, but also of courage and class pride, are not exaggerated. Focusing on the women provides yet another insight. But the author also impressively depicts the inner turmoil of the men torn between calling for industrial action or being reviled as strikebreakers. According to Krings, the speech by the worker Oschi on page 169 is based on the speech given by Krupp plant manager Helmut Laakmann on November 30, 1987, when the future of the steelworks in Duisburg-Rheinhausen was at stake.

Changes in point of view, detailed descriptions, and numerous adjectives in *Tage aus Glas* may at times overwhelm readers, and some things may seem stereotypical in Krings' first novel, but the author's precise knowledge of local history, the characterization of the protagonists, and her artful handling of how being shapes consciousness are convincing. (MT)

Books

Reviews

Colleen Murrell (2025): *BBC Women reporting the world. Conversations with foreign correspondents*. Palgrave Macmillan, 237 pages, ca. 27 euros

Reviewed by Stine Eckert

Tiananmen Square in 1989, the violent toppling of Liberia's president in 1990, the Arab Spring in 2010, and the massacre in Bucha in 2022 – these are just a few of the numerous stops in Colleen Murrell's intense and impressive journey across recent world history through the eyes of ten BBC women foreign correspondents: Kate Adie, Diana Goodman, Liz Blunt, Lyse Doucet, Orla Guerin, Carrie Gracie, Sara Beck, Caroline Wyatt, Sarah Rainsford, and Shaimaa Khalil. Murrell dedicates a chapter to each of them, bringing these prominent women journalists closer to the reader through long and detailed interviews, systematically inquiring about how their gender played a role in their work. A mixture of journalistic and academic writing style, referring to the correspondents by first name, and a color photograph of each of them turns each chapter into a lively portrait.

Murrell conducted qualitative, open-ended interviews – in person with all but two of them – between August 2021 and July 2022, and kept in touch with them via email for more recent turn of events. She traces their careers from upbringing and childhood interests to school and college education and through many journalistic steppingstones to them becoming BBC foreign correspondents, often being firsts in their roles. Their ability to quickly learn and speak languages, their extraordinary drive, deep specialist knowledges of regional politics and cultures, and cultivation of sources and professional networks in different parts of the world, as well as their flexibility to change posts at the drop of a hat impresses across the book's 237 pages.

The author selected her interviewees to chronicle many firsts within the BBC and explore the obstacles they had to overcome to reach these milestones, such as Kate Adie, »the first woman who rose to prominence as a staff reporter on a normal salary« (p. 11) in the 1980s, Diana Goodman in Bonn and Elizabeth Blunt

in Abidjan becoming the first BBC women foreign correspondents in 1986 or Caroline Wyatt becoming the BBC's first woman defense correspondent in 2007. The chapters are arranged chronologically and demonstrate how subsequent women journalists are benefitting from these pioneers to this day. Encouragingly, her interviewees repeatedly speak about how knowing of or working with these women and other women colleagues helped them to imagine and pursue their own careers. Similarly, they all lauded the stringers, fixers, and local journalists with whom they worked abroad, and are often not acknowledged enough.

Murrell, a Professor of Journalism at Dublin City University who herself worked in foreign newsgathering for the BBC before, also brings readers to scenes of war, conflict, and historic events through paraphrased and direct quotes of her interviewees, making the book at times a page-turner. For instance, Kate Adie recounts how she raced one of the cassettes with recording from the shootings at Tiananmen Square under fire back to the hotel, facing off with police officers, but making it in time to report live via phone:

»And as I was starting, the shooting really started and there were people running in all directions. It was terrifying. And someone crashed straight into me. I fell over, went my length, tore all the skin off my forearm on the gravel. And he fell on top of me. And he was dead because a bullet had hit him. And as I lay on the ground, I saw something very odd. I saw little red ticks. And they were bullets hitting the ground. And I got up and I just ran. ...And one of them came towards me and I just attacked him....by that time I was out of my mind with rage and determination... I went all over, one got a kick, another one I hit with furniture. I was lucky they never pulled their guns. And I went for the stairs, and I remember going up those stairs to this day.« (p. 31).

Murrell supplements their memories with citations from their own books and previous interviews, archival research for examples of their reporting, and current links for further reading and watching. The impressive geographic breadth of the postings ranges from Europe and the Middle East to Africa, Asia, and Australia and Oceania. Dozens of countries make an appearance in the book. Eastern Europe especially is featured in several portraits, including the ongoing war in Ukraine. For instance, Senior International Correspondent Orla Guerin is shown in a helmet and heavy protective gear (p. 126); she tells three harrowing stories of men, women, and children fleeing from the fighting in Bucha, Irpin, and Lysychansk in 2022. And Eastern Europe Correspondent Sarah Rainsford recounts how Russia refused to let her back into the country in August 2021, concluding »Russia today is such a different place and such a dangerous place [...] and Russia for now has been lost« (p. 205). In contrast – and perhaps due to the selection of the interviewees, the BBC postings for women correspondents, and/or the BBC's fewer posts in Latin America in general tied to British colonial history – North, Central, and South America rarely make an appearance (exceptions are for instance mentions of Venezuela, Cuba, and Los Angeles).

The main goal of the book for Murrell, however, is to chart the development of the BBC's employment of women foreign correspondent and how it measures up today, concluding that many improvements have been made. Her 17-page introduction sets the context: Initially ahead of its time for employing women as journalists in the 1920s, the BBC introduced a »marriage bar« in 1933 to ban married women (not men), which was dropped during the Second World War and paved the way for the first accredited woman war correspondent for the BBC, Audrey Russell. Murrell then takes readers through the 1970s equal pay and anti-sex discrimination acts in the UK to highlight gendered pay gaps and discriminations at the BBC in the 1980s and beyond. The revelation in 2017 that the BBC severely underpaid women compared to their men peers shook the BBC. Murrell asks each of her participants how they experienced this moment and how it impacted their sense-making of their work and value. For Carrie Gracie, fluent in Mandarin and serving as the BBC's China correspondent and editor, the report about her pay versus that of her men colleagues »dropped out of the blue and ›was just so disappointing« (p. 144). Murrell recounts how together with at least 43 other women journalists Gracie battled the BBC for a year to eventually receive several years of back pay, which she donated to the Fawcett Society for its Equal Pay Advice Service.

In these and other ways, the book offers detailed insights into the hierarchies and workings of the huge operation that make up the BBC and its many programs. The producing side and management are also explored in depth through the example of Sara Beck, who served as Bureau Chief in Moscow, Jerusalem, and Singapore and was head of the Russian Service and BBC Monitoring. A glossary helps readers to better understand BBC-specific terminology and practices.

Scholars may be a bit disappointed that Murrell did not use her impressive and rich interview collection for a deeper analysis of gendered issues within the BBC in a conclusion chapter to further address overlaps and differences between the interviewees' responses. This could have also included thoughts on the connections between socio-economic backgrounds of the participants and their careers to explore intersectional aspects regarding which women have been able to make it to the top of the BBC reporting posts. Perhaps such an analysis is still forthcoming in another way. Meanwhile, the book is a stirring read and a fascinating trip around the world through the (career) stories of BBC women correspondents, several of which continue their reporting today, such as Tokyo Correspondent Shaimaa Khalil who navigates being Arab and a woman in journalism or Chief International Correspondent Lyse Doucet who frequently reports on Gaza, Israel, and Iran. Moreover, the book can also serve as a teaching tool as each chapter includes practical tips and messages to encourage young women to consider foreign reporting as a riveting and rewarding career choice.

Murrell's book leaves readers with the greatest respect for these journalists' achievements and with a fresh appreciation for their important work to illuminate the truth in what are often messy constellations of history, place, and time. Staying sanguine herself, Murrell cautiously projects to see a woman at the very top of the BBC for the first time, as director-general, before »too long« (p. 15). The vacancy of the post as of this writing, in January 2026, gives hope for another BBC first for women.

A big thank you goes to Sigrun Rottmann for providing feedback for a draft of the review.

About the reviewer

Stine Eckert is Associate Professor of Journalism in the Department of Communication at Wayne State University in Detroit and one of the editors of *Journalistik/ Journalism Research*.

Carsten Brosda, Daniel Müller (eds.). (2025). *Horst Pöttker: Beruf zur Öffentlichkeit. Ausgewählte Schriften zu Theorie, Ethik, Geschichte und Perspektive des Journalismus*. [Horst Pöttker: A Vocation for the Public. Selected Writings on the Theory, Ethics, History, and Future of Journalism.] Herbert von Halem Verlag, 416 pages, 38 euros

Reviewed by Beatrice Dernbach

Carsten Brosda and Daniel Müller have given their mentor Horst Pöttker an extraordinary gift: The volume, published in 2025 and presented to the honoree – born in December 1944 – while he was still in his 81st year, is not a commemorative volume in the usual sense. It does not bring together reminiscences from two dozen colleagues, but rather 18 essays written by the scholar himself. A format that does remarkable justice to his professional seriousness and his ethos; it offers a deeper insight into the decades of his scholarly thought.

Selecting the texts was certainly not an easy choice for the two editors. They divided the 18 publications into four chapters: 1. Theory of journalism (6 contributions), 2. Professional ethics of journalism (2), 3. History of the journalism profession (4), and 4. Future of the journalism profession (6). A brief critical note up front, just to get it out of the way: The fact that the bibliographic references are collected at the end (see p. 409) rather than directly with the articles makes navigation difficult. Brosda and Müller also refrain from placing the texts within their historical or scientific-theoretical context. Their introduction therefore serves as a central guide – and fulfills this task admirably.

For Horst Pöttker, the focus has always been on understanding journalism as a profession and journalism studies as a discipline that always »specifically relates to a social communication practice and its professional mediators« (p. 10). This stems from his scholarly interest and academic training: Born in Bad Segeberg, he studied social sciences, humanities, philosophy, and mathematics in Hamburg, Zurich, Kiel, and Basel, where he earned his Dr. phil.-hist. degree in 1978. From 1982 to 1985, he was a research assistant in the Department of Sociology at the University of Siegen. He then moved into journalism, becoming editor-in-chief of the journal medium at the Gemeinschaftswerk der Evangelischen Publizistik (until 1996). Even during this period, he still had one foot in academia: From 1992 to 1995, he was a visiting professor in communication studies (focus: ethics of journalistic practice) at the University of Leipzig. In 1995, he completed his habilitation in sociology (focus: sociology of communication and public media) at the University of Siegen. The following year, he succeeded Kurt Koszyk as professor for »Theory and Practice of Journalism« at the University of Dortmund. Until his retirement in 2013, he taught and conducted research there,

as well as at the universities of Rostov-on-Don, Iowa, Stavropol, Vienna, and St. Petersburg. In his hometown of Hamburg, he served as a senior professor at the university (2013–2018).

There, at the opening event of the »Augstein Lectures« on November 7, 2016, he began by remarking: »I used to be a journalist; I am no longer one. But I am a fellow traveler of journalism.« As an academic, he must maintain a critical distance from journalism; thereby helping journalism to fulfill its duties and improve – not in the sense of a »critical distance that seeks to shake the very foundations of this profession.« And he adds: »I love this profession. And someone who trains journalists must not only know something about this profession, but must have practiced it themselves.« Any scholar with practical training and any editor with academic training whose hearts bleed in light of current technological, economic, and journalistic developments understands Pöttker immediately.

This attitude and the stages of his academic career outlined above are clearly evident in the background of the 18 essays. Above all, sociological perspectives are formative; thus, Pöttker refers to Émile Durkheim, Georg Simmel, and Max Weber, from whom »communication studies and journalism could still learn a great deal after a century« (see pp. 143–165). Among others, the philosopher Immanuel Kant serves as a model for his journalistic professional ethics. Although the journalism scholar has not, like others in the field, highlighted and explicitly developed systems-theoretical or constructivist approaches, he always anchors journalism in both social and action theory as well as in practice. Journalists must decide where and how they create public discourse. He criticizes, however, the increasing »decisions based on political expediency,« such as legitimizing language conventions and the suppression of certain issues, even though »controversial discussions« would be more effective.

Time and again, Pöttker addresses the »insoluble contradictions of journalism« in the creation of »public sphere as a Sisyphean task« (see pp. 94–113), caught between the demands of timeliness and reliability, and between public interest and social function. At the same time, he shows that it is within these tensions that the »potential for solutions« in journalism lies (see pp. 57–75). He links historical classifications of the profession's relationship to the public sphere (see pp. 114–142) – such as its emergence around 1700 in England (see pp. 208–232) – with current challenges posed by the digital cultural shift (see pp. 355–377).

Horst Pöttker doubted that journalism studies or journalism theory were well placed under the umbrella of communication and media studies. He advocated for its independence and, in his essay »Öffentlichkeit durch Wissenschaft. Zum Programm der Journalistik« [»Public sphere through science. Toward a program for journalism studies«] (see pp. 28–56), published in *Publizistik* in 1998: the »identity problems of communication studies (newspaper studies),«

the necessity of professional orientation in academia, and the need for professionalism in the creation of the public sphere. He assigns journalism the task of establishing quality standards (see pp. 76–93), foremost among them »universality, truth, timeliness, and comprehensibility« (see p. 44) as well as accuracy, relevance, independence, and entertainment value (see pp. 83–89). Pöttker sees the link between theory and professional practice, among other things, in »university media: If journalism studies is to become for the journalism profession something akin to what medicine is for the medical profession, then it needs an institution corresponding to a university hospital that serves the integration of research, teaching, and professional practice (including the possibility of experimental innovations).« (p. 48)

This volume by Carsten Brosda and Daniel Müller is more than a tribute: it is a dense, intelligently composed journey through four decades of journalistic theory. Those who not only practice journalism but also wish to understand it will find a precise and inspiring assessment by an extraordinary scholar who, since his retirement, has not been resting on his laurels but is enthusiastically collaborating with architecture colleagues at TU Dortmund University to explore the field of architecture journalism.

About the reviewer

Dr. Beatrice Dernbach is a professor of Practical Journalism in the Technology Journalism/Technology PR program at Nuremberg Tech. Her areas of expertise include specialized journalism, sustainability and ecology in journalism, narrative and trust in journalism, and science communication.

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Christina Elmer, Lorenz Matzat (eds.). (2024). *Handbuch Daten und KI im Journalismus*. [Handbook of Data and AI in Journalism.] Herbert von Halem Verlag, 386 pages, 32 euros

Reviewed by Tanjev Schultz

The development of data journalism into a distinct professional field within the media has progressed so far that it can no longer be dismissed as mere »hype.« While the situation may currently still be different for »artificial intelligence« (AI), it is foreseeable that it, too, will soon become a standard tool in most newsrooms. Thus, the handbook edited by Christina Elmer and Lorenz Matzat, with twenty individual contributions covering many facets of the topic, fills a gap in the market for practical literature that few have attempted to address until now. The volume can be a useful companion, not least for students and those in journalism training.

Christina Elmer is a professor in Dortmund; previously, she was deputy head of development at Der Spiegel. Lorenz Matzat was a visiting professor in Leipzig and is one of the pioneers of data journalism in Germany. Thanks to their expertise and contacts, the two were able to assemble a group of competent authors, most of whom come from the field of journalism. At the same time, the handbook also provides insights from and for research, particularly through the contribution by Mario Haim and Valerie Hase on »Data Journalism from a Communication Studies Perspective« and the contribution by Jessica Heesen on the »Ethics of Data-Driven Journalism.«

It is noteworthy that while the volume itself is richly illustrated, it does not succumb to a fetish for numbers and graphics or a naive understanding of data. »Given the supposed inviolability of findings derived from data,« says Heesen, »journalists have a responsibility to critically deconstruct data and, especially in data journalism, to question the supposed objectivity of data.« (p. 218) Guiding questions might include: »Where is data collected? What data is (not) recorded? How is data interpreted and described?« (ibid.)

In the examples of data journalism and AI applications that run throughout the handbook, these questions could perhaps have been posed and answered even more systematically. Overall, however, the essays offer many suggestions and starting points for a reflective approach to data and statistics. This ranges from an overview of data sources that can be drawn upon in journalism, through a presentation of the use of geo- and satellite data, to large language models (LLM) and strategies for AI applications in a newsroom. From local journalism to investigative reporting and international division of labor in handling major leaks,

the handbook addresses all currently important operational and organizational issues.

To pick one example: In her essay on the fundamentals and reception of data-driven graphics, Gianna-Carina Grün presents a »checklist for effective visualizations« that newsrooms could put on their desks. Among the questions on this list is: »If the chart is interactive: Is the interaction useful? How could the visualization have been implemented without interaction?« (p. 88) In fact, as a user, one occasionally gets the impression that a graphic contains interactive gimmicks simply because they are possible. Whether they are useful and truly help to uncover and understand something does not always seem to be a priority.

Another example: Uli Köppen explains how the public Bavarian broadcaster Bayerischer Rundfunk handles automation and AI and demonstrates how linear regional news broadcasts are broken down using algorithms so that individual segments can be »tagged« with geolocation – that is, linked to the location of the event – by another algorithm. »This makes our audio content usable for personalization.« (p. 293)

The technical jargon and Anglicisms common in this field might seem a bit annoying or off-putting to some readers. However, they are difficult to avoid. That said, the articles are easy to understand and not unnecessarily complicated. Most of the authors are closely connected to journalistic practice, so their style is correspondingly accessible. While the dynamic developments, especially in AI applications, could quickly make some contributions seem outdated, the handbook currently still feels up-to-date. Thus, in both form and content, it is an asset to journalism and the field of journalism.

About the Reviewer

Tanjev Schultz is a professor of journalism at Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany. He is one of the editors of *Journalistik/Journalism Research – Journal of Journalism Research*. Contact: tanjev.schultz@uni-mainz.de

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Kommunikationswissenschaft



CARSTEN BROSDA / DANIEL MÜLLER (HRSG.)

Horst Pöttker: Beruf zur Öffentlichkeit. Ausgewählte Schriften zu Theorie, Ethik, Geschichte und Perspektive des Journalismus

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In zahlreichen Aufsätzen hat Horst Pöttker, viele Jahre Professor für Journalistik in Dortmund und danach Gast- und Seniorprofessor u.a. in Hamburg und Wien, von den 1970er-Jahren bis heute die Bausteine einer Theorie des journalistischen Berufs vorgelegt, die das journalistische Subjekt und die journalistische Ethik konsequent im Blick behält und im Einklang mit der internationalen Journalismusforschung auf den Praxisbezug der Journalismustheorie beharrt.

Während viele journalismustheoretische Arbeiten im deutschsprachigen Raum die Systemtheorie oder den Konstruktivismus als Ausgangspunkte wählen, setzt Horst Pöttker, dessen 80. Geburtstag Anlass für diesen Sammelband ist, auf eine gründliche historische Analyse und handlungstheoretische Soziologie.



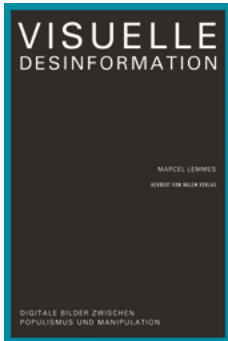
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Medienwissenschaft



MARCEL LEMMES

Visuelle Desinformation. Digitale Bilder zwischen Populismus und Manipulation

2025, 368 S., 17 Abb., Broschur, 213 x 142 mm, dt.

ISBN (Print) 978-3-86962-741-0 | 34,00 EUR

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Populistische Akteur:innen nutzen die Macht digitaler Bilder gezielt für Desinformation und emotionale Mobilisierung. Doch wie genau funktionieren diese visuellen Strategien?

Das Buch schließt eine entscheidende Forschungslücke, indem es die visuellen Komponenten populistischer Kommunikation analysiert. Dafür entwickelt die Arbeit zwei innovative Bausteine: einen präzisen, auf Manipulation statt Täuschung basierenden Desinformationsbegriff und eine aktuelle bildpragmatische Theorie des populistischen Bildes. Das Ergebnis ist ein scharfes Analyseraster, das die Mechanismen visueller Manipulation systematisch erfasst und verständlich macht.



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Kommunikationswissenschaft



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