

# medien & zeit

Kommunikation in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart

## Nachruf

**„Das war ein Forschungsinstitut, wie es das heute  
praktisch nicht mehr gibt.“**

SIMON SAX & ALBERT GELVER

## THEMENSCHWERPUNKT

**„Critical Junctures“ in Democratic Media Systems**

**„Critical Junctures“ in Democratic Media Systems:  
Concepts and Backgrounds**

TOBIAS EBERWEIN, CHRISTINA KRAKOVSKY & CHRISTIAN OGGOLDER

**Critical Junctures of Ethnic Media in Austria**

YELIZAVETA ANDAKULOVA

**Elite Continuity and Media Transformations**

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**The Platformization of Media Structures  
as a Critical Juncture**

MARKUS UHLMANN, JONATHAN KROPF, VIKTORIA HORN,  
CLAUDE DRAUDE & JÖRN LAMLA

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# medien & zeit

## Inhalt

### Nachruf

„Das war ein Forschungsinstitut, wie es das heute praktisch nicht mehr gibt.“

Erinnerungen an Holger Böning und die *Deutsche Presseforschung* von zwei früheren studentischen Mitarbeitern

SIMON SAX & ALBERT GELVER . . . . . 3

### THEMENSCHWERPUNKT

„Critical Junctures“ in Democratic Media Systems

### EDITORIAL

„Critical Junctures“ in Democratic Media Systems: Concepts and Backgrounds

TOBIAS EBERWEIN, CHRISTINA KRAKOVSKY & CHRISTIAN OGGOLDER . . . . . 6

Critical Junctures of Ethnic Media in Austria

YELIZAVETA ANDAKULOVA . . . . . 12

Elite Continuity and Media Transformations

An Asymmetrical Comparison of Elite Continuity in Albania and Myanmar

MELANIE RADUE & JONILA GODOLE . . . . . 23

The Platformization of Media Structures as a Critical Juncture

A Pragmatist Perspective on Value Mediation by Journalistic Start-ups and Established Publishers

MARKUS UHLMANN, JONATHAN KROPF, VIKTORIA HORN,

CLAUDE DRAUDE & JÖRN LAMLA . . . . . 36

### REZENSIONEN

Rezensionen . . . . . 49

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ERRATA Ausgabe 1/2024

Das Heft 1/2024 ist im Jahrgang 39, nicht 38, wie am Cover versehentlich angegeben, erschienen.

Der Name des von Thomas Birkner rezensierten und renommierten Autors des 2023 erschienenen Buches *So funktioniert Österreichs Medienwelt* (Wien: Falter Verlag, 232 Seiten) lautet selbstverständlich Harald Fidler, nicht Filder (S. 59). Wir bitten um Entschuldigung!

## Nachruf

„Das war ein Forschungsinstitut, wie es das heute praktisch nicht mehr gibt.“<sup>1</sup>

Erinnerungen an Holger Böning und die *Deutsche Presseforschung* von zwei früheren studentischen Mitarbeitern

SIMON SAX

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ALBERT GELVER  
Bremen

Wer die Räumlichkeiten des Instituts Deutsche Presseforschung auf der vierten Ebene der Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Bremen betritt, dem liegt der Geruch alten Papiers in der Nase: „eine Kombination aus Grasnoten, eine Spur Säure und ein Hauch Vanille“ (Strlič et al., 2009, 8617). Vor den Fenstern der Büros, die an den kargen Dachgarten der Bibliothek grenzen, kreischen die Möwen. Drinnen dämpfen Papiermassen in den Regalen und auf den Tischen das Gekreische wie das gesprochene Wort und geben Gedanken Raum, die wie Papierflieger über den Gang schweben. Ein grüner Nadelfilzteppich, der dort schon seit der Einweihung des spätmodernen Betonbaus 1975 liegen könnte, tut sein Übriges. Bis zu seiner Emeritierung 2016 wirkte Holger Böning am Institut Deutsche Presseforschung in zwei Büros, verbunden durch eine Zwischentür. Seit 2003 war er Sprecher und *spiritus rector* des Instituts (Blome et al., 2015). Zu Beginn seines Ruhestands zog er aus und verlagerte sich und seine ungebrochene Schaffenskraft endgültig in das behagliche Arbeitszimmer im Obergeschoss des Bremer Reihenhauses in der Scharnhorststraße, zugleich Sitz des gemeinsam mit seiner Frau Elke Ehlers betriebenen Verlags *edition lumière*.

Wer die Presseforschung kennenlernen durfte, als Holger Böning dort während seiner letzten Jahre an der Universität Bremen wirkte, der fühlt sich heute, wenn er vor seinem alten Büro steht, wie in einer Zeitkapsel, denn seine Präsenz in diesen Räumen hatte einen gehörigen Anteil daran, dass nicht nur jeder Winkel sozusagen Pressegeschichte atmete, sondern auch im heutigen universitären Betrieb aus der Zeit gefallen wirkt: Dort war man eingeladen zum (zweck)freien wissenschaftlichen Nachdenken und -sinnen, zum zeitintensiven Eintauchen auch in Einzelfragen, jenseits von den Sachzwängen und Widrigkeiten einer zusehends beschleunigten akademischen Welt, wo jahrelange, geduldige Grundlagenforschung in den Geisteswissenschaften eher als Karrierehindernis gilt. Nein, diese Widrigkeiten blieben draußen, sie wurden an der gläsernen Eingangstür zur Presseforschung abgelegt,

anders wäre die Holger Böning so wichtige pressebibliographische Forschung nicht möglich gewesen. Drinnen schrieb er intensiv, aber immer in aller Ruhe an seinem gerade nächsten Buch (lenkte dabei fast unmerklich und mit leichter Hand die Geschicke des Instituts) und inspirierte nicht wenige, es ihm gleichzutun.

Ob die studentische Hilfskraft um 9:00, 10:00 oder 13:00 Uhr kam – darauf achtete Holger Böning nicht. Er vergab auch keine Arbeitsaufträge, vielmehr bat er in dieser oder jener Angelegenheit um Unterstützung. Eine Hilfskraftstelle bei ihm bedeutete mehr Förderung denn Erwerbsarbeit. Ohne sein Zutun wäre es nicht denkbar gewesen, schon im zweiten Studienjahr einen Sammelbandaufsatz zu veröffentlichen. Dermaßen trug er weiter, was ihm selbst einst zuteilgeworden war:

„Ich bekam eine halbe Stelle in einem Forschungsprojekt zur Spätaufklärung. Ich konnte mich dort drei Jahre ganz auf die Dissertation konzentrieren. Wunderbar, ungestört. Mein Lehrer [Hans-Wolf Jäger, Anm. d. Verf.] hat jedes Kapitel gelesen. Es war immer alles rot angestrichen, von oben bis unten. [...] Ich war jedes Mal unglücklich, wenn ich etwas zurückbekam. Es war sehr intensiv [...]“ (Böning, 2019).

Ähnlich verhielt es sich mit Texten, die Holger Böning durchgesehen hatte, sie waren stilistisch nicht wiederzuerkennen. Wer mit ihm in den universitären Betrieb hineinsozialisiert wurde, der könnte es für selbstverständlich gehalten haben, dass Professoren die Texte ihrer Schützlinge gerne und gewinnbringend gegenlesen. In Erinnerung geblieben ist sein Merksatz: „*Eigentlich* ist eigentlich immer überflüssig.“ Die Kurt Tucholsky-Referenz verschwieg er, wohl auch, weil er tunlichst vermeiden wollte, den Eindruck intellektueller Überlegenheit zu vermitteln:

„... nein, ‚eigentlich‘ ist überhaupt kein Wort. Das ist eine Lebensauffassung. Da leben die Leute in ihren Vierzimmerwohnungen und verdienen elfhundertundsiebenunddreißig Mark im Monat, und haben eine Frau und zwei Kinder (oder umgekehrt), und fahren jeden Tag mit der Untergrundbahn ... aber ‚eigentlich‘ sind sie ganz etwas anders. Dichter zum Beispiel [...]“.

Es wimmelt von verkappten Königen, die inkognito leben. Vielleicht braucht jeder diesen kleinen Privatstolz, sonst könnte er es ja wohl nicht durchstehen; vielleicht muß diese Bezugnahme auf einen tieferen, oft nur vermeintlichen Wert dasein, man könnte sonst nicht leben. Es gibt so viel Verhinderte ...“ (Panter, 1928).

Holger Böning war das Gegenteil eines Verhinderten, er war ein Berufener. Berufen zur Menschenfreundlichkeit – und zur Gelehrsamkeit bis zum Äußersten. Eine biographische Unausweichlichkeit war das nicht. Im Gespräch mit ihm hatte man den Eindruck, dass der soziale Auf-

<sup>1</sup> Böning (2019)

stieg vom Starkstromelektriker zum Professor resilient gemacht hatte gegen jenen eingebildeten Stolz, den Kurt Tucholsky persifliert. Akademischer Dünkel war Holger Böning fremd: In der Presseforschung trug er meist ein schlichtes, schwarzes T-Shirt – das graue Sakko warf er nur über, wenn sich offizieller Besuch angekündigt hatte.

Neigte sich der Arbeitstag in der Presseforschung dem Ende entgegen, schallte sanft das Cembalo aus dem Büro von Holger Böning. Drinnen saß er, umgeben von vielen, vielen Büchern – Bücher in den funktionalen Wandregalen, Bücher auf den Tischen, Bücher auf dem selbstgezimmernten Holzregal über der Tür –, ließ die Finger über die Tastatur fliegen und hörte Johann Mattheson. Böning (2019) über Mattheson:

*„Er war der Erste, der sich 1712 in einer Zeitschrift gegen das Schlagen von Kindern ausgesprochen hat. Wo die Ehre der Musik oder das Ansehen von Musikern in Gefahr war, konnte er ausrasten. Das war ein knorriger Mensch. Das schätze ich.“*

Die Sympathie des Biographen gegenüber seinem Protagonisten mag auch von einer gewissen Geistesverwandtschaft herrühren. Die Schläge als Teil der Kuren für untergewichtige Kinder im puritanischen Adenauer-Deutschland hatten Holger Böning (2019) zeitlebens Gewichtsprobleme beschert. Seine unaufgeregte, aber immer eindeutige Ablehnung gegenüber allzu autoritärem Auftreten möchte man in einer Zeit, in der rechte Demagogen wieder daran arbeiten, die Menschenwürde zu beschädigen, jeder Pädagogin, jedem Pädagogen anempfehlen.

Knorrig wurde der ruhige Mensch hinter dem Schreibtisch mit der stets griffbereiten Kaffeetasse gegenüber jenen, die sich am Kulturgut Zeitung versündigten, nachzulesen etwa im *Jahrbuch für Kommunikationsgeschichte* 2005:

*„Hassen Bibliothekare den Gegenstand ihrer alltäglichen Berufsarbeit? Das Vernichtungswerk wird nach Metern gemessen. Das ‚Hamburger Abendblatt‘ mit den Jahrgängen 1962–1984 zum Beispiel besitzt die Frechheit, 49m wertvollsten Bibliotheks-Regal-Platzes zu okkupieren“ (Böning, 2006, 253).*

Papier hassende Bibliothekare boten Holger Böning Anlass zum fröhlichen Streitgespräch. Mit ganz anderer Ernsthaftigkeit arbeitete er sich an den geistigen Wegbereitern der Shoa ab und an jenen, deren „Haltungen des blanken Opportunismus und der zynischen Gesinnungslosigkeit“ den Völkermord erst ermöglicht hatten (Böning, 2001; siehe auch Böning, 2020). Wichtiger aber war ihm, über die Menschen zu schreiben, denen die Nationalsozialisten Würde und Lebensrecht abgesprochen hatten (Böning, 2001). Einprägsam geblieben ist den damaligen studentischen Mitarbeitern die Zuarbeit für die 2016 erschienene Julius Moses-Biographie: 404

engbedruckte Seiten umfasst das Werk über diesen 1868 geborenen und 1942 ermordeten Vertreter der *jüdischen Renaissance*, der Sozialdemokratie, des Weimarer Parlamentarismus und der humanistischen Sozialmedizin (Böning, 2016). Die biographische Leistung erscheint in noch hellerem Licht, wenn man bedankt, dass Holger Böning hier weit außerhalb der von ihm sonst beackerten Frühen Neuzeit arbeitete.

Es war einer jener Abende, an denen man durch die Fenster der Büros in der Presseforschung auf das Panorama des rotgefärbten Himmels über Bremen blicken kann, Johann Mattheson schallte zum Hilfskräfte-Büro hinüber: Der studentische Mitarbeiter hatte am Mikrofilmlesegerät Ausgaben der USPD-Zeitung *Freiheit* – Julius Moses war USPD-Mitglied – gesichtet, schritt über den grünen Nadelfilzteppich in Richtung Feierabend, hinüber zum Büro von Holger Böning, steckte kurz den Kopf hinein und fand sich in einem Gespräch über den Nutzen der Presse für die historische Forschung wieder. Natürlich wusste Holger Böning, dass Zeitungsberichte historische Ereignisse nicht einfach spiegeln, er wurde aber auch bei dieser Gelegenheit nicht müde, den Wert der Presse als Quelle für die historische Forschung insgesamt zu betonen: Wer einen Blick in die 1586 Endnoten der Moses-Biographie wirft, wird feststellen, wie hoch er diesen Wert einschätzte. Ein verblüffend praktikabler Ratschlag von ihm: „Und wenn Sie Ihre Quellen gesichtet haben: Beginnen Sie einfach zu schreiben!“ Für Holger Böning war gute Forschung aktives Tun, dazu berufen prinzipiell jede und jeder guten Willens – man denke an seine außerordentlich produktive, langjährige Zusammenarbeit mit Emmy Moepps. Das Gehabe der Verhinderten überließ er anderen: „Vorbildlich ist für mich, wenn man empirisch gesättigt arbeitet, aus den Quellen“ (Böning, 2019).

Eine Quelle nicht endender Denkanstöße war Holger Böning seinen akademischen Wegbegleiterinnen und Wegbegleitern lange über die Emeritierung hinaus. Durchbrochen von der Corona-Pandemie und seiner Krankheit, wurden die Besuche bei ihm zu Hause in der Scharnhorststraße seltener. Uns bleibt die Erinnerung daran: Zwei Stockwerke des Aufgangs zum geräumigen Büro im Dachgeschoss, das Treppenhaus säumen Bilder Heiko Hermanns (o. D.), Öl auf Leinwand, „Figur und Grund, Positiv – und Negativform, Bewegung und Stillstand“, einen verstrickenden „Zusammenhang von Raum und Zeit“ schaffend. Im Büro sitzt Holger Böning am Schreibtisch und arbeitet unermüdlich an einer der unzähligen Erscheinungen des eigenen Verlags. Man könnte sagen, er verschob in seinen Büchern, und darin Hermann nicht unähnlich, das Raum-Zeit-Gefüge, genauer: das Raum-Zeit-Gefüge der Aufklärung – vom armen Bauern aus Toggenburg über das bürgerliche Hamburg bis hin zu Friedrich II. und schließlich in die Gegenwart hinein, die ihm auf andere Weise, aber nicht minder, aufklärungsbedürftig erschien.

Und vielleicht war dies das Beeindruckendste, schon damals, als wir ihn in den ersten Semestern des Studiums

kennenlernten: Wie er seine raumzeitlichen Neubewertungen unpräntiös und intellektuell großzügig teilte.

Holger Böning hat sich mit seiner Arbeit und seinem Wirken an der Universität Bremen in die Herzen und Gedanken vieler eingepägt. Seine unermüdliche Hingabe an

das wissenschaftliche Arbeiten, sein unerschütterlicher Glaube an den Wert der Presse als historische Quelle und seine Förderung junger Menschen zeichnen das Bild eines Presseforschers, der weit mehr war als nur ein berufener Gelehrter. Er war ein Mentor, ein Freund und ein Vorbild.

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## Editorial

# „Critical Junctures“ in Democratic Media Systems: Concepts and Backgrounds

TOBIAS EBERWEIN, CHRISTINA KRAKOVSKY, CHRISTIAN OGGOLDER

### Why critical junctures?

When confronted with the concept of “critical junctures” for the first time, some historical researchers may raise a puzzled eyebrow. Initially, the term seems to indicate an occupation with isolated events rather than contextual embedding. But a closer look at the current theoretical discussion reveals a far more nuanced approach.

Capoccia and Kelemen (2007, p. 348) argue critical junctures are characterized as brief intervals of time during which there is a significantly increased likelihood that the decisions made by agents will impact the outcome. They stress that, while such an upheaval may be viewed as a starting and central point, it is always viewed in light of and in relation to earlier and later longer-term events. Examining these critical periods highlights the importance of paying attention to formative experiences and emphasizes how significant the past is for understanding the present (Donnelly & Hogan, 2012, p. 328).

This description encapsulates the idea that agents confront a wider than usual range of feasible options during a brief phase, and that their decisions about these possibilities are likely to have a significant impact on subsequent outcomes. Further, by emphasizing that the probability that actors’ choices will affect outcomes decreases after the critical juncture, this definition suggests that their choices during the critical juncture trigger a path-dependent process that constrains future possibilities. As such, the critical juncture constitutes a situation that is qualitatively different from the anticipated historical development of the institutional framework (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007). This suggests that such critical turning points cause paths to alter because they allow for the expression and application of novel ideas that will effect change. Path dependency sets in and makes it challenging to reroute development after the effects of some important junctures are socially accepted. Historical determinism can be avoided, particularly by combining the ideas of “path dependency” and “critical junctures”, because they show that route-dependent behaviors can continue even after an apparent shift has occurred (Peruško et al., 2021, p. 20).

Thus, it is apparent that while institutional frameworks are integrated into the concept, the significance of individual and sometimes unpredictable behavior is not diminished. Critical junctures raise the possibility of subversive results dependent on the choices made by individual players, not just at levels of institutions but also at societal and ideational (Collier & Munck, 2017; Donnelly & Hogan,

2012). As Carlos E. Gallegos-Anda (2021, p. 108) succinctly phrases the argument: “The juncture is ‘critical,’ due to the unforeseen transformations experienced in the institutional, political, legal, and economic realms, which in time, produced a new legal framing that expanded or innovated approaches to economic, social and economic rights.” The particular outcome varies depending on the people involved, the specific historical context and follows a characteristic path for every instance.

Critical junctures, in any event, are periods of stress or crisis that cannot be adequately handled by the institutions and policies in place, or that are no longer appropriate. As a result, they put the current order to the test and create a lot of pressure for sudden, abrupt, and path-dependent adjustments (Roberts, 2015). When such tipping points occur, media systems in democratically structured states typically face difficulties (Lamuedra et al., 2019; McChesney, 2007; Price, 2021; Shepperd, 2021).

Within this framework, research on journalism generally focuses on changes in the news production process. Digitization is a prime example because it has drastically altered both the practices of journalism and the profession. The way that editors handle hate news, disinformation, misinformation, and threats, as well as interactions with recipients and audience members on social media, are all equally significant. Taking a more comprehensive approach, research on critical junctures also takes into account social, economic, or political settings. Therefore, approaches in communication studies can also focus on impacts that affect the media system. For instance, political system changes in Europe starting in the late 1980s offer a relevant field of research – such as Germany’s reunification and the fall of the Soviet Union – as well as feminist movements, particularly from the 1960s onwards, or the financial crisis of 2008/2009.

This special issue of *medien & zeit* focuses on such critical junctures from a communication studies perspective. The aim is to reflect on and discuss specific turning points at the level of actors as well as in institutional and structural settings, for individual states, supranational organizations, or in international contexts.

### Media-related risks and opportunities for deliberative communication – the Mediadelcom approach

The use of the critical junctures approach as a guiding framework for this special issue emerged from the Horizon 2020 project “Media-related risks and opportunities for deliberative communication: Development scenarios of the European media landscape” (Mediadelcom). This three-year research project (2021–2024), led by Halliki Harro-Loit from the University of Tartu (Estonia), brought together researchers from 14 EU countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Sweden). The project aimed to work out a methodology enabling the assessment and forecast of the



risks and opportunities for deliberative communication emerging in the process of media transformation between 2000 and 2020 (cf. Harro-Loit et al., 2024).

While current research on media transformations heavily focuses on structural crises – such as platform monopolies, declining journalism standards, and the spread of misinformation – there is a lack of a comprehensive approach to addressing media-related risks and opportunities. Mediadelcom aimed to fill this gap by providing a structured assessment of these risks and opportunities, developing a new holistic approach (cf. Oller Alonso et al., 2024) that examines the interplay between

- *legal and ethical regulation,*
- *journalism,*
- *media usage patterns, and*
- *media-related competencies.*

Legal and ethical regulations play a fundamental role in the context of risks and opportunities concerning data protection laws at the EU and national level, informational self-determination, freedom of information and expression, access to information, and media accountability.

Transformations in journalism and the news production process create risks and opportunities for journalistic professionalism, the job market for journalists, and the competitiveness of content producers in global, national, and hyperlocal news markets. These changes also impact the role and position of public service media.

The availability (or lack) of knowledge regarding shifts in media usage and citizen engagement with news affects the ability of decision-makers to make informed choices. The news media's success or failure in delivering reliable information and fact-based analysis impacts the electorate's ability to make informed decisions directly. Technological innovations allow media companies to collect various data online, such as visitor metrics. However, they often keep these data confidential for business reasons.

Media-related competencies of citizens as media users or news producers play a crucial role in journalism's sustainability and influence media consumption.

These four domains are also subject to change over time, so the concept of critical junctures is equally relevant here. Several interrelated factors have driven changes in media production, distribution, use, and professional practice. These include the exponential growth of social media since 2002, changes in the advertising and media economy as media ownership has globalized, the economic crisis of 2008/2009, the rapid proliferation of smartphones since 2007/2008 coupled with technological advances, and the introduction of new data protection regulations in Europe since 2018/2019. Although these technological and global aspects are transnational, changes within national media ecosystems should be viewed as contingent historical processes, where earlier phases influence the present and the present sets the conditions for future developments. From a historical comparative approach, this project examined the processes of change and continuity in media ecosystems

and the impact of these turning points concerning risks and opportunities for deliberative communication in specific countries. Thus, the core concept of Mediadelcom was based on a comprehensive analysis of the discourse on “media-related risks and opportunities” in the context of studies on media transformations and innovations (cf. Mediadelcom, n.d.). The overall goal of the project was to develop scenarios and recommendations for knowledge-based media governance.

### **Mediadelcom: Lessons learned after three years of research**

In view of the questions raised above, the research carried out for Mediadelcom – at least in relation to the recent development of European media systems – provides a variety of answers that complement the studies bundled in this special issue. These include insights from the theoretical and empirical research perspective as well as practical advice for media managers and policy makers.

### **The concept of media monitoring capabilities as a diagnostic tool for media systems under pressure**

From a theoretical perspective, the concept of media monitoring capabilities developed by Mediadelcom (cf. Harro-Loit et al., 2024) plays a pivotal role, as it not only enriches the scientific discourse, but also provides an important basis for the development of a diagnostic tool for media systems under pressure. The project defines the capabilities of media monitoring as

*the ability, possibilities and resources, and motivations of various agents to observe and analyze the developments of the media over space and time, and the changes in society emanating from the media transformations, as well as related risks and opportunities for deliberative communication. (Harro-Loit et al., 2024, p. 21)*

Put simply, the aim is to scrutinize the contribution of media and communication research to the development of media systems – and to assess its usefulness. Mediadelcom sees the ideal of deliberative communication (cf. Bächtiger et al., 2018) as the main goal of sustainable media development in democratic societies. The study intends to clarify which characteristics media systems must have in order to create the best possible conditions for deliberative communication and to what extent media and communication science research can contribute to achieving this goal. In the sense of the structure-agency approach (cf. Archer, 1995), both research-related infrastructures and individual monitoring actors as well as their relationships with one another need to be evaluated. An analytical differentiation between data, information, knowledge, and wisdom, as suggested by the DIKW model commonly used in information sciences (cf. e.g. Frické, 2018), is crucial for this endeavor.

The partners involved in Mediadecom used this theoretical model for a comparative study in the 14 European countries covered by the project. A systematic inventory of the research infrastructures and actors in all countries was carried out on the basis of literature reviews and database research. In addition, all country teams conducted in-depth interviews with up to 16 experts each (for further details, see Lauk et al., 2024).

The results show considerable discrepancies between the countries surveyed (for a summary, see Harro-Loit & Eberwein, 2024): For example, the North-Western European countries in the sample (Germany, Sweden and, to a limited extent, Austria) in particular have a lively tradition of problem-oriented communication and media research. In many Eastern European countries, on the other hand, there is still a need to catch up. Common problems and challenges for the capabilities of media monitoring in all European countries are (a) information fragmentation; (b) information overproduction; (c) lack of consistency in studies or interruption of repeated or longitudinal studies; (d) low or uneven information and knowledge quality; (e) missing research competencies; and (f) very little evidence that acquired wisdom is used for media governance. For Mediadecom countries with weak media monitoring capabilities, it is evident that these can become a critical juncture for media system development themselves – for example, when research findings are instrumentalized for political purposes.

### Risks and opportunities of media system transformations in Europe

In addition to the analysis of media monitoring capabilities, the evaluation of empirical studies on specific risks and opportunities of recent media system transformations in Europe was also an important concern of Mediadecom. To this end, the international research consortium evaluated more than 5,600 research publications on relevant issues alongside in-depth interviews with experts, focusing on selected research domains in which the discourse on the opportunities and risks of media change is currently particularly pronounced (see above). Two methods were used to interpret the diverse data: (1) a qualitative meta-analysis of the bibliographic findings and interview transcripts and (2) a comparative fuzzy set analysis of selected basic data (cf. Peruško et al., 2024a). The qualitative analysis reveals a considerable range of factors in all domains examined, which can become either an opportunity or a risk for media system development:

- In the area of media law, it became apparent that solid laws alone are insufficient to ensure freedom of expression and information as prerequisites for deliberative communication. Rather, freedom of expression depends on the implementation of these laws in the national context – a task that the countries examined fulfill to highly different degrees (cf. Psychogiopoulou et al., 2024).
- The study diagnosed a broad spectrum of infrastructures for media ethics discourses in the Mediadecom sample: Some countries – such as Sweden, Germany and Austria – can point to a long history of media self-regulation allowing central institutions such as the national press councils and their codes of ethics to enjoy a comparatively high reputation within the journalistic profession. By contrast, most of the newer EU member states lack this history – with corresponding consequences for media accountability (cf. Kreutler et al., 2024).
- For the research field of journalism, the project identifies common patterns across the countries studied as well as unique trends in particular countries. The general trends include current challenges for media organizations such as the gradual loss of both audiences/users and advertisers, in particular the financing of public media, but also a decreasing job satisfaction owing to changes in professional standards and a deepened commercialization/algorithmization logic and changes in production. In contrast, a large number of risk factors can be identified at the macro, meso and micro levels in the individual countries studied (cf. Berglez et al., 2024).
- The analysis revealed many influences on the quality of deliberative communication in Europe in terms of media usage. The first of the two most important overarching trends was the low willingness to pay for the news, resulting in the risk that quality journalism is accessible only for an increasingly small group of citizens. The second trend was an observed rise in distrust in the news across many studied countries, ascribed to the post-COVID-19 atmosphere, oligarchizing and politization of the media, as well as success of misinformation and disinformation connected to the rise of alternative media (cf. Jansová et al., 2024).
- In the area of media-related competencies, the study illustrates major differences between the 14 Mediadecom countries, both in terms of policies, agents, and evaluation. A fundamental problem is the lack of a generally accepted definition of media literacy, on the basis of which a uniform model for fostering media-related competencies could be developed. Instead, a one-sided focus on digital competencies dominates in most countries, which the study suggests poses a risk to deliberative communication, in that an overly narrow focus on technologies could quickly obscure the importance of media and journalism in democratic societies (cf. Gálik et al., 2024).

Mediadecom's detailed analysis enables researchers to identify significant turning points or critical junctures in the development of media systems for all research domains examined in the period between 2000 and 2020 – some of which depend on the respective country context, but some of which also have transnational relevance. The most important overarching trends include the digital

shift, the development of the Internet, and the proliferation of media platforms – as well as, most recently, the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast, many other trends have influenced the countries in the Mediadelcom sample in highly differing ways. This applies, for example, to the major economic crisis of 2008/2009:

*in some of them, new media appeared and some old media perished, and the position of journalists became increasingly precarious. Moreover, the economic crisis had some political ramifications which influenced the situation in the media – the populist turn, particularly in Hungary and Poland. However, political change can also present opportunities, as in the latest turn of the parliamentary election in Poland, where we see (for the moment) a re-democratization with positive influences on the media. (Peruško et al., 2024b, p. 159)*

Such detailed findings were to be systematized with the help of a comparative fuzzy set analysis of selected basic data from all 14 Mediadelcom countries (cf. Vozab et al., 2024). The focus was on the questions of which countries in the sample have a healthy level of deliberative communication and the factors that can contribute to this positive state. The evaluation shows that a majority of the media systems under scrutiny cannot fulfill the goal of promoting deliberative communication. In addition to Sweden, Germany and Austria, only Estonia and Greece belong to the sample of countries in which the contextual factors support the development of deliberative communication. The study also makes it possible to identify specific conditions that enable a high degree of deliberative communication. These include: high democratic quality; strong economic development; the autonomy of public service media; the existence of journalistic codes of ethics; high journalistic skills; and a strong use of ‘legacy media’. However, the possible paths to reach this aim vary greatly from country to country: For example, the existence of a certain condition for deliberative communication can be an important parameter in one media system, but remain ineffective in another. Conversely, risk factors can also have diverse effects across countries. The Mediadelcom analysis thus illustrates once again the importance of taking into account country-specific contexts in comparative media system analysis – another lesson for research into critical junctures in media and communications.

### Scenario-building and recommendations for wisdom-based media governance

Mediadelcom also highlights the relevance of these questions for media managers and policy makers. To this end, the international research consortium has coined the concept of “wisdom-based media governance” (cf. Harro-Loit et al., 2024). According to this concept, only research data that is comprehensibly described, analyzed and applied can have a concrete and measurable social value.

Mediadelcom has illustrated this by translating key findings from the project into a range of scenarios for media system development in Europe (Matthews & Harro-Loit, 2024), which would enable the elaboration of recommendations for media governance in Europe and the participating member states (Mediadelcom, 2023). The project therefore illustrates once more that only those who observe the past can also make well-founded recommendations and forecasts for future trends. Naturally, implementation is the responsibility of actors outside the academic system.

### Concept and contents of the special issue

While the articles collected in this special issue of *medien & zeit* are not a direct result of the research conducted within Mediadelcom, they are related to the project in manifold ways. The issue presents three case studies from differing national contexts, each with its unique approach to examining critical junctures.

The first contribution considers the importance of the historical perspective in the context of media system analyses, which was repeatedly emphasized within Mediadelcom. In her paper “Critical Junctures of Ethnic Media in Austria”, **Yelizaveta Andakulova** provides a long-term analysis regarding the development of ethnic media in Austria during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Her study aims to identify those critical junctures that have significantly influenced the formation and course of ethnic media in Austria. The author describes five turning points that mostly coincide with political changes and, of course, with the digital transformation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In their paper “Elite Continuity and Media Transformations: An Asymmetrical Comparison of Elite Continuity in Albania and Myanmar,” **Melanie Radue** and **Jonila Godole** offer an exploratory look beyond European boundaries. Despite having distinct historical and cultural origins, both nations’ media landscapes have undergone similar transformations. Using Colin Sparks’ concept of ‘elite continuity’, this study examines and contrasts critical junctures in the post-authoritarian media systems of both nations. To investigate the intricate connections among political movements, corporate interests, and changing media landscapes, they combine qualitative research methods with historical contextualization. The authors are able to highlight the ways in which elite continuity manifests itself at pivotal points, shedding light on the long-lasting effects of deeply ingrained power structures. The study expands our understanding of the enduring effects of elites and path dependencies in dynamic media environments.

The authors **Markus Uhlmann**, **Jonathan Kropf**, **Viktoria Horn**, **Claude Draude** and **Jörn Lamla** dedicate their contribution „The Platformization of Media Structures as a Critical Juncture“ to the topic of media platformization. They see the crisis in digital journalism caused by platforms as a critical juncture and, in the spirit of Mediadelcom, advocate seeing not only the risks but also the opportunities of platformization, experimenting

with new possibilities, and reinventing journalism. In addition, the authors focus on the challenges of communicating different values that are relevant in the platformization of media structures, asking how values can be communicated based on 'prices', socio-technical 'design', and the 'cultivation' (promotion) of public negotiation and participation processes. By comparing two German online journalism start-ups and an established digital mainstream publisher, the results show that niche actors like the start-ups tend to be autonomous from the prevailing structural conditions. Although the strategies for conveying values can differ considerably, a shared commitment to values is apparent. In contrast, established actors feel subject to deterministic influences

that hinder the development of lasting value loyalties. Thus, the analysis also sheds light on the role of the socio-technical ecosystem in shaping value mediation and underlines the usefulness of co-validation approaches. In summary, both the Mediadelcom project and the contributions presented in this issue of *medien & zeit* demonstrate the wide range and relevance of questions dealing with critical junctures in the context of media change and its consequences. While many issues remain to be tackled, the collection showcases exemplary research findings from a range of subdisciplines of communication studies that can hopefully stimulate further research in this field. The temporal dimension will prove indispensable for this task.

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# Critical Junctures of Ethnic Media in Austria

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## Abstract

In light of globalization, migration, and the imperative to safeguard human rights, the examination of ethnic media has become a pertinent and noteworthy area of research within the realm of media studies. Nevertheless, the historical exploration of ethnic media in Austria remains insufficient. Thus, the objective of this research paper is to identify the key critical junctures that have exerted a substantial impact on the evolution and course of ethnic media in Austria. By employing the theory concerning changes in Austrian history at the national level, this research aims to unveil the pivotal moments experienced by Austrian ethnic media in the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century.

Keywords: *ethnic media, critical junctures, Austria*

Ethnic media refers to news outlets that cater to specific ethnic or cultural communities serving as a vital source of information and connection for immigrant and minority communities, providing a platform for cultural expression and community engagement. The term “minority media” is an often used to alternative and appropriate name since the group of people for whom these information sites are established belong to the minority among the general population. However, the term is limiting, because not all minorities are ethnic, and some social groups are referred to as “minorities”. Ethnic media are information outlets created for, and often by, immigrants, ethnic and linguistic minority groups, and indigenous communities, delivering news from their either or both their home country and the country of relocation, typically in the language of the ethnic minority group or bilingually. Over the years, ethnic media has undergone several critical junctures that have transformed its role in society. This research paper aims to identify critical junctures and their impact on ethnic media, commencing from the conclusion of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the early 19th century and concluding with the digital transformation of the 21st century. Throughout this period, ethnic media in Austria were established and began their developmental trajectory. The research suggests that the development of ethnic media in Austria has been occurring gradually; however, certain historical situations reinforced or, indeed slowed down the process. Ethnic media have never been as widely disseminated as mainstream media due to their restricted audience. However, they still require research attention: Austria, being ethnically and culturally diverse, necessitates the study of media from various communities. An essential feature of a democratic society is the provision of access to information and the capacity of all citizens to participate in the political process. Ethnic media plays a crucial role in enabling this opportunity by acting as a bridge between minority communities and the broader society, disseminating news and information that is important to their needs and interests. In this manner, the apprehensions and challenges of ethnic minorities are recognized and tackled by policymakers.

It also can function as a corrective tool to consequences of mainstream media disinformation or information paucity if such circumstances are applicable. It is crucial for enhancing general understanding and preserving cultural heritage, fostering community engagement, and exploring other social implications. Five critical junctures significantly influenced the development of the Austrian ethnic media landscape were defined: the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the national-socialist regime, migration from Southern and Eastern Europe, EU membership, and the Digital Transformation.

## Literature Review

The book titled *Österreichische Mediengeschichte. Band 2: Von Massenmedien zu sozialen Medien (1918 bis heute)* (Austrian Media History. Volume 2: From Mass Media to Social Media (1918 to the Present) (Karmasin & Oggolder, 2019) offers a comprehensive account of the historical evolution of the Austrian media system, from 1918 to the contemporary era. This book serves as a valuable resource in comprehending the interconnectedness of political, economic, and ideological occurrences commencing from the inception of the First Republic. It enables a nuanced examination of media developments, which is also helpful in understanding Austrian ethnic media within this broader historical context. Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes (2011) suggest ethnic minority media has undergone three distinct eras. The first was the gifting era, connected to decolonisation and modernisation, which involved managing minority language resources to achieve presence and visibility within the nation-state media system. The second was the service era, which established a shift from the provision of media space to a service for minority language consumers, with media serving as a means of developing the ethnic minority community and making it fit for the pluralistic society. The third was the performance era, which resulted in a less top-down and more bottom-up and fragmented media landscape and covering transnational channels of communication

(Pietikäinen & Kelly-Holmes, 2011). Recent studies have noted that public funding for ethnic media should not be framed as aid but as a social, cultural, and economic investment (Zabaleta & Xamardo, 2022). Despite facing economic, structural, and competitiveness challenges, minority language media production has the potential to be a strong player within their minority community, as observed in research that focuses on active community management and involvement (Zabaleta et al., 2014). Ethnic media can aid in the integration of minorities if they are composed correctly, with geo-ethnic stories being particularly important. However, research conducted by Lin and Song (2006) shows that these stories are not as widely disseminated as news from the homeland in minority media. This was discovered through an analysis of ethnic media in Los Angeles using the communication infrastructure theory, which emphasises the importance of local media and communication in providing vital information resources that help individuals achieve their goals. Ethnic media allows community actors to obtain and disseminate information, develop a sense of belonging, and participate in problem-solving activities (Lin & Song, 2006). This tendency to emphasise news from the homeland may not just be the case in Los Angeles but also in other parts of the world, where it may hinder integration and even separate migrants from society. The theory of communication infrastructure, which incorporates a multi-level storytelling system, has been utilised to demonstrate that a well-integrated communication infrastructure within ethnic enclaves can enhance residents' health outcomes by facilitating the dissemination of information and promoting participation in health-related activities. So long as the system includes community-based organisations, local ethnic media, and resident networks. This finding underscores the importance of effective communication strategies in promoting health equity within diverse ethnic communities (Lim et. al., 2022).

Mediascapes have been transnationalized, creating special cultural spaces (Geissler & Pöttker, 2009). Ethnic media, which are connected to cultural identity and influence the process of people's integration, do not promote separation, nor is this the intention of ethnic journalists. While mainstream media provide information on current affairs, ethnic media provide orientation in everyday life, a bond between the homeland and current state, the preservation of ethnic traditions, and fostering a family's sense of togetherness (Albizu, 2007; Fleras, 2009). Ethnic online communities meet the same needs as ethnic television, radio, or print media, but they seem to do so with a bigger impact. The internet is a medium for those seeking attachment to their cultural homeland to strengthen their cultural identity. It allows users to find members of their own ethnic background and culture and to gather information and knowledge about where they come from, thereby enhancing their cultural identity (Arnold & Schneider, 2007). Empirical studies by Yin (2013) and Ponzanesi (2020) indicate that cyberspace does not dissolve location-related identity but reinforces it (Yin, 2013; Ponzanesi, 2020). Considering

that newcomers often constitute a younger generation, which is more prone to both online communication and consumption of information, the results of previous studies become even more apparent. Often, people with a migrant background use social media to establish an interest group, which implies less expense than creating a full-fledged media outlet (Asimovic et al., 2021).

La Ferle and Lee (2005) suggest that ethnic rather than mainstream media may be the most effective way to reach and persuade minority audiences, which is why media planners should be more familiar with cultural values and lifestyles of ethnic minorities in order build trust and present understandable information. Based on social comparison theory, media use offers information salient to race and ethnicity that individuals may incorporate into their self-concept (La Ferle & Lee, 2005). Ethnic media likely have positive effects on ethnic minorities by enhancing their ethnic pride and ethnic performance whereas reliance on mainstream media to learn about one's ethnic group can lead to decreased self-esteem. It is possible that ethnic media exposure might alleviate the negative effects of mainstream media stereotypes for ethnic minorities. It was suggested for future research to use experimental methods to explore the possibility that ethnic media exposure can serve as a method for internalised prejudice reduction among ethnic minorities and as a way to increase group vitality in the context of democratic multicultural societies. It is nevertheless salient to create and support alternative spaces where ethnic communities can create, consume, and share ethnic media. These alternative media spaces can help improve group vitality, boost collective ethnic pride (Brantner & Herczeg, 2013), and raise willingness to engage in ethnic performance for minority groups (Ramasubramanian et al., 2017). Eventually, having strong diasporic communities is crucial to ensuring that ethnic minorities become active and engaged citizens in a multicultural, transnational, and a global media context (Ramasubramanian et al., 2017). While minority media can mobilise and provide support for the ethnic community, they are indicators of larger social change, and can revise the media landscape and create new organisational structures. People are susceptible to ethnic media connections to elaborate and understand more what makes them Turkish-Austrian, for example, and not just Austrian, to discuss cultural and social values, but to also find mechanisms to fit in and to co-exist with others who have a different ethnic origin. Minority media contribute to larger social processes as well, such as the contemplation of what it means to be a citizen of a state. They are also involved in policy negotiations concerning minority groups. The phenomena of ethnic media enterprises that may transmit across national borders (e.g., Jafri's *TV Asia*, *TV Globo*) connecting diasporas and their countries of origins, creating ethnic transnational media, and the emergence of many ethnically targeted satellite television channels around the world force governments to consider the implications of ethnic media for society as a whole (Ramasubramanian et al., 2017).



Language is inevitably connected to identity and is a symbol of identification. For example, in the Austrian region Carinthia – which is notable for the presence of a significant Slovenian minority – the role of the Slovenian language is symbolic, and this symbol is as powerful as a hymn or flag. Since the language acts like a symbol, the nexus between media and language is obvious: the presence of a particular language in the media indicates its value and prestige. There is also an opinion that language is not essential to building a feeling of belonging to a particular country as was indicated by an analysis of Austrian political and media discourses. However, in semi-official and private social circles, the German language was called as one of the most salient parts of the Austrian identity that distinguishes Austrians from migrants. Sometimes, the existence of an imbalanced linguistic double identification can be seen as a burden, but considering minority language as private, familial or weekend identity assists in escaping these burdens (Busch, 1999). Busch defines three dimensions of minority language rights in the context of differences: a) to expose them and to be accepted; b) to have equal rights despite them; and c) the necessity of social interaction across them (Busch, 1999).

Purkarthofer (2005) endeavoured to delineate the factors contributing to the establishment of ethnic media within the Austrian context. Institutional factors stand out as particularly influential, wherein minorities lacking official minority status are unable to access relevant government support. Additionally, the status of a language plays a pivotal role; languages utilized in churches, schools, or public settings are endowed with functions vital for their sustenance and media coverage. The utilization of Slovenian as a religious language by the Hermagoras group a century ago, coupled with the state's obligation (as stipulated in Article 7 of the State Treaty) to ensure media coverage, has facilitated media provision due to increased resources, both financial and personnel-based. Autochthonous minorities in Austria benefit significantly from institutional factors, particularly languages like Slovenian, Burgenland-Croatian, and Hungarian, which are used in specific educational settings. The burgeoning significance of bilingual education in Carinthia augurs well for language use and, consequently, media diversity. In the realm of audiovisual media, the commitment of public broadcasting is crucial, as legal obligations ensure, at the very least, minimal coverage. Theoretically, despite institutional factors being equally applicable to all autochthonous minorities according to State Treaty provisions, they alone do not singularly determine media coverage, as there are other influential factors, such as media-inherent ones. These factors are intrinsically tied to the nature of the medium, particularly the distinctions between print and audiovisual media. For instance, appropriate broadcast times are critical for audiovisual media's effectiveness; broadcasting minority programs during less favourable hours can impede access and weaken justification based on viewership numbers. Similarly, print media, like newspapers and

book publications, face distribution challenges, affecting accessibility and reach. Other factors encompass demographic and psychological facets, encompassing aspects like the size of the ethnic group and the perceived value or prestige of a language. These factors significantly impact the media landscape by influencing the potential audience and the reception of particular languages. For example, cohesive settlement areas often facilitate media initiatives, while the perceived value of a language, intertwined with the ethnic group's prestige, can positively or negatively shape the media landscape. Negative associations with certain languages can detrimentally affect their presence in media outlets (Purkarthofer, 2005, p. 58-59).

## Ethnic Media and Democracy

The concept of strategic essentialism coined in the 1980s by Spivak (Ritzer & Ryan, 2010, p. 193) is a path that has been and continues to be explored as a minority strategy for influencing mainstream society. Strategic essentialism in this sense entails that members of groups, while being highly differentiated internally, may engage in an essentializing and to some extent a standardizing of their public image, thus advancing their group identity in a simplified, collectivized way to achieve certain objectives (Eide, 2016, p. 76). The concern is that by taking this approach, they might inadvertently support those whose essentialist views are stronger than their own, such as researchers, editors, politicians, or influential figures. Conversely, as public awareness of the associated risks and strategies grows, it may help to reduce these risks and enhance the overall outcomes. The problem occurs when the practice of strategic essentialism is not the result of a deliberate choice and an assessment of a delicate balance, but rather is partly the result of media conventionalism that requires people and groups to essentialize themselves in order to highlight issues that have nothing to do with their daily ontology of being either or both the majority and a minority within (Eide, 2016, p. 76). The issue arises when strategic essentialism is not a conscious decision based on careful consideration, but instead is partly driven by media norms that compel individuals and groups to oversimplify their identities to bring attention to matters unrelated to their everyday experience as part of the majority or as a minority. In general, strategic essentialism means that there is a tactic where minority groups, despite their internal diversity, adopt a more simplified identity to advance their collective interests in society. However, there is a danger that by simplifying their identity, these groups might reinforce stereotypes or play into the hands of more powerful forces who might use this essentialized identity to their own advantage. Strategic essentialism can contribute to polarization by emphasizing differences between groups rather than commonalities.

Lin and Song (2006) argue ethnic media often prioritize news from the homeland over local geo-ethnic stories.



This can limit their effectiveness in promoting integration and local civic engagement and can also create echo chambers where individuals are exposed primarily to information that reinforces their own perspectives. When communities become isolated in such echo chambers, they may become more polarized. Asimovic et al. (2021) show that in areas with limited ethnic diversity, deactivation of social media might limit exposure to diverse viewpoints, which is useful for democratic engagement. It suggests that offline interactions play an important role in shaping attitudes, potentially leading to increased polarization when social media is removed. In contexts where people have limited opportunities for positive intergroup contact, offline environments can become more insular and less inclusive. This can contribute to deepening ethnic divides, making it harder to foster democratic values such as mutual respect and understanding.

Trust in media is shaped by the belief that non-institutional forms of communication are less influenced by power and more capable of providing information that mainstream media are thought to either conceal or ignore. Diminished trust in traditional media and expert knowledge has paved the way for alternative source of information (Morozov, 2017); and ethnic media can also fall into this category, given that many such outlets are relatively insular and do not consistently adhere to professional standards, often operating as hobbies.

## Methodology

The research aims to employ the theory of critical junctures on changes in Austrian history at the national level. It analyses the history of ethnic media in Austria in the 20th century and in the beginning of 21st century aiming to highlight the pivoting points in the formation of ethnic media in Austria. The development of ethnic media usually depends on government policies and changes in media regulations including not only synoptic, but also incremental changes. Being a significant part of the media democracy concept in being an alternative to mainstream media, ethnic media in Austria have been formed by historical critical junctures in the state provoking changes in the Austrian media system. Junctures are “critical” because they place institutional arrangements on paths or trajectories, which are then very difficult to alter (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007). In institutional analysis, critical junctures are characterized by a situation in which the structural (economic, cultural, ideological, organizational) influences on political action are significantly relaxed for a short period, with two main consequences: the range of plausible choices open to political actors expands substantially, and the consequences of their decisions for the outcome of interest are potentially much more significant. Contingency is paramount (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007) and legacy is enduring (Collier & Munck, 2017). Researchers do not simply identify the critical juncture but instead deepen the investigation

of the historical material to identify the key decisions (and the key events influencing those decisions) steering the system in one or another direction, favoring one institutional equilibrium over others that could have been selected (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007). Critical juncture can be not only synoptic, but also incremental (Donnelly & Hogan, 2012). Two steps that precede the critical juncture are: (i) the antecedent conditions, which encompass the economic, social, political features that provoked the critical juncture; (ii) the cleavage or shock. Critical juncture is routinely seen as growing out of a fundamental societal or political cleavage. The theory of critical junctures consists of three elements: economic crisis, ideational transformation, and the nature of the policy change (Donnelly & Hogan, 2012), which means the happening can be a critical juncture, when all three elements alter.

The review of the history of media in Austria (Karmasin & Oggolder, 2019) demonstrates that historical events, policy shifts, and social movements have significantly influenced the media landscape, including ethnic media. These changes can be regarded as critical junctures, as they encompass economic, ideological, and political transformations, and exhibit both incremental and synoptic characteristics. The authors assess how these shifts impacted Austrian media during each period, marking times of profound change that reshaped society and influenced the development, suppression, or transformation of media. The dissolution of Austro-Hungary led to the formation of new states and the emergence of ethnic media reflecting these new realities and that period saw the founding of several newspapers aimed at ethnic groups. The period of National Socialism involved the rise of extreme nationalism, militarization, and the consolidation of power under a totalitarian regime, particularly in Germany. Non-nationalist and ethnic media were often shut down or heavily censored, as the regime sought to control the narrative and suppress dissenting voices. Post-war economic growth and liberalization led to significant migration from Eastern and Southern Europe, which brought diverse ethnic groups into new environments. This migration created favorable conditions for the development of ethnic media, catering to the needs of immigrant communities and helping them maintain cultural ties. Austria's accession to the EU introduced new economic opportunities, regulatory changes, and a broader acceptance of diversity. The development of digital technology revolutionized media by making information more accessible and transforming how media content is produced and consumed. Digital platforms enabled ethnic media to migrate online, expanding their reach but also challenging traditional print media formats.

## Early 20th century: the End of the Austro-Hungarian Empire

The end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918 and the establishment of the First Austrian Republic is a synoptic

change with a collateral economic crisis, ideational and policy amends that led to the closure of some old and emergence of new ethnic media outlets primarily by immigrant communities from Eastern Europe. The two peace treaties resulting from the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 caused a major redrawing of the map of Europe: the independent status of newly emerged nation-states on the territory of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, with their own media systems. The Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye divided the Austrian part of the Dual Monarchy between the interwar Austrian state, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, Italy and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The Treaty of Trianon divided the Hungarian part of the Dual Monarchy between the interwar Hungarian state, Romania, Czechoslovakia, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Austria and the Free State of Fiume (today Rijeka), which emerged in 1921, operated under the auspices of the League of Nations and was annexed to Italy in 1924 (Venken, 2020). Furthermore, following the dissolution of the monarchy, numerous magazines in the national languages of the former multi-ethnic state largely disappeared. After 1918, only one foreign-language magazine title could be found, “*Hvezda ceskoslovenskych pani a divok*” (“The Star”, 1927–1941, Prague & Vienna), in contrast to several magazines aimed at German-speaking minorities and groups in the former crown lands (Krainer, 2019). Despite the lack of information about ethnic media during this time, the development of some newspapers is known. For example, the newspaper “*Nase Novine*” in Croatian language closed in 1918, however in 1919, the Hungarian newspaper “*Bécsi Magyar Ujság*” did emerge. In 1922, shortly after the annexation of Burgenland to Austria, politically committed Croats, including Lorenz Karall, founded the “*Hrvatske Novine*” (Atlas Burgenland, 2023). Following the First World War, the “*Dělnické listy*” (“Workers’ Papers”), a workers’ publication in the Czech language, was renamed the “*Vídeňské dělnické listy*” (“Viennese Workers’ Papers”) in 1926. It was published until 1934, when it ceased to exist due to political developments in Austria (Bláhová, 2011). They were based on the idea of the worker’s movement. Under the Czech name “*Dělnické listy*”, German workers’ sheets, some magazines and sheets appeared after 1872 to the present day, which were basically socialist and social-democrat oriented or felt committed to the ideas of the workers’ movement. They appeared in Bohemia (Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy) alternatively in Vienna, in Czechoslovakia (or today in the Czech Republic), but also inspired sister projects abroad, such as in Argentina and the United States (Bláhová, 2011). “*Nedelja*” (“A Sunday” in Slovenian) is the Slovene-language religious newspaper of the Diocese of Gurk and is the oldest weekly newspaper of the Carinthian Slovenes. It was founded in March 1926 by a group of Slovene-speaking priests. During this period, Esperanto, a constructed language, experienced a notable surge in popularity. A considerable portion of its lexicon was at its zenith of usage. Several

newspapers were exclusively published in Esperanto, such as “*Sennaciulo*” and “*La Progreso*”. To conclude, the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, created some ethnic media publications from the autochthonous communities in Austria. At that time, it was only print media. Sometimes these media outlets were small and short-lived, but they laid the groundwork for future development of ethnic media in the country. This critical juncture contributed to a change in the ethnic media landscape by slowly forming the future status quo.

### 1930s-1940s: National-Socialism

With the de facto sidelining of the parliament in March 1933, Austria’s path towards dictatorship began. The Dollfuss government attempted to maintain the facade of legality through emergency decrees, but in reality, a gradual coup was taking place. The opposition was disciplined, suppressed, and banned. The authoritarian regime established control over media, communication, and propaganda outlets, securing access at institutional, personnel, and content levels. All media – whether press, radio, or film – were synchronized, censorship was reinstated, and press freedom was eliminated. Overall, the media propaganda activities and alignment tendencies of the Austrofascist “Corporate State” proved to be largely unsuccessful<sup>1</sup>.

During the National-Socialist era, journalism was defined as a regulated task of the state. This led to a contraction of the Austrian magazine market, including a substantial impact on women’s magazines. Non-Nazi press was prohibited, while the remaining press was (as much as possible) centrally controlled, monitored, and subjected to censorship. The rise of fascism and the Nazi regime in Austria had a profound impact on ethnic media. Many publications cease to exist. “*Vídeňské Noviny*” and “*Vídeňský Věstník*” were established in 1934, however, also in this year, “*Vídeňské Dělnické Listy*” was closed. The newspaper “*Pravda*” was closed in 1938 and “*Vídeňské Noviny*” ceased to exist in 1941. “*Dělnické Listy*” was closed in 1934. In 1941, the “*Nedelja*” was discontinued by the regime. After the Diocese of Gurk, the Slovenian Pastoral Office, took over the editorship of the newspaper in 1945, the “*Nedelja*” became the official Slovenian-language religious newspaper of the Diocese, the first issue after the war was published in December 1945 (Pressestelle der Diözese Gurk, 2023). “*Vídeňské Svobodné Listy*” was established in 1946. What the new weekly dealt with primarily on its pages was re-emigration

<sup>1</sup> The “masses” could not be even remotely mobilized for the system. Instead, Austrians engaged in a “reader,” “listener,” and “newsreel strike.” Additionally, political and media pressure from Nazi Germany remained significant. However, the authoritarian regime’s ambivalent strategy towards the National Socialists also came into play, fluctuating between confrontation and appeasement (Moser, 2019 cited by Krainer, 2019). In 1934, there was a “latent civil war” (Children, Hilgemann & Hergt, 2005 cited by Krainer, 2019). In 1932, Engelbert Dollfuss was elected as the Chancellor of Austria, who from 1933 onwards established an authoritarian regime (Austrofascism 1933–1938), marked by the reintroduction of censorship and significant restrictions on press freedom.

to Czechoslovakia as well as the post-war and political problems of the time. Due to re-emigration, many people wondered whether the Viennese press written in Czech would be needed at all in the future. The editors at that time consisted of representatives of the Czech-Viennese Social Democrats, National Socialists, Communists and People's Democrats. The editorial's guiding idea was the unity of the minority, regardless of party or association affiliation. The first edition was published in a circulation of 10,000 copies and was sold at the price of 30 groschen (*Vídeňské svobodné listy*, 2023). "Glasnik" was created in 1946 (*Volksgruppen ORF*, 2023). From June 1946, the Carinthian Slovenes were able to publish the *Slovenski vestnik*, which saw itself as the organ of the Liberation Front. Its appearance was not without controversy, and for a period, its place of publication was not Klagenfurt, but Vienna. After its founding, the Council of Carinthian Slovenes began publishing its own organ, the "Naš tednik", from September 1949. Just one year later, it was merged with the "Koroška kronika" (Enotna Lista, 2023). Esperanto was still popular in that time.

During the era of National Socialism, all forms of opposition, including the media, were systematically suppressed, and prohibited. The entirety of social-nationalist media, spanning print, radio, and film, was subjected to synchronization, thereby reinstating stringent censorship measures and completely eradicating press freedoms. Consequently, the regime, driven by its nationalist objectives and exerting strict control over political media in Austria, significantly impeded the advancement of ethnic media outlets. These media platforms not only served as conduits for diverse cultural representations but also as forums for varied opinions. However, despite severe restrictions, these outlets were not entirely eradicated. Following the collapse of the National Socialist regime, commencing from 1945, numerous ethnic media sources experienced a resurgence.

### 1960s-1970s Migration from Southern and Eastern Europe

From the 1950s onward, a dynamic print media market systematically developed, marked by the rise of robust new tabloid newspapers and the emergence of the initial independent political and economic magazines, coinciding with a decline in party newspapers. During a phase of concentration commencing in the late 1980s, national oligopolies (such as Mediaprint, Styria, and the News Group) solidified their presence in Austria, involving major German conglomerates, alongside numerous regionally influential print media conglomerates. Presently, these entities have extended their operations as private broadcasting providers and have ventured into online services. The concentration processes were facilitated by hesitant and largely insufficient media policy regulation aimed at preserving

the diversity of media titles<sup>2</sup> (Kaltenbrunner, 2019 in Karmasin & Oggolder, 2019). The end of World War II in 1945 and the establishment of the Second Austrian Republic led to the re-emergence of ethnic media outlets and the resurgence of ethnic media in Austria, as new waves of immigrants arrived from Southern and Eastern Europe. However, in the 1960s and 1970s, despite the limited emergence of ethnic media in Austria during this period, it holds significant legislative importance as it served as a foundational phase for subsequent ethnic media outlets. It played a crucial role in establishing frameworks that paved the way for the establishment and evolution of ethnic media entities in 1990s. As to already existed publications, they were often focused on providing information and support to immigrant communities, and they played an important role in helping these communities integrate into Austrian society. The signing of the Austrian State Treaty led to the recognition of autochthonous minority rights, which created a favourable condition for the establishment of new ethnic media outlets, especially later, in 1976 when the Austrian Ethnic Group Act (*Volksgruppengesetz*) recognised Croatian, Slovenian, Hungarian, Czech, Slovakian and Roma ethnic groups as official minorities in Austria, imbuing them with special rights and supporting them in media production. Compared to West Germany and Switzerland, Austria was relatively late in attracting foreign countries' workforces. This was partly because the labour shortage in Austria was exacerbated by the emigration of Austrian workers to Switzerland and Germany. The recruitment of foreign workers was made possible by the Raab-Olah agreements concluded in 1961 (Bauer, 2008). The post-war history of Austrian media can be narrated as a sequence of waves of concentration, illustrating concentration as an inherent component and inevitable consequence of competition-oriented economics. Media policy measures did not put a stop to the concentration process, at best delaying it or even promoting it. Media and opinion diversity are values threatened by media concentration (Trappel, 2019, p. 222). Hence, this period exhibited both favourable transformations, notably in terms of migration and institutional modifications, and adverse changes, such as

<sup>2</sup> The first wave of concentration took place in the 1950s. During this period, daily newspapers represented a diverse spectrum of opinions and were complemented by radio programs. Following World War II, the publication of newspapers was subject to licensing or permission by the occupying powers. Depending on the occupying force, either party-affiliated newspapers or those owned by private individuals were allowed to operate. In 1945, the three major parties ÖVP, SPÖ, and KPÖ reached an agreement to collectively publish "Neues Österreich" ("New Austria"). Additionally, each party established its respective newspapers. The second wave of media consolidation impacted the industry between 1967 and 1972, during which five daily newspaper titles were either discontinued or acquired. This phase commenced in 1967 with the discontinuation of the three-party newspaper "Neues Österreich". The "Kronen Zeitung" strategically moved towards market dominance by engaging in horizontal concentration, acquiring its competitor "Express" in 1970 and subsequently ceasing its publication in 1971. In the attempt to counteract this trend in 1975, the government introduced direct press subsidies. The main aim of this initiative was to halt the continuous decrease in the quantity of independent newspaper titles, or at the very least, slow down the ongoing process of media concentration (Trappel, 2019, p. 212).

media concentration, exerting influences on ethnic media outlets.

## 1990s European Union Membership

Austria entered the EU on the 1st of January 1995. Membership in the EU has had a decisive impact on the country's foreign and European policy and makes it possible to advocate Austrian concerns within the EU decision-making structures. Representatives of Austria participate in the decision-making process in the European Council, the Council and its preparatory bodies; furthermore, there are directly elected Austrian members of the European Parliament as well as Austrian representatives in the other EU institutions. The EU's issues feature prominently on the daily agenda of Austria's foreign policy; it is important that Austrian interests and positions are pursued further on the European level in the framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy. The EU's initiatives encompass various multilateral initiatives focused on safeguarding civilians in armed conflicts, enhancing human rights and minority rights, promoting disarmament, and implementing arms control and non-proliferation measures concerning weapons of mass (Federal Ministry Republic of Austria, 2023). In the early 1990s, Austria faced the prospect of condemnation by the European Court of Human Rights. Eventually, in 1993, the ORF's radio monopoly was abolished by the "Regional Radio Law" ("Regionalradiogesetz"), terminating the state broadcasting monopoly and enabling pluralistic regional private radio. In 1993, the "Association of Free Radios" ("Verband Freier Rundfunk Österreich") was created. Following legislative and juridical challenges in the private broadcasting sector, ORF radio programs have had to contend with commercial competition nationwide since 1998. However, the ORF remains privileged in several respects compared to private competition, especially regarding frequency allocation. The television monopoly was officially dissolved with the "Cable and Satellite Broadcasting Act" in 1997 ("Kabel- und Satellitenrundfunkgesetz", 1997). The institutional changes that fostered a favorable environment for the development of private media and facilitated a more diverse media landscape, contributed to the emergence of new ethnic media outlets. A lot of new media outlets were established in the 1990s. The magazine "*Romano Kipo*" has been in publication since 1991 and serves as the quarterly informational newspaper for the Cultural Association of Austrian Roma in Vienna. Similarly, "*Romano Centro*", a quarterly journal affiliated with the "Romano Centro" association, has been published regularly since June 1993. In 1989, a regional studio commenced broadcasting television programs like "*Dobar dan Hrvati*" for Croatians and "*Adj' Isten magyarok*" for Hungarians (Atlas Burgenland, 2023). The "*Nowyi Wenskij Journal*" ("New Vienna Journal") is a monthly Austrian periodical published in Russian since January 1996. It encompasses various informative and reference materials about Austria, articles concerning the lives of compatriots

within the country, and accounts from travellers. The Austrian Polish magazine known as "*Polonika*" has been in publication since March 1995. Widely available throughout Austria, it operates as an informational and social magazine, facilitating the integration of the Polish diaspora into their country of residence. The publication primarily focuses on issues related to the lives of Poles residing in Austria, offering information on significant events concerning the Polish diaspora, Austria, and Poland (*Polonika*, 2023). "*Jupiter*"<sup>3</sup>, a socio-cultural quarterly magazine, has been published since June 13, 1999, with a literary focus. Acknowledged as one of the foremost Polish diaspora media outlets worldwide, the magazine emphasizes literature in its content.

## 2000s-present Digital Transformation

The rise of the internet and social media has wielded significant influence on ethnic media in Austria, echoing the broader impact experienced across various media sectors. Numerous ethnic media outlets have shifted their focus to online platforms, concurrently witnessing the emergence of new digital-only publications. Simultaneously, traditional print and broadcast media have diversified by incorporating content tailored to ethnic minority communities. An institutional impetus for the advancement of ethnic media stemmed from a legal ruling preceding the European Court of Human Rights in Austria, leading to the enactment of a law in 2001 permitting private commercial broadcasting companies (Grünangerl, Trappel & Tomaz, 2021). The online platform "*Austriapol*", tailored to serve the Polish community in Austria, was established in 2000. Following this, in February 2002, the broadcast of the TV magazine "*Servus Szia, Szdravo Del Juha*", targeting diverse ethnic communities, commenced streaming (Atlas Burgenland, 2023). The weekly newspaper "*Novice*" began its publication in April 2003 (Enotna Lista, 2023). Another significant addition to the ethnic media landscape was the emergence of the Turkish-language newspaper "*Yeni Hereket*" in 2003. (Bülbül, 2023). "*The Vienna Review*", founded in 2006 by American journalist Dardis McNamee as a student newspaper for Webster University Vienna, initially served as the sole English-language newspaper in Vienna. Targeting the English-speaking community in Austria and Central Europe, expatriates, and tourists, it was published in print and online by Falter Verlag from 2011 to 2014 before transitioning solely to an online platform ("*The Vienna Review*", 2023). "*Mri Tikni Mini Multi*", a children's magazine published every two months from 1997 by the Roma Service association in conjunction with "ZORA", aimed to introduce Romani language to children through playful stories, fairy tales, rhymes, riddles, and songs. Though discontinued in 2005 (roma\_2020, 2024, it was succeeded by "*Mri nevi Mini Multi*" (the "New Mini Multi") published by the Roma Service Association and the Burgenland Croat Adult

<sup>3</sup> The newspaper ceased to exist in 2022.

Education Centre since 2006. The online portal “*ipolen.at*” was established in 2003. “KOSMO”, a free magazine geared towards the linguistics and content preferences of the 744,000 Austro-Bosnians, has been published since early 2009 by “Twist Zeitschriften Verlag”. A bilingual cultural art journal “*Creative Austria*” was launched in 2007, and in October 2015, Margaret Childs and Dardis McNamee founded “Home Town Media GmbH” and launched the first issue of “*Metropole*” titled “We Built This City”. This magazine delves into the international impact on the history of Austria and Vienna. It features contributions from former writers of “*The Vienna Review*”, which ceased its print publication at the end of 2013 but continued online (*Der Standard*, 2014). Despite this transition, “*Metropole*” continues to flourish. Although English media are not conventionally categorized as ethnic media due to English being a secondary language for many individuals in Austria, they are actively used by various ethnic communities. “*Russian Austria*” (Russian Austria, 2023) came into existence in 2004, contributing to the expanding array of ethnic media outlets catering to diverse linguistic and cultural communities within Austria.

notably, the progression of ethnic media within Austria. The factors that predominantly shaped ethnic media comprised synoptic institutional elements and inherent media characteristics. However, incremental changes, considered as critical junctures due to their gradual yet substantial, evident, and distinctive impact on the evolution of ethnic media in Austria, can also be acknowledged. The role of ethnic media remains pertinent in a globally interconnected world, particularly within Austria, boasting a considerable population with a migration background. The necessity for ethnic media traces back to the inception of the Republic of Austria following the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918.

The End of the Austro-Hungarian Empire represented a significant critical juncture that catalysed economic, ideological, and policy transformations. This period resulted in the closure of established ethnic media outlets while simultaneously fostering the emergence of new ones, primarily established by autochthonous minorities. Media publications predominantly existed in print format during this era, laying foundational groundwork for the progression of ethnic media within Austria.

Critical Juncture	Economical Change	Ideological Change	Political Change	Synoptic/ Incremental	Influence on Ethnic Media
<b>The End of Austro-Hungarian Empire</b>	Economic strain of war	Strengthening of cultural expressions of ethnic groups	Formation of New Nation-States	Synoptic	Several newspapers were founded
<b>National Socialism</b>	Self-sufficiency, militarisation	Nationalism, conservative roll-back	Anschluss (Annexation)	Synoptic	Non-national-socialist and ethnic media were closed.
<b>Migration from Eastern and Southern Europe</b>	Economic growth	Gradual moves to liberalisation and pluralism	Coalition government, reforms, social policies	Incremental	The development of favorable conditions for future ethnic media
<b>EU Membership</b>	Single Market, Structural Funds and Cohesion Policy	Embracing European values, moves towards diversity	Adapting to EU policies	Synoptic	EU membership provided opportunities for establishment ethnic media, migration created demand in ethnic media
<b>Digital Transformation</b>	Increased innovations	Acceptance and integration of digital technologies, fast access to information	Policy Formation, Digital Agenda	Incremental	The migration of ethnic media to the internet, at times resulting in the complete cessation of print editions

Table 1: Critical Junctures of Ethnic Media in Austria

## Conclusion

Five critical junctures have been identified concerning the evolution of ethnic media in Austria, spanning from 1918 until the early 21st century. These pivotal moments are: (i) the End of the Austro-Hungarian Empire; (ii) the Period of National Socialism; (iii) Migration from Eastern and Southern Europe; (iv) Austria’s accession to the EU; and (v) the Period of Digital Transformation. Each of these pivotal moments exerted varying degrees of influence on the country’s economic structures, governmental policies, ideological orientations, and

The National Socialist Regime, characterised by economic militarisation and nationalist ideologies, resulted in the suppression of ethnic media and the narrower media landscape. The regime took control of communication and propaganda platforms, asserting authority at institutional, personnel, and content levels. Media underwent synchronization, censorship, and the erosion of press freedom. Several ethnic media outlets gradually disappeared between 1934 and 1941, only to re-emerge post-1941. Noteworthy closures during this period include the cessation of publications such as “*Pravda*” in 1938, “*Vidensle Noviny*” in 1941, “*Dělnické listy*” in 1934, and “*Nedelja*” in 1941.

The migration waves of the 1960s-1970s from Southern and Eastern Europe did not distinctly lead to the emergence or disappearance of ethnic media outlets. Nevertheless, this period held significant importance due to institutional transformations and subsequent migration waves, which facilitated favourable conditions for the establishment of ethnic media. Gradual economic growth, liberalisation, and a move towards pluralism marked positive trajectories, paving the way for the establishment of new ethnic media outlets. The signing of the Austrian State Treaty acknowledged the rights of autochthonous minorities. However, a pivotal document emerged in 1976 — the Austrian Ethnic Group Act (Volksgruppengesetz) — formally recognising Croatian, Slovenian, Hungarian, Czech, Slovakian, and Roma ethnic groups as official minorities in Austria. This legislation granted them special rights and offered support in their media establishment.

Austria's accession to the EU in 1995 wielded substantial influence on the nation's foreign and domestic policies, its engagement within Europe. The EU's moves toward democratisation fostered conducive circumstances for the inception of ethnic media. The post-1993 period, marked by the establishment of the "Regional Radio Law" ("Regionalradiogesetz") and the Association of Free Radios ("Verband Freier Rundfunk Österreich"), witnessed prolific growth in new ethnic media outlets. Multilingual non-commercial radio stations emerged during this phase, focusing on serving multiple ethnic communities and diverse audiences rather than singular groups, thereby not falling under the classification of ethnic media.

The fifth critical juncture of the Digital Transformation starting in the 2000s, marked the most prolific period in

the establishment of new ethnic media outlets. From 2000 until 2006, significant emergence of ethnic newspapers such as "Austriapol", "Russian Austria", "Mri Tikni Mini Multi", and "The Vienna Review", all of which became active and continue to operate. However, the primary incremental change during this period was the transition to the online space.

Synoptic institutional elements were predominant factors shaping ethnic media in Austria. Yet, it is essential to acknowledge incremental changes, as these gradual but substantial shifts have distinctly contributed to the ethnic media evolution. Over the period, ethnic media ensures that the media landscape reflects Austria's multicultural society. By representing diverse ethnic groups, these media outlets contribute to a more inclusive and representative democracy. The growth of ethnic media have supported the recognition and protection of minority rights. As democracy evolved in Austria, so too did the development of ethnic media. Almost all periods contributed to their growth (except for the National Socialist period). Ethnic media play a crucial role in promoting democratic values through the representation of diverse communities. However, there is a need for more research into the content of ethnic media in Austria, as their impact on democracy is not uniformly positive. For example, challenges may arise when ethnic media predominantly disseminate news from their countries of origin, potentially isolating these communities from the broader discourse. There is also the propagation of misinformation within ethnic media, which can contribute to a distorted perception of reality, leading individuals to make decisions based on incorrect assumptions.

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# Elite Continuity and Media Transformations

## An Asymmetrical Comparison of Elite Continuity in Albania and Myanmar

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### Abstract

This study investigates the intricate dynamics of post-authoritarian media systems in Albania and Myanmar<sup>1</sup>, utilizing Sparks' (2008) concept of "elite continuity." Our research employs an asymmetrical comparative approach to explore critical junctures – pivotal moments that significantly shape the evolution of media landscapes. We have two primary objectives: first, to unravel the historical pathways leading to the liberalization of media markets in both nations, and second, to demonstrate using Sparks' framework how elite continuity evolves in these specific contexts.

Our study incorporates historical contextualization and qualitative analysis to examine the complex interplay between political transitions, economic interests, and evolving media systems. We explore how elite continuity manifests during these critical junctures, shedding light on the enduring influence of entrenched power structures.

Our findings reveal persistent patterns of elite continuity, emphasizing the shift from political to economic power. Despite differing historical and cultural contexts, both countries exhibit parallels in media transformations. This study enhances our understanding of the enduring impact of established elites and path dependencies within media context transformations.

Keywords: *Elite Continuity; Transition; Media Transformation; Commercialization; Albania; Myanmar*

Comparative research in political communication has predominantly focused on most-similar systems comparisons within Western contexts and theories (Hafez & Priyadharma, 2019, p. 19; Richter et al., 2023). Usually, we find publications of comparisons of well-researched countries like the UK, Germany, the USA, France etc. using well-established Western theories. We want to break this ongoing cycle of reproduced knowledge and a cycle of Eurocentric knowledge production processes that perpetuate colonial trajectories. Although it initially may seem unusual comparing Southeast Asian and Eastern European media contexts, asymmetrical comparisons offer significant advantages, especially in an era where postcolonial perspectives challenge Western-centric knowledge production. By comparing Albania and Myanmar, this study moves beyond isolated country studies to explore new forms of comparative research (Grüne, Hafez, Priyadharma & Schmidt, 2019). Following a quasi-experimental design, similar to "Most Different Systems – Similar Outcome" designs (...) we seek to identify common features among otherwise different communication systems to understand similarities in a particular outcome (Esser & Vliegenthart, 2017, p. 6). In examining media transformations in Albania and Myanmar, this approach becomes particularly valuable when considering critical junctures, such as political transitions.

The study of transitology after the collapse of the Soviet Union has primarily addressed transformations in former communist systems, often presenting liberal

democracy as the ultimate outcome. However, differing pathways after political transitions, as shown by Voltmer (2012), can yield varying or even similar outcomes for politics, society, and media. This study aims to explore how Albania and Myanmar, despite differing historical, political, and cultural contexts, exhibit similar patterns of elite continuity after their political systems opened up. Sparks' (2008) concept of elite continuity provides a structured model to analyze how these cases compare with observations from Poland, Russia, and China.

We adopt asymmetrical comparison as a central method for "systemization through analogies" to understand the conditional contexts leading to elite continuity in Albania and Myanmar (Hafez & Priyadharma, 2019, p. 18; Thomaß, 2016, p. 51). Analyzing these two countries – each with distinct historical, political, and cultural trajectories – provides valuable insights into how media systems evolve under varying conditions of political change and elite persistence. This method enriches our understanding of global media dynamics and informing policy approaches during transition periods.

Both Albania and Myanmar underwent profound political transitions post-1990. Albania emerged from decades of isolation under a communist dictatorship, while Myanmar transitioned from nearly half a century of military rule to quasi-democratic governance between 2011 and 2021. Myanmar's transition process started with a top-down democratization through the "roadmap to democracy" initiated by the *Tatmadaw* (the military)

<sup>1</sup> For Myanmar the period of transition between 2011 and 2021 is considered. The time after the coup the état on February 1, 2021 is not relevant for our study.

in 2003. In contrast, Albania's transition started after 45 years of dictatorship as a bottom-up process after the fall of the Soviet Union after 1990.

Despite their similarities in emerging from closed political systems, they differ significantly. Myanmar is a multilingual, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic country with persistent armed conflicts and a Buddhist supremacy policy, whereas Albania, influenced by its communist past, is a multi-religious but less religiously active society. The two countries also differ greatly in terms of population size: Myanmar with its 55 million inhabitants is one of the biggest countries in Southeast Asia, whereas Albania with 2.8 million is the smallest country in the Balkans region. If you look at the economic situation of the two countries, you can recognize similar structures of a gap between the extremely rich and the poor, which is caused by the mismanagement of each countries' sources of income by corrupt elites. As a result, both countries are comparable to the poorest in their region in terms of economic power and income.

Although, the two countries present a wide range of social, cultural, and political formations, they both resemble each other regarding the outcome of their transitions following an elite continuity. Our study especially identifies essential commonalities in the transformation processes of Albania's and Myanmar's media systems, which can be conceptualized within Sparks' (2008) framework of elite continuity. Similar to Sparks (2008), our analysis takes the ending of the dictatorial regimes as the point of departure in both countries. Differing from Sparks (2008) we do not only investigate former communist contexts, because while Albania was one of the strictest and secretive of communist regimes, Myanmar was for many decades one of the strictest and secretive military regimes worldwide. Sparks' (2008) concept of elite continuity defines our objects of comparison within its seven major components for understanding elite continuity in the context of political transformation. The main components are: i) genuine revolution; ii) the shift to a market economy; iii) considerable continuity; iv) political parallelism; v) social order; vi) the transformation of political power into economic power; and vii) the degree of democratization. By applying these components to the media contexts of Albania and Myanmar, we aim to elucidate the interplay between elite continuity and media development in these critical junctures.

In summary, this research seeks to unravel the complex interplay between elite continuity and media dynamics in Albania and Myanmar, offering insights into their unique political landscapes and the challenges they face during transformative phases. After explaining the relevance of examining path dependencies while analyzing media context transformations using the elite continuity concept by Sparks (2008), the paper gives insights into the historical developments of the two countries' media transformations as a background to understand the contexts of the elites' entanglements. Following this, we apply Sparks (2008) framework with its seven components to analyze elite continuity in Albania and Myanmar following their political transitions and discuss the outcomes.

## Political Transformations and the Media

Political transformations that involve system changes often display distinctive characteristics, particularly in the scope and dynamics of societal upheaval (Jarolimek, 2009, p. 415). Research on these transformations has mainly focused on political systems, especially following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, emphasizing transitions towards idealized forms of democracy. This approach often categorizes transition processes as "defective" or "illiberal" democracies. The field of "transitology" and its associated transition paradigm gained prominence during the third wave of democratization in Eastern Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s.

Scholars often frame the traditional view of "transition" as a linear passage from authoritarian rule to democracy (Merkel, 2010; O'Donnell, Schmitter & Whitehead, 1986). Jakubowicz (2007) considers "transition" as the phase immediately after dismantling the old system, leading to the development of a new one. However, this paradigm assumes a progression towards a liberal democratic model and overlooks the complexities and non-linear paths that many countries do experience. As Carothers (2002) argues, the idea of a straightforward path to democracy – which he terms "the end of the transition paradigm" – is misleading. The reality in many countries has been more complex, with political transformations often influenced by the interests and actions of the dominant elites (O'Donnell & Schmitter, cited in Tzankoff, 2001, p. 20, see also Schmitter, 2017). The persistence of dominant elite structures, even in nominally democratic states, suggests that transformational processes do not necessarily result in substantial shifts in political power dynamics (Giraudy, 2015). While there may be significant public engagement at the start of a transition (Merkel 2010, p. 84), the consolidation of democratic systems often depends heavily on the actions and interests of political elites.

While much of the political science literature has focused on regime changes, the role of the media within these transformations is often overlooked. Media systems can either mirror societal changes or actively participate in them, serving as a crucial component of the broader transformation process. Understanding the path dependencies in media systems is essential for comprehending the unique characteristics of political transformations (Pierson, 2004). As Voltmer (2012) notes, media institutions are not newly created after regime changes but are instead transformations of existing structures that retain the norms and power dynamics of the previous regime. This insight underscores the importance of considering media dynamics as an integral aspect of political transformations, shedding light on the complex interplay between continuity and change within evolving systems. Sparks and Reading (1994) further emphasize that in post-communist Europe, media system transformations exhibited significant continuities in structures and personnel, revealing a slower shift towards market-driven models than initially anticipated.

In the contexts of Albania and Myanmar, understanding

media system transformations requires a focus on ‘critical junctures.’ These are events that trigger significant institutional or policy changes, often involving crises, shifts in ideas, and major policy shifts (Donnelly & Hogan, 2012, p. 324; Peruško, 2020). For Albania, the critical juncture was the transition from a communist regime to a democratic system. In Myanmar, it was the shift from a military dictatorship to a period of quasi-democratic governance. These junctures are crucial for understanding the evolution of media contexts in both countries.

Sparks’ conception of media pathways after political overhauls offers a framework for understanding how different types of authoritarian regimes – such as those in Albania and Myanmar—can lead to varied media transformations. By examining these pathways, we can gain insights into how media systems evolve in response to political changes and how elite continuity is maintained or altered through these transitions.

### Comparing Albania’s and Myanmar’s Media Transformations using Sparks’ Conception of Elite Continuity

Our qualitative analysis and comparison are guided by Sparks (2008; 2010) theoretical framework of “elite continuity”, which offers an alternative explanation for the dynamics observed in post-authoritarian media systems. Sparks’ approach challenges the conventional expectation that transition from communist to post-communist media systems would naturally lead to the development of independent and objective media outlets. Instead, Sparks suggests that these media landscapes often remain closely aligned with the pre-existing elite structure. By applying Sparks’ framework to the media transformations in Albania and Myanmar, we aim to uncover the persistence of elite influence within these evolving environments.

The application of Sparks’ framework is informed by previous data collections and analyses, including interviews with various stakeholders in Albania and Myanmar (Radue, 2017; 2019; 2022; Radue & Bullerdieck, 2015; Godole, 2014). This method allows us to cross-reference insights from multiple perspectives, providing a comprehensive assessment of the complex processes influencing media transformation in these contexts. In our previous studies, we conducted extensive interviews and on-the-ground research to understand the specific contexts of Albania and Myanmar after transition (Godole, 2014; 2021; Radue, 2017; 2019, 2022). For instance, one of the authors has academically tracked the democratization process in Myanmar, spending considerable time in the country, leading media development projects, and conducting interviews in local and exiled newsrooms. Similarly, the co-author brings practical experience from Albania, offering a deep understanding of the media landscape shaped by firsthand observations as both a former journalist in the early 1990s and a media scholar. This direct engagement has provided us with unique insights and access to information that is

not readily available from other sources.

By examining the seven components of Sparks’ (2008) framework we aim to provide a detailed account of the historical evolution and transformative processes that have shaped the liberalization of media markets in Albania and Myanmar. Using Sparks’ concept, we compare the pathways leading to elite continuity and employ historical contextualization to understand the key issues that have shaped the media environments in both countries. We focus on pivotal moments to comprehend how they have influenced the current configurations of the media landscape, setting the stage for subsequent changes and developments.

Our analysis is guided by the following research questions, which explore the dynamics of elite continuity and media system transformation during critical junctures:

**RQ 1:** How does elite continuity, as conceptualized within Sparks’ framework, manifest throughout the transformative phases of media systems during critical junctures in Albania and Myanmar?

**Thesis 1:** We assume that elite continuity persists in both Albania and Myanmar despite their distinct political transitions. The entrenched power structures and elite influence remain dominant, preventing the full emergence of independent media systems.

**RQ 2:** To what extent do factors like media commercialization, crony ownership, and politicization hinder the democratic potential of the media landscape in Albania and Myanmar?

**Thesis 2:** We assume that media commercialization, crony ownership, and political influence severely restrict the democratic potential of media landscapes in both countries. These factors contribute to a media environment that lacks diversity and independence, ultimately affecting the quality of democratic discourse and the flow of accurate information.

To test these theses, we combine historical contextualization with qualitative analysis, focusing on key dimensions of media transformations in Albania and Myanmar. This approach allows us to explore how elite continuity and media system transformation interact within political and cultural contexts and encompasses the following steps:

1. **Historical Contextualization:** We provide a detailed backdrop for the transformation processes in Albania and Myanmar, highlighting critical junctures that have significantly influenced their respective paths.
2. **Application of Sparks’ Framework:** We systematically apply Sparks’ (2008) framework to analyze the media landscapes in both countries, which involves examining each of Sparks’ seven components.

By clearly stating these theses, we aim to provide a thorough comparative examination of media market transformations in Albania and Myanmar and their intricate relationship with elite continuity. This aligns with Sparks’ (2008) assertion that democratization should

be viewed as a contingent feature of the new order, rather than its inherent essence.

## Historical Contextualization of Albania's and Myanmar's Media Transformation

In the case of Albania, the term "transition" has been persistently used to describe the evolving political and media landscape since the fall of communism in the 1990s. However, there is an ongoing debate about whether this term adequately captures the complexities of Albania's democratic process. Kajsiu (2006) argues that the concept of "transition" oversimplifies the nuanced relationship between democracy and integration in Albania. He contends that the traditional transition paradigm fails to account for the recurring challenges and setbacks faced by Albanian democracy, such as issues with free and fair elections and the persistence of power structures. Instead of merely focusing on the consolidation of democratic institutions, Kajsiu highlights the importance of understanding the underlying political dynamics and historical processes that precede these institutional changes. This critique points to the dynamic and evolving nature of Albania's political and media landscape since 1990, suggesting that a more nuanced approach is needed to fully understand its transformation.

In contrast, Myanmar's political opening up between 2011 and 2021 represents a relatively brief period of liberalization rather than a complete political overhaul. During this decade, Myanmar experienced an overt effort to implement democratic structures and introduce new political actors. Our analysis focuses on the interplay between old and new elites, which shaped a media landscape that included both military-aligned entities and opposition forces. This dynamic was notably influenced by the emergence of exile media organizations, often supported by foreign aid, which promoted democratic values and sought to challenge the military-dominated society. Despite this opening, Myanmar's media landscape remained fragile, as demonstrated by the coup d'état on February 1, 2021, which underscored the resilience of military-backed elite structures and highlighted the limitations of Myanmar's democratic developments.

Overall, our analysis using Sparks' framework allows us to discuss and compare the structural factors that contribute to elite continuity in different contexts of transformation. By focusing on broad structural dependencies and processes, we aim to illustrate the mechanisms through which elite continuity is maintained, rather than delving into the specific struggles of opposition actors against entrenched power elites. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of how various political and media systems evolve and the ways in which power structures persist through periods of apparent change.

### Albania's Media System Transformation

The political transition in Albania, marked by a shift from

communism to a more democratic system, significantly influenced the developing media landscape. This development mirrored the broader political and economic transitions of the country. Like other Eastern European nations, Albania's media initially mimicked foreign models, particularly Italian television (Godole, 2014). Unlike in countries with pre-existing alternative media that facilitated a smoother transition, such as Poland and Hungary, Albania lacked such structures due to stringent state control during communism. The rapid shift left the media struggling to adapt to new democratic realities without a robust foundation for independence. In 1991, the number of national daily newspapers doubled to four, and by 1994, this number had grown to eight. This rapid expansion in media outlets was accompanied by a drastic transformation within the journalistic workforce. Many journalists from the former regime were either dismissed or relegated to roles within the state broadcaster or local media outlets.

During the early years of transition, Albanian media attempted to move away from overt partisanship yet struggled to establish themselves as truly independent institutions. As Jakubowicz (2007) observes, media in former socialist countries, while becoming more pluralistic, remained deeply intertwined with political interests. This entanglement was particularly evident in Albania, where a significant number of media outlets received state subsidies. Key state-supported entities included TVSH (the state public television), district public televisions, ATSH (the national news agency), Radio Tirana, and various local radio stations in major cities. Additionally, several partisan publications were financially supported by their respective political parties. Despite initial optimism about the emergence of a free press, this environment led to audience disillusionment. Many Albanians sought news sources independent of ideological and political biases, resulting in a decline in the circulation of partisan newspapers and, in some cases, their eventual closure (Godole, 2014, p. 69).

To understand the evolution of Albania's media landscape, an examination of its development across four distinct periods based on media ownership is useful (Godole, 2014; Fuga 2008; Neza 2010; Kajsiu 2012).

1. The Free press of the New Plurastic Parties (1991-1994): This phase marked a transition from strict state control to a period of relative anarchy in the media sector. The press established by the newly formed political parties began to rise. These publications were mostly led by journalists and directors of party organs who had been in place during the communist period: They changed the titles or the cities where the newspapers were originally founded. The most evident case is that of the first independent newspaper, *Koha Jonë*, which was initially established in Lezhë as the organ of the Party of Labor of the district, and later moved to Tirana, where it made history during the transition period (Godole, 2014). In general, journalists were young and untrained. During this period, there was a lack of clear journalistic standards, employment criteria, contractual obligations,

and defined rights for journalists. As the former journalist, Aleksandër Furxhi, said in an interview, “after the fall of the regime, journalism was perceived more as an improvised profession, while journalists [were seen] as improvising working men” (Godole, 2014). Although the media landscape experienced significant growth, the influence of former communist elites persisted. Sparks and Reading (1994) note, there were substantial continuities in the structures and personnel of broadcasting even after political transitions. In many cases, the old state broadcasting systems were not fully privatized or replaced by free-market mechanisms but instead underwent gradual, controlled reforms that were heavily influenced by political interests (Sparks & Reading, 1994, p. 227). Consequently, the expansion and diversification of the Albanian media market during this period illustrate the complexities of elite continuity. Established elites adapted to the evolving media landscape, often using their positions to establish or control new media outlets.

2. The Political Press (1994-1998): During this phase, journalists often owned the newspapers they worked for, resulting in media that mirrored the chaotic nature of the political system at the time. The media landscape lacked a comprehensive legal framework to regulate journalistic activities effectively. The first press law, No. 7756 (1993), was adopted with minimal changes from Germany’s Westphalia region and without meaningful input from media stakeholders. This law, which was revised in 1997, was encapsulated in just two sentences: “The press is free. Freedom of the press is protected by law.” This period saw a proliferation of daily and weekly newspapers and magazines, largely due to low production costs associated with outdated printing technology. However, private radio and television broadcasts had yet to emerge; state broadcasters continued to dominate the airwaves but struggled with outdated training, technology, content, and journalistic techniques. From the perspective of the relationship between politics and the media, this phase is marked by a relatively strong media presence that often positioned itself in opposition to political power. However, the political authorities, who rose to power following the first pluralistic elections in 1992, gradually reverted to old tactics of press control, aiming to mold the media and its journalists into submissive entities that aligned with the ruling power. Some researchers argue that the independent media of this period played a crucial role in promoting popular movements, particularly the newspaper *Koha Jonë*, which acted almost as a separate opposition party during the 1997 unrest (Lani 2012, cited in Godole, 2014). By the end of this period, there was widespread disillusionment with democracy, and the relationship between the public, the media, and journalists had significantly deteriorated. The image of journalists, who were once seen as heroes, advocates, missionaries, and watchdogs between 1993-1996, had declined to that of “shams” and “liars”—terms also used for politicians. This shift in perception was largely due to the media’s failure to provide adequate information and warnings about the impending

collapse of the pyramid schemes in 1997 (Godole, 2014).

3. The Clientelist Media (1998-2011): This third phase marked a shift in the media landscape as it became heavily influenced by private capital. Following the creation and consolidation of capital and capitalists in Albania after 1998, market forces began to play a significant role in the media sector. Influential businessmen, particularly those from the construction industry, entered the media ownership arena. During this period, media outlets were often established not to serve the public interest but to fulfill market demand and advance the economic and political interests of their owners. This era is characterized as the period of “clientelist media” by various researchers (Baka, 2011) because investments in media became a strategy for businessmen to create protective shields to safeguard and strengthen their interests. The media market during this period experienced significant growth, which was more quantitative than qualitative. According to Mark Marku (2012), powerful private interests led to a “reconfiguration of the media landscape.” This shift occurred periodically as prominent businessmen from the construction industry, such as Koço Kokëdhima, Irfan Hysenbelliu, and Genc Dulaku, as well as coffee mogul Dritan Hoxha, entered the media market, quickly establishing new media outlets that became some of the most influential in the country. Due to substantial investments, the newspapers owned by Kokëdhima and Hysenbelliu achieved the highest circulation in the market, while Dulaku and Hoxha came to own two of the most important private television stations in Albania (Marku 2012, cited in Zguri, 2017, p. 13). Most of these new businessmen held privileged positions during the communist era. They played crucial roles in shaping media policies and ownership structures, ensuring their continued dominance in the media landscape to this day.

4. The Mediatization of Politics (from 2013 onwards): Referring to the Press Freedom Index over the last 10 years, there have been fluctuations and slight improvements in media freedom, but the country continues to be categorized as having a partially free media. The most recent report states: “In Albania, press freedom and media independence are threatened by conflicts of interest between the business and political worlds, a flawed legal framework, and partisan regulation. Journalists are victims of acts of intimidation by politicians and organized crime” (<https://rsf.org/en/country/albania>).

A significant factor here is the mediatization of politics by political leaders, particularly the current Prime Minister, who launched his first social television media outlet, ERTV, in 2017, where he showcases all his public activities. The connection between politics and the media reached a peak in this phase, especially with the impact of social media and various online platforms. The Freedom House report on Albania highlights that since the 2015 local elections, monitoring conducted by the OSCE revealed that all major media outlets, including public media, favored one of the main political parties, specifically the Socialist Party (Zguri, 2017).

## Myanmar's Media System Transformation

Colonial legacies have significantly influenced the trajectory of media markets in Southeast Asian nations. While many post-colonial states in the region have embarked on journeys toward democratic governance and media liberalization, Myanmar stands out as an exceptional case. For over half a century, Myanmar was governed by a military dictatorship (1962-2011), which left no room for free and pluralistic reporting. In February 2011, Myanmar experienced a unique transition, unlike the revolutions or uprisings seen in Eastern Europe. Instead, it initiated a top-down "Roadmap to a Disciplined-Flourishing Democracy" led by the *Tatmadaw* (Myanmar's military) in 2003.

With Myanmar's first general elections in 25 years the NLD (National League of Democracy) won a landslide, and a first democratically elected government was formed in 2015. Although Myanmar's 2008 constitution still guaranteed 25% of seats in parliament for military personnel, a change towards a democratic governance formally took place. In 2020, with the NLD's strengthened popularity the party won 83% of the parliamentary seats – 346 seats in the lower and upper house – in the third general elections following the 2010 political reforms. The military-backed opposition USPD party won just 25 seats. As the power of the NLD was widening the military aligned party USDP did not acknowledge the outcome of the elections due to alleged irregularities and demanded new elections through the elections commission. This request has not been addressed. On February 02, 2021, when the newly elected parliament intended to meet for the first time in Naypyidaw, the military took power. A new cabinet was appointed, the separation of powers was abolished, and the legislative, judicial, and executive power was transferred to General Min Aung Hlaing and a state of emergency was imposed. All senior MPs, including de-facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi and president Win Myint, were arrested. Since the military coup 5,592 people have been killed and 27,294 arrested by the junta or pro-military groups (AAPP, 2024, Sept. 02).

In this paper, we will analyze Myanmar's media development across four distinct phases: Myanmar's Media Spring (2011-2014), Institutionalization of the 'battle for free speech' (2015-2017,) Backsliding in media freedom developments (2017-2021), and Demolition of institutionalization of the media market through the coup d'état (2021).

1. Myanmar's Media Spring (2011-2014): This phase marked a structural shift, manifested by the abolition of the censorship board in 2012 and the proliferation of privately-owned media outlets, including dailies, weeklies, and monthlies. State propaganda organs were restructured into "Public Service Media." Despite the optimism surrounding these developments, the persistence of old power structures, closely tied to former rulers, hindered the media's ability to operate independently. For example, new independent private daily newspapers struggled to compete against wealthy cronies who favored tabloid

journalism and were less critical of powerful elites. Like Albania, Myanmar rapidly transitioned from one extreme to another – from being one of the most closed media systems in the world to a relatively free battleground of free media reporting. Unlike Albania, Myanmar's media liberalization did not occur in a political vacuum but was influenced by its colonial heritage and tightly controlled by the military. As in Albania, Myanmar's newsrooms were filled with inexperienced and unskilled journalists due to the lack of institutionalized training for professional journalism during its media spring.

Moreover, the transformation of Myanmar's state-owned broadcaster, MRTV, into a public-service entity preserved a profound intertwinement between the government and the *Tatmadaw* with the media sector and did not balance the government's monopolistic advantages. The ideological imprint of the media outlets as transformed public-service broadcasting "remains extremely vulnerable to state interference" as also shown in analysis for other transitional contexts (Voltmer, 2012, p. 237).

During this time, international media aid organizations, such as DW Akademie and Internews came into the scene quickly e.g. to support the process of setting up public service media structures and train people for new tasks to support new emerging elites to build democratic media structures. One could question the expected impact of foreign aid for the establishment of new elites in Myanmar, as key players, like DW Akademie, worked together with the old powerholders and maybe even strengthened them through training and resources during the process of the transformation of the state media.

In this early stage, one prominent example shows how the entanglement of assorted money sources impacted the media (spring) development (see also Brooten, 2016). The *Myanmar Times* was the oldest privately owned media outlet in Myanmar, known for its moderate criticism of the government. It was the first publication financed by foreign capital. It began as a joint venture between Australian Ross Dunkley and U Sonny Swe, the son of a high-ranking military official, which granted the paper preferential treatment (Thu, 2012, p. 23) but limited its independence. In 2014 and 2015 prominent businessman U Thein Tun known as the "godfather" in the old world of crony business" (Asia Times, 2022), who was the local partner of Danish brewer Carlsberg and the Tun Commercial Bank, invested in the *Myanmar Times* and owned most of its shares (Myanmar Times, 2014). U Thein Tun's management of the newspaper had to follow the military's editorial line. The former editor-in-chief actively censored coverage, e.g., banning the word *Robingya* and censoring critical reports about the *Tatmadaw* or companies that bought adverts and other 'sensitive' institutions. Even at a time when most of the country's private press adhered to its editorial independence after the military coup in 2021. This made the newspaper one of the first victims of the coup after the entire staff quit in protest (Asia Times, 2022).

In addition to the influence of military, business and media connections, the former Press Scrutiny Board could easily control the content of independent

newspapers through censorship. Moreover, the expensive annual licenses were typically allocated to politically corrupt individuals with close ties to authorities and government ministries, who either published the papers themselves or leased the licenses to private publishers (Thu, 2012, p. 22; personal communication, anonymous, member of the Press Council, 07.03.2014).

2. Institutionalization of the ‘Battle for Free Speech’ (2015-2017): Myanmar took significant steps toward a freer media market by enacting new laws and institutions. In 2014, the introduction of the News Media Law and the Printing and Publishing Law replaced earlier draconian legislation, effectively ending pre-censorship. New bodies, such as the Press Council and the Myanmar Journalism Institute, were established to promote media freedom and journalists’ rights. The newly founded Press Council is an example of how small battles between new and old elites can lead to results that maintain power privileges. The Press Council was composed of members of the old (pro-government and pro-military) and new elites (activists, pro-opposition) who negotiated a new framework for the institutionalization of a new order for the media. This included the new media law, which did not fulfil the more progressive demands of the newly founded Press Council and continued to provide the government with instruments to punish undesirable reporting. Additionally, the transformation of state-owned broadcaster MRTV into a public-service entity did not lead to genuine liberalization.

3. Backsliding in Media Freedom Developments (2017-2021): Despite the formal transition to democratic governance following Myanmar’s 2015 general elections, media freedom faced challenges. Section 66D of the Telecommunications Act was frequently employed to charge critical reporting as defamation, a criminal offense. Since the NLD came to power, the cases of journalists sued under the 66D skyrocketed and experts have called the new government an elected dictatorship, which is establishing a “self-censorship regime” and ascribe a lack of democratic culture to the NLD (Y. Htut, personal communication, April 17, 2017; anonymous, personal communication, March 02, 2017).

Additionally, the escalation of human rights violations against the *Rohingya* minority in 2017, labeled as “ethnic cleansing” by the UN, worsened the situation. During this period, Facebook became a primary source of information, facilitating the spread of hate speech and disinformation. While international criticism of Aung San Suu Kyi’s government intensified, her support grew within Myanmar, especially among the Bamar majority.

4. Demolition of Media Market Institutionalization through a Coup d’État (Since 2021): On February 1, 2021, Myanmar experienced a coup d’état by the *Tatmadaw*, resulting in the destruction of nearly a decade’s worth of media freedom achievements. Independent media outlets had their licenses revoked, journalists were imprisoned, persecuted and killed. The space for free expression and criticism have been completely diminished.

Altogether, these developments reconstruct the complex journey of Myanmar’s media transformation, highlighting the interplay between political forces, media development, and democratic transitions in the country’s recent history (see also Stokke & Aung, 2019).

## Sparks’ Framework Application for the Comparison of Elite Continuity in Albania and Myanmar

To compare the media system transformations in Albania and Myanmar, we apply Sparks’ (2008; 2010) framework of “elite continuity”. This framework helps us to understand how path dependencies in actor-structure relationships explain significant institutional or policy changes (Donnelly & Hogan, 2012; Pierson, 2004). Here, we provide insights into the transformation processes of Albania and Myanmar, focusing on critical junctures in their political landscapes that led to the liberalization of their respective media markets. This section contrasts the experiences of both countries under each of Sparks’ components, highlighting the nuances and deviations from theoretical expectations.

### (1) The Genuine Revolutions

Sparks (2008) describes the events in Central and Eastern Europe as “genuine revolutions” that represented a clean break from communist regimes, with new political parties contesting power and dismantling the Communist Party’s monopoly. While some transitions were negotiated, they nonetheless resulted in significant changes in political life (Sparks, 2008, p. 10). According to Sparks, the post-communist transitions in Central and Eastern Europe were true revolutions, breaking the Communist Party’s grip on power and creating new political parties. Myanmar’s transformation does not qualify as a “genuine revolution” under Sparks’s definition. The transition failed to substantially or formally dismantle the political monopoly of the *Tatmadaw*. In Albania, the fall of communism was less of a ‘genuine revolution’ and more influenced by external political shifts (Voltmer, 2012; Godole, 2014). Unlike the clear break from communist regimes observed in Central and Eastern Europe, Albania’s transition involved a transfer of power (Sparks, 2010, p. 98) to new leaders of pluralistic parties, many of whom were former party secretaries or closely associated with the communist regime, indicating a continuity of elite influence rather than a complete systemic overhaul.

### (2) Elite Continuity

Sparks (2008, p. 10) notes considerable continuity in institutions and personnel between old and new regimes, particularly in broadcasting and the civil service, where old state broadcasters were neither dismantled nor privatized. This continuity is evident in Myanmar’s

transition, where the transformation of the state-owned broadcaster maintained deep ties between the government and the *Tatmadaw*, fostering an environment susceptible to state interference (Voltmer, 2012, p. 237).

This pattern of continuity in institutions and personnel, as highlighted by Sparks, underscores their persistence in maintaining their established social roles and internal structures. A similar phenomenon is observed in the context of Myanmar's transition. The transformation of the state-owned broadcaster in Myanmar has resulted in a deep entwinement between the government and the *Tatmadaw*, extending into the media sector. This has created an imbalance in favor of the government's monopolistic advantages. Furthermore, the ideological influence exerted on media outlets, now transformed into public-service broadcasters, remained highly vulnerable to state interference. This susceptibility is evidenced by analyses conducted in other transitional contexts (Voltmer, 2012, p. 237). In Albania, the regime change also raised questions about the replacement of lower-level elites, not just top leaders. Samuel Huntington, a prominent political scientist, posited in his 1991 book "The Third Wave" that the actions of new governments in dealing with the old leadership apparatuses play a pivotal role in shaping the type of transition in these societies. This concept underscores the unique role played by the elites at the pinnacle of these societies during regime changes.

The situation in Albania during the regime change in 1991/92 was characterized by a dearth of independent counter-elites. Over the course of 45 years, the Stalinist regime had effectively stifled the emergence of dissident groups, liberal networks, or religious communities, even informally. Most political opponents had been either eliminated or imprisoned. Albania's isolation from the outside world further hindered communication with like-minded individuals in other countries, and international relations and trade had developed at a sluggish pace in the years leading up to the transformation.

In these circumstances, the post-dictatorship era witnessed a shift of individuals but not a wholesale replacement of elites. Former political prisoners wielded minimal influence in shaping the transformation process, with most of them assuming symbolic roles. Conversely, officials from the former Communist Party, who had collaborated with Enver Hoxha's (and later Ramiz Alia's) regime for years, ascended to leadership positions within the new political parties.

Both Myanmar and Albania demonstrate significant continuity in institutions and personnel, maintaining pre-existing social structures and internal hierarchies (Sparks, 2008, p. 10). The transformation of state-owned broadcasters and their continued influence illustrates this continuity.

### (3) Shift Towards a Market Economy

Sparks (2008) argues that the transition toward a market economy was closely linked to political power, with political connections being crucial for securing media

licenses (Sparks, 2008, p. 10). In Myanmar, while a market economy existed prior to the top-down democratization process, the military's economic influence, facilitated through cronies, persisted. Notably, the *Tatmadaw* retained ownership of a significant portion of the country's media infrastructure. Cronyism emerged as a dominant structure in Myanmar's political, economic, and social transformation. Key media enterprises came under the ownership of influential political and economic elites, including individuals with strong ties to former ministers, military leaders, or those entrenched in the political sphere. The example of the *Myanmar Times* shows how private capital in the media sector maintained strong ties between the old elites within the evolving media landscapes. A tight nexus between the *Tatmadaw* and private companies have effectively captured the media market and led to a media landscape characterized by market-driven freedom of expression that is largely dominated by cronies.

Although a new broadcasting law was enacted in 2015, and the licensing process began, the sector remained under government and *Tatmadaw* control. It took years for the NLD government to complete the licensing for the private sector. Finally, in April 2017, five companies were granted licenses after a prolonged process: DVB Multi Media, Fortune International, Kuang Myanmar Aung, Mizzima Media, and Young Investment Group. In contrast to Sparks' observations (2008), the issuance of new broadcasting licenses, termed "content providers," extended beyond cronies to include former exile media organizations. At this point, "new" actors from exile entered the local media sector and started to challenge the old elites from within the country. Although exile media organizations such as DVB were popular and had large market shares, the government continued to have tools at its disposal to restrict the freedom of these publishers. As a result, these exiles, for example DVB never fully returned to Myanmar and continued to have offices in Thailand, where its staff returned after the 2021 coup. Despite their unique 'communication power' that has emerged since 1988, when activists fled Myanmar, the exiled media have not been able to significantly influence the balance of power in Myanmar in recent decades (Radue & Bullerdieck, 2015). The strong ties between the *Tatmadaw* and monopoly-like private companies led to a market-driven freedom of expression. Non-state print publications, unlike e.g. the high-circulating state-owned *Global New Light of Myanmar Daily*, struggled to survive in this crony-dominated market. Myanmar's former Minister of Information, Ye Htut, anticipated this scenario, which was also criticized by other experts:

*Whether we like it or not; when we are opening up the media market and we abolish the censorship, the media becoming a business. [...] In the future, that's my concern, more and more the big companies are coming into the media market, and they will monopolize the print media and the broadcast media, and the independence disappears.*

(Y. Htut, personal communication,  
April 17, 2017)



Wealthy elites increased their power by interfering with the public discourse in Myanmar with investment in the media market and ownership of media outlets: “[T]hey have a lot of money and they don’t need it. They don’t care about losing money, but they want to influence the people” (anonymous, personal communication, February 14, 2017). New independent newspaper outlets, which were licenced in April 2013, mostly ceased operations due to the dominance of the government and cronies in the market who also control technologies and distribution channels (e.g. Ma Thida, personal communication, January 25, 2017, Brooten, 2016).

In Albania, the shift toward a market economy followed a similar pattern, where former communist elites became media owners (Godole, 2014). The continued dominance of these elites in the media market reflects the significant influence of existing power structures, particularly in local media enterprises and the state broadcaster *RTSH*, which remained dominant even after the transition. Former editors who had worked under the communist regime extended their influence during the privatization phase, founding private media outlets. Former journalists from newspapers operating during the communist era transitioned into media owners post-1991. Up until the end of 1997, many newspapers were under the management of these journalists, who adapted their media platforms to the evolving political and market dynamics.

It was only after 1998 that businesses began to invest in the media sector, with notable examples such as the newspaper *Shekulli*, which received investment from a former party secretary who had benefited from the privatization of state-owned assets in the early 1990s.

Consequently, the existing power structures continued to exert significant influence within the media market, particularly within the realm of local media enterprises. Furthermore, the state broadcaster, *RTSH*, maintained dominance in the broadcasting sector even after the transition, highlighting the enduring impact of the prior regime’s structures on the media landscape.

#### (4) Influence of Political Elite

Sparks (2008, p. 10) observes that media institutions emerging from transitional processes were often influenced by political elites, with regulatory bodies reflecting the shifting outcomes of elections. Political parallelism is a prominent feature in both Myanmar and Albania, as media institutions stemming from the transitional period bear strong influence from economic, political, and military elites. Contrary to expectations of complete independence, Sparks and Reading (1994) observe that media systems continued to exhibit elements of political dependence post-transition (p. 235). This aligns with the situation in Albania and Myanmar, where media independence is still evolving amidst ongoing political influences. In Albania regulatory bodies were reshaped based on election results, and the media became a stake of political power (Godole, 2014; 2021).

In Myanmar, this phenomenon is particularly evident in

the dominance of a crony business-oriented media market. The media landscape is largely divided into government-aligned outlets and those that adopt an oppositional or activist stance. The pervasive influence of economic, political, and military elites is conspicuous and shapes the media environment.

In Albania, political parallelism is evident, with media outlets often reflecting government positions or functioning as government mouthpieces. The ownership of media outlets by political figures, such as Prime Minister Edi Rama’s ownership of *ERTV*, exemplifies the ongoing entwinement of media and politics. In both cases, the intertwining of media and political interests underscores the influence of elites in shaping media narratives and agendas, potentially impacting media pluralism, independence, and the overall quality of democratic discourse.

#### (5) Persisting Social Order

According to Sparks (2008, p.10), while political revolutions transformed governance structures, they did not constitute social revolutions that fundamentally challenged the social order in the economy or the state apparatus. While the transitions were political revolutions that transformed the governance of these countries, they did not constitute social revolutions challenging the fundamental social order.

The social order in Myanmar remained largely intact, primarily due to the top-down nature of the political transformation. This observation aligns with Sparks’ framework, emphasizing that these transitions did not give rise to social revolutions capable of fundamentally challenging the existing order within industry or the state apparatus. Similarly, in Albania, expectations of rapid economic prosperity following the fall of communism were not realized. Instead, the country experienced a semi-autocratic system (Altmann, 1999, p. 348) characterized by the informal economy, corruption, and slow economic development, illustrating the persistence of the pre-existing social order. This period witnessed the flourishing of the informal economy, the erosion of existing productive infrastructure, rampant corruption, and other challenges (Schönfelder, 1999, pp. 341-345).

These dynamics in Myanmar and Albania highlight the complex interplay between political transformations, social orders, and economic structures, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of post-authoritarian transitions.

#### (6) Transformation of the Elite

Sparks (2008) notes that post-revolution elites often transformed their political power into economic influence, maintaining continuity across systems. In both Myanmar and Albania, former elites used their political connections to acquire economic power, reinforcing their dominance in the new order. One of the prominent aspects that emerges in our cases is the transformation of the old elite’s

political influence into economic power, enabling them to maintain a significant hold on power. This phenomenon aligns closely with Sparks' conceptualization of "a high degree of elite continuity throughout societies," illustrating a transition from political authority to economic dominance (Sparks, 2008, p. 1).

In Albania, the former bureaucratic ruling class repositioned itself as private capital owners, maintaining significant control over the media and other sectors, as articulated by Sparks (2008, p. 18). This parallels the situation in Myanmar, where military elites and their cronies dominated the media market, underscoring the continuity of elite influence. The *Tatmadaw* never gave up its central position and upheld dependencies across social systems to safeguard its power.

### (7) The Degree of Democratization

Sparks (2008) argues that democratization is often a contingent feature of post-revolution societies, not an inherent outcome. In Myanmar's closely managed democratization process, several mechanisms were upheld to preserve the influence of the *Tatmadaw*, primarily through constitutional provisions and economic connections. Notably, the military retained control over central ministries, and a quarter of parliamentary seats were designated for military personnel only. Myanmar's political change built up a hybrid (semi-authoritarian) regime which resonated with Sparks' observations regarding the development of former communist contexts, wherein democratization often emerged as a contingent feature of the new order rather than its defining essence (Sparks, 2008, p. 10; Stokke & Aung, 2019). Similarly, in Albania, democratic institutions emerged under the influence of old elites, demonstrating that democratization was secondary to the continuity of elite power.

In both countries, the media systems were shaped by the continuity of political elite influence (Sparks, 2008), rather than a complete transformation toward independent and democratic media.

While both countries experienced some democratization, it was not the essence of the new order. In summary the media systems in Albania and Myanmar were shaped by the continuity of the political elite's influence and interests, rather than a complete transformation towards independent and democratic media.

### Conclusions

The study provides an understanding of the challenges facing media transformations in post-authoritarian societies like Albania and Myanmar. It highlights the resilience of elite structures and the limitations of conventional democratization efforts that do not adequately address the root causes of media capture and manipulation. Moving forward, it is essential to develop strategies that promote not just the legal and economic independence of media, but also the cultural

and institutional conditions necessary for a truly free and pluralistic media environment. Building on the theses and research questions posed at the beginning of this study, we conclude the following:

### Reflection on Elite Continuity in Media Transformations

The study found that elite continuity persists in both Albania and Myanmar, as entrenched power structures and elites have maintained their influence over the media landscape throughout the political transitions. This finding aligns with Sparks' framework, demonstrating that media systems often remain closely tied to pre-existing elite structures, even after significant political change. This underpins the assertion made at the outset that, when examining media transformations, the path dependencies and historical interdependencies of the structure-actor relationships that have shaped the power relations in the context should be examined more closely. Here, Spark's perspective of elite continuity is of great value because it focuses on the challenges of state media transformation. In our case studies, the transformation of state broadcasters such as Myanmar's MRTV and Albania's RTSH into public service media did not break the strong links between governments and the old elites. This has led to the continuation of a power imbalance and susceptibility to state interference (Voltmer, 2012, p. 237). These developments illustrate what Sparks (2008, pp. 1, 18) refers to as 'elite continuity', in which the former bureaucratic ruling class attempts to restructure themselves as owners of private capital. Sparks' (2008) analytical framework helps to understand how elite continuities manifests itself during such transitions.

The conclusion that elite continuity remains dominant in Albania and Myanmar suggests that formal political transitions alone are insufficient to disrupt established power dynamics. The persistence of elite influence underscores the adaptability of these groups, who manage to maintain control by transitioning into new roles or leveraging historical connections. The implications of this finding are significant: it challenges the assumption that democratization processes naturally lead to more independent and pluralistic media environments. Instead, it reveals that old elites often retain power by reshaping their influence within the evolving political and media landscapes. These findings serve as reminders that political change does not automatically equate to a complete overhaul of elite structures or power dynamics.

This raises questions about the effectiveness of post-transition reforms aimed at promoting media independence. If entrenched elites can adapt and continue to wield influence, then strategies focused solely on legal or regulatory changes may not be enough. A more comprehensive approach is needed—one that addresses the underlying power structures and fosters a genuinely independent media culture that can resist co-optation by political or economic interests. The comparison of our two contexts by applying Sparks seven components (2008)

directs our perspective on such persisting power networks.

### Reflection on the Impact of Media Commercialization, Crony Ownership, and Politicization on Democratization

The study concluded that media commercialization, crony ownership, and political influence significantly hinder the democratic potential of media landscapes in both Albania and Myanmar. These factors limit media pluralism and independence, compromising the media's role in supporting democratic processes.

The finding that commercialization and crony ownership undermine democratic media functions reflects a broader trend seen in many post-authoritarian contexts. In Albania and Myanmar, the media landscape has become a battleground for economic and political elites, who use their resources to shape media content and control narratives. The shift toward a market economy was highly political, with political connections playing a crucial role, for example in winning commercial broadcasting licenses (Sparks, 2008, p. 10). This dynamic is evident in Myanmar's media market, where cronyism plays a dominant role. In Albania, a shift toward a market economy followed a similar pattern, where former communist elites transitioned into media ownership (Sparks 2010, p 98). This concentration of ownership and influence leads to a lack of diverse perspectives and critical journalism, which are essential for a healthy democracy. Despite some new media outlets emerging during the transitions, many remained linked to existing elites, limiting true renewal in terms of independent journalism and diverse ownership.

This suggests that efforts to promote democratic media environments need to go beyond merely opening up

markets or reducing direct state control. Instead, there must be safeguards against the monopolization of media ownership and the intertwining of media businesses with political or economic agendas. Encouraging a diverse media ecosystem that includes a range of voices and perspectives is crucial to counterbalancing the power of dominant elites and ensuring that the media can fulfill its role as a democratic watchdog.

Overall, the study's findings confirm the importance of understanding media transformations within their specific political and cultural contexts. Despite experiencing some degree of democratization, both countries demonstrate that democratization in media systems often remains a contingent feature, heavily influenced by the enduring dominance of old elites and preserved power structures. They serve as reminders that political change does not automatically equate to a complete overhaul of elite structures or power dynamics, underscoring the need for tailored, context-specific media reforms that address both historical legacies and contemporary challenges.

Moreover, these reflections encourage further research into the mechanisms by which elites maintain their influence in changing political contexts and how media reforms can be designed to counteract these forces. The example of Myanmar's exile media provides assorted starting points to examine how such new elites can flourish but may need either support or more diversity to strengthen those new elites in a more sustainable transformation. Additionally, further research can raise the question how international media assistance may weaken new elites in their struggle to fully overhaul the overpowerful old elites. Such research could provide valuable insights for policymakers and media advocates working to build more democratic media systems in similar transitional societies.

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# The Platformization of Media Structures as a Critical Juncture

## A Pragmatist Perspective on Value Mediation by Journalistic Start-ups and Established Publishers

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### Abstract

The field of digital journalism is facing multifaceted crises posed by the phenomenon of platformization. We interpret this platformization as a critical juncture and investigate how different actors address the associated challenges, focusing on processes of value mediation. To do so, we compare two German journalism start-ups and a mainstream publisher. Our study introduces a pragmatistic theoretical framework using three approaches of cooperative value mediation (or “co-valuation”) – pricing, design, and cultivation – as an analytical as well as normative tool. On the one hand, results show that niche players exhibit a tendency for autonomy from prevailing structural conditions, underlined by a collective “value commitment”, although the strategies for mediating values can differ significantly. On the other hand, established players perceive themselves as subject to deterministic influences, hindering the cultivation of enduring value loyalties. The analysis thus also highlights the role of the sociotechnical ecosystem in shaping value mediation, emphasizing the utility of the co-valuation approaches.

*Keywords: Digital Journalism, Platformization, Critical Juncture, Data Economy, Pragmatism, Co-Valuation*

Today, journalism faces multiple crises that “are in part a result of the ongoing fundamental structural transformation of our media systems, where economic and technological forces in combination generate ever more intense competition for attention, for advertisements, and for audiences’ media spending.” (Nielsen, 2016, p. 77). A key driver of this development has been platformization since the 2010s, which describes the increasing power of big tech platforms and their ongoing formation of the internet’s infrastructure (Eisenegger, 2021; van Dijck et al., 2018). In order to survive economically, established media outlets adapt platform logics while additionally facing new competitors in financing and content distribution.

Whereas various analyses of digital capitalism provide useful perspectives regarding the dangers of platformization, they often focus on a seemingly inescapable platform power (Staab, 2024; Zuboff, 2019). We argue that the crisis of digital journalism can also be understood as a critical juncture (Siapera et al., 2015) that creates an indeterminate situation as described by Dewey (1946), which disrupts accepted routines thus requiring all actors to find ways to deal with the circumstances.

In this search for new strategies, actors in the field of digital journalism must consider and mediate assorted values, e.g. privacy, economic profitability or the formation of public opinion. In the following, we focus on the challenges of value meditation by highlighting the plurality of occasionally conflicting values. Adopting the concept of “co-valuation” (Draude et al., 2024, pp. 7-10), we also propose a tool to analyze the forms of value meditation. Thus, we ask how relevant values in the context of digital journalism can be mediated on the basis of ‘prices’, sociotechnical ‘design’ as well as

through processual ‘cultivation’ of public negotiations and participation. Therefore, in our article we pose the research question: How do actors in digital journalism mediate various values in reaction to challenges of platformization?

To exemplify a spectrum of possible reactions and to illustrate our theoretical approach, we focus on two empirical cases of German online journalism start-up platforms and a commercial digital media publisher.

In the following section, we introduce our perspective on the phenomenon of platformization and its impact on media structures by relating the topic specific discussion to the critical juncture discourse and the concept of pioneer journalism (Hepp & Loosen, 2021). Afterwards we present our theoretical perspective on the role of values and value mediation in critical junctures. Here, we illustrate a specific approach on value mediation underpinned with pragmatistic theory on values by introducing the concept of co-valuation. Before we use this perspective to study and discuss how media outlets react to the critical juncture of platformization against the background of their value commitments and positions in the field, we introduce our methodological approach. We conclude by highlighting how the co-valuation approaches provide an analytic and normative perspective for the assessment of opportunities and challenges of value mediation in digital journalism.

### Introducing the Platformization of Media Structures as a Critical Juncture

Current crises in journalism are often associated with the rise of digital platforms, especially Alphabet’s Google and



Meta's Facebook (Eisenegger, 2021). Today, publishers must compete with high reach and technically superior platforms in the advertising market that also occupy users' first information touchpoint. Furthermore, publishers increasingly depend on the technical infrastructure of platforms, for example in terms of the development of apps for mobile use (SDK tools, app stores, etc.) and the display of advertising (especially programmatic advertising). Publishers also curate content via user interfaces and algorithmic recommender systems or through the integration of platform elements into their own websites (like buttons, search functions, etc.) (cf. Nielsen & Ganter, 2022, pp. 1-26). As a result, publishers are increasingly exposed to, and in some cases actively contribute to, the goals and logics of action of tech companies that do not correspond to the traditional objectives of journalism (Eisenegger, 2021). At the same time, users can publish content themselves via digital platforms without having to resort to publishers and their quality checks, which weakens the gatekeeping role of publishers and potentially facilitates the dissemination of unverified information (Neuberger et al., 2023). Against this background, the profound crisis journalism is facing due to media platformization has been described as a "challenge to democracy" (Fischer & Jarren, 2024) and the public sphere (Habermas, 2022). Click-bait, fake news, filter bubbles and echo chambers, a loss of quality or the polarization of public debates are among the most frequently mentioned phenomena in this context (Neuberger, 2022).

Although these diagnoses raise awareness of the dangers of the dominant role of platforms, critical analyses of digital capitalism (e.g. Srnicek, 2016; Staab, 2024) sometimes lack the conceptual tools to recognize the ambivalences of digitization. This potentially leads to dystopian descriptions of an almost inescapable platform power (e.g. Zuboff, 2019) and to simplistic dichotomies between capitalist exploitation and a value-driven orientation towards the common good (Sharon, 2021). Consequently, responsibility for problematic situations can be shifted too easily and uncertain situations are regarded as already decided. Hence, new terminology is needed that neither denies power and interests nor elevates them to all-explaining variables. The interconnection of interests and values is apparent in approaches that assume the simultaneity of several crises in contemporary journalism. As Neuberger (2020) and Nielsen (2016) show, the financial crisis in journalism is linked to a variety of other crises, those of: quality; professional identity; epistemology, and confidence. Against this background, several challenges arise for journalism, which reinforce existing value conflicts or create new ones, e.g., concerning the issues of economic profitability and journalistic quality standards. The latter are much more difficult to maintain, for example, if large numbers of staff must be laid off for financial reasons. However, an orientation towards advertising-relevant click rates and the reach of audiences, which contributes to the spread of clickbait articles affects also issues of quality (Petre, 2021). Furthermore, the use of new advertisement formats such as native advertising challenges the separation of editorial

content and advertisement as a core element of journalistic professionalism (Schauster et al., 2016). At the same time, publishers use these formats as an alternative to highly data-intensive forms of advertising (e.g. programmatic advertising), which come into conflict with European data protection legislation and the ban of third-party cookies by the major browser providers (Engert et al., 2023). Thus, media outlets must find new ways to mediate values of, for example, quality, professionalism, or privacy with economic profitability. To a certain extent this need for value mediation applies even for the platforms, which have various dependent relationships with advertisers, users, media companies, and regulators. Platforms are often involved in legal disputes over fair prices that must be paid for by using journalistic content (Radsch, 2022). Furthermore, platforms try to position themselves as mediators between all stakeholders through design decisions such as Google's "privacy sandbox"<sup>1</sup> and are the subject of public criticism. It is an empirical question to what extent platforms can evade justification imperatives, for example through technical design decisions or competitive advantages.

In the following, we propose to understand the platformization of media structures as a "critical juncture" and combine this approach with a specific perspective on value mediation following the classical pragmatism of John Dewey (1939; 1946) and French neo-pragmatism (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). The term critical junctures refers to short periods of time, in which change is, as Cappocia & Keleman (2007) argue, significantly less restricted than in phases of path dependency due to "brief phases of institutional flux" (Cappocia & Keleman, 2007, p. 341) which may lead to an enduring legacy within the ecosystem (Collier & Munck, 2017). Lamuedra et al. (2018) describe the disintegration of "established" institutions as an indicator of a critical juncture, which in turn allows the innovation of new institutions. The authors also attest this state to digital journalism, citing McChesney (2013, p. 20) who frames journalistic institutions' current evolution to be in "freefall collapse". Using a less dramatic framing, the dissolution of institutionalized path dependencies in journalism results from the multiple crises mentioned before and leads to an indeterminate situation, which affords the establishment of new routines.

Therefore, this dissolution opens opportunities for experimental practices and new imaginations in the journalistic context, for which Hepp and Loosen (2021) coined the term

<sup>1</sup> With the so-called "privacy sandbox", Google responds to data protection regulations by preventing the use of "third party cookies" in the Chrome browser. Google thereby follows Apple and Mozilla, who have already introduced similar technologies. According to Google, the privacy sandbox enables the different values and interests of various stakeholders to be mediated: "The Privacy Sandbox initiative aims to create technologies that both protect people's privacy online and give companies and developers tools to build thriving digital businesses. The Privacy Sandbox reduces cross-site and cross-app tracking while helping to keep online content and services free for all" (Google 2024). However, the sandbox has also been criticized for further increasing Google's competitive advantage on the advertisement market without contributing to data protection (Eliot et al., 2022; Gerandini et al., 2021).

*pioneer-journalism, [referring to] a particular group of professionals who incorporate new organizational forms and experimental practice in pursuit of redefining the field and its structural foundations. Their interactions and interrelations define the social domain of pioneer journalism. It can include contributions from established media organizations, individual journalists and small startups, and organizations one might not typically associate with the journalistic field. These include tech companies and social movements as well as a variety of other corporate actors and collectives.*

(Hepp & Loosen 2021, p. 578)

However, the experimentation of new and established actors in the field of journalism could also be understood as internal critiques that “generate explanations, ideas, actions and practices” which function as “actual ways of intervening into the future of the media” (Siapera et al., 2015, p. 460). Thus, we ask whether and how novel and established actors critique journalism platforms and thereby experiment with new opportunities to reinvent journalism. To do so, we introduce a specific approach on examining these exploratory efforts within journalism. A look at these “real utopias” (Wright, 2010) shows the possible paths of a renewed journalism, but also points to potential obstacles to their implementation. However, not all actors have the same starting conditions to react to the crisis resulting from platformization. Therefore, this article takes a comparative look at both start-ups and established publishers.

### Presenting our theoretical approach: Pragmatism and value mediation

The intuition that critical junctures require an innovation of institutions also plays an important role in the philosophical tradition of pragmatism. Thus, Dewey argues that societal crises call for an “inquiry”, understood as a cyclical, cooperative and society-wide learning process to develop institutions that can appropriately deal with new societal issues (Dewey, 1946). In this context, the above-mentioned crises are triggers for an indeterminate situation, not elements of a problematic situation in itself: “Turning an indeterminate situation into a problematic one is for Dewey the first step of inquiry.” (van de Poel & Kundina 2022, p. 40; see Lamla 2013a and Lamla 2013b, pp. 84-118) One of the main tasks of the (niche-)actors in journalism is therefore to translate the indeterminate situation into their own problem definition.

Furthermore, for the appropriate transformation of critical junctures into new routines values as “judgment devices” (van de Poel & Kundina, 2022) are crucial. Following Dewey’s (1939) theory of valuation, van de Poel and Kundina (2022, p. 6) understand “values as evaluative devices that carry over from earlier experiences and are (to some extent) shared in society.” As judgment devices, values can help “to discover what is morally at stake” (van de Poel & Kundina, 2022, p. 7) and guide future actions. For example, as mentioned above, privacy or journalistic quality currently serve as

guidelines against which the platformization of media structures is judged. However, pragmatism does not refer to values deontologically as abstract rules for “correct” action. On the contrary, contested values are themselves the product of previous problem solutions and therefore must be applied and interpreted in the context of new situations (van de Poel & Kundina, 2022, pp. 6-7). This practical anchoring of values as judgement devices also undermines the clear distinction between “ideal values” and practical “constraints”. Following Dewey’s “ends-in-view” understanding of values, Maeyer (2020, 119) argues that journalistic values and orientations (e.g., informing the public about relevant societal issues or getting page views) depend on how to achieve them (e.g., data protection requirements or the balancing of advertisement and journalistic content). Therefore, achieving an end-in-view like informing the public about relevant societal issues also depends on the mediation with other aspects and value-laden issues like privacy, journalistic quality, or profitability (Engert et al., 2023). An adequate inquiry must thus not only mediate (variable) values and situations but also ends and means.<sup>2</sup>

The “ends-in-view” understanding of values shows that practical solutions usually require the mediation of various values and interests. Therefore, the idea of a single and isolated value as a judgement device falls short. By following Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) and their influential book “On Justification”, ‘orders of worth’ can be mobilized in episodes of crisis. Each order of worth has its own idea of what is just and appropriate in each situation. For example, outlets can justify or criticize specific perspectives on issues like privacy, journalistic content, or the integration of users on journalism platforms with reference to technical efficiency, economic profitability, democratic opinion-forming or creative innovation. The plurality of valuation principles becomes apparent when values clash. There are essentially two options available in such a situation: Either the conflict is resolved through forms of power and violence, or a compromise is reached between two or more orders of worth. To do justice to the plurality of ‘orders of worth’ and digital journalism as a complex, multi-level phenomenon, the concept of compromise must also reflect multiple levels in the search for new routines in journalism. Therefore, we want to differentiate between three forms of cooperative value mediation, which we call ‘co-valuation’ (see also Draude et al., 2024, pp. 7-10). This helps to understand not only that value mediation through compromises takes place but also *how* a compromise is reached:

- **Pricing:** Firstly, we focus on the translation of values into the economic language of prices. By following Boltanski and Esquerre (2020), prices are justified by specific values. For example, an offer of affordable

<sup>2</sup> However, not every uncertain situation triggers an inquiry based on values as judgment devices. Although established habits are the foundation for establishing new routines through societal learning processes, reactions to indeterminate situations could also try to preserve previous routines in a way that tend to reproduce crises in the long term. Furthermore, the interplay of the actors, legal frameworks, and power asymmetries can shape the conditions that enable or prevent the innovation of new routines.



quality content could be justified on the grounds of promoting democratic opinion-forming. Besides, providing free access to important journalistic content could justify financing journalism by advertising revenues. However, since various values and interests of media outlets justify a specific price, we can ask which values are (not) considered when it comes to setting prices. Regarding advertising revenues, the driving factor to justify prices that advertisers must pay to publishers is the reach of advertising space. Against the background of a normatively appropriate value mediation, this could be an issue since the reach of advertising space usually does not reflect the quality of journalistic articles.

- *Design*: Secondly, we ask how sociotechnical design can mediate various values. For instance, approaches such as ‘fair machine learning’ or ‘privacy by design’ aim to establish an infrastructure blueprint, which avoids manipulation, discrimination, or misuse of data (Binns, 2018). If discrimination-sensitive algorithms are recognized as a competitive advantage in specific sectors, value mediation takes place via fair machine learning. Furthermore, journalistic recommendation systems can foster value mediation when they enable democratic opinion-forming as well as economic profitability. A normative evaluation of value mediation through design examines whether design processes in various contexts such as the court of law or on the user side are appropriately justified (Diver, 2022, p. 163).
- *Cultivation*: Thirdly, episodes of critical junctures challenge existing values as judgement devices and often require a public negotiation to redefine values to establish new routines. Dewey (1939) suggests value mediation emerges from past experiences that ideally has been subjected to critical methods of experimental and public investigation. In this sense, the “practical problem that has to be faced is the establishment of cultural conditions that will support the kinds of behavior in which emotions and ideas, desires and appraisals are integrated” (Dewey, 1939, p. 65). Therefore, we refer to cultivation as the public and participatory process that leads ideally to an innovative adoption, redefinition, and integration of values. Cultivation in this sense depends on preserving constitutive functions of journalism for the reproduction of critical competencies of citizens. Especially the competency to evaluate existing justifications should be fostered under conditions of the digital transformation of the public sphere.

These co-valuation approaches not only provide a perspective to analyze different forms of value mediation but can also guide normative assessment of value mediation. For instance, the normative perspective concerns the application of particular co-valuation approaches, asking to what extent prices or design approaches are sufficiently justified and reflect a range of values (journalistic quality, profitability of publishers, democratic opinion framing, etc.). However, normative questions of value mediation also relate to the appropriate

integration of co-valuation approaches. Therefore, establishing a normatively justified price for journalistic content requires a legal and regulatory design that, for instance, sets criteria for prices that Google must pay for the use of journalistic content. But even if this pricing is recognized as fair by publishers there is also a need for public discussions (cultivation) regarding the question to what extent journalism should be dependent on platform-organizations like Google at all. In the following, we would like to exemplify these theoretical considerations by means of an empirical comparison of reactions to platformization. Before we proceed, however, we present our methodological approach in the next section.

### Methodological approach to study the reactions to platformization

The results presented below are based on empirical material collected as part of the interdisciplinary research project FAIRDienst<sup>3</sup>. The empirical material includes literature and document research, two workshops with experts and practitioners from the field of digital journalism and a total of 28 approximately one-hour interviews with various actors from the digital journalism ecosystem (publishers, start-ups, civil society actors, the advertising industry, journalism associations, etc.) (see Engert et al., 2023). All actors in our sample are German, but we also refer to European legislation and globally operating companies such as Google (German quotes used in the article were translated by the authors). This initial study enabled us to acquire a knowledgeable understanding of the empirical field of online journalism. Building on that, we choose in the following to focus on selected in-depth interviews with personnel working at journalistic start-ups and established publishers. These cases enabled us to investigate how various actors position themselves and react to tensions within the field. The selected start-ups were the primary unit of analysis because of their pioneering approaches that can be understood as internal critiques to the critical juncture of platformization. They aim to deviate from the existing ecosystem by introducing innovations which classifies them as niche actors (Geels 2012, p. 472). At the same time, the chosen start-ups communicate a foundational normative orientation in their external presentation, showcasing that values play a significant role in guiding their actions. To broaden the spectrum of possible reactions, we compared these start-ups against an established online media publisher platform.

We chose three cases based on the principle of minimal and maximum contrasting (Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Strübing, 2019), to detect both similarities and differences between the start-ups and the established publisher, as well as to show the range of possible reactions mapped by our sample (Hummrich, 2009, pp. 149-201). For a

<sup>3</sup> “Faire digitale Dienste: Ko-Valuation in der Gestaltung datenökonomischer Geschäftsmodelle (FAIRDienst)” [Fair digital services: Co-evaluation in the design of data-economic business models], funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research under Grant No. 16KIS1249K.

minimal contrast, we selected two online journalistic start-up platforms (JSTUPP 1 and JSTUPP 2) that applied distinctive strategies in terms of co-valuation by focusing on either a pricing or design-centered approach. For a maximum contrast, we chose an established commercial publisher of online journalism (ECPOJ) that was naturally exposed to ecosystem conditions and lock-in mechanisms different to those experienced by JSTUPP 1 and JSTUPP 2. The questions asked in the semi-structured interviews focused on business model strategies, privacy concerns, value mediation strategies, user participation and power relations. The aims of the interviews were to determine the individual strategies of the media outlets and their reasons for offering innovations while at the same time dealing with the socio-technical regime. The authors transcribed and inductively coded (Glaser & Strauss, 2017) all the interviews and translated them into English. Selected key passages were examined in depth through sequential analysis (cf. Reichertz, 2008). Following this, we used the aforementioned theoretical approach to analyze the reactions of online media outlets to the critical juncture of platformization. To do so, we applied the concept of “co-valuation” to guide the further analysis process using the coded material.

## Reactions to platformization

In the following, we show how actors in the field of journalism react to current crises of digital journalism and how they use values as judgement devices. The first two cases refer to niche actors trying to establish innovations in the field of digital journalism as well as reacting to specific challenges we previously discussed. However, the start-ups follow either a pricing approach (JSTUPP 1) or a design one (JSTUPP 2). We used an established commercial publisher of online journalism (ECPOJ) to contrast the challenges that pioneer communities and proven media companies face.

### Case 1: Journalism Start-up Publishing Platform (JSTUPP 1) - Securing democratic values through fair price models

In this section, we present JSTUPP 1 that uses values as judgement devices not only to criticize developments in digital journalism, but also as a basis to search for new business models. One of the most pressing goals of this start-up is the promotion of democratic opinion-forming by giving users access to affordable quality content. Therefore, one of the founders of the start-up claimed that

*it would be cool to be able to read paid journalism [...] from different newspapers without having to pay for lots of subscriptions. Because most people can't afford to take out a lot of subscriptions and then you get more and more one-sided information.*

(JSTUPP1)

In addition, changes in usage practices of especially younger people make it necessary to rethink the distribution of news content: “[E]ven [...] the big newspapers [...] have huge problems because young people in particular no longer read them. [...] Because people are consuming media differently now. And I have the feeling that a big change is needed” (JSTUPP 1). The need for affordable quality content and the failure to reach young people point to the funding, quality and identity crises of digital journalism previously mentioned. Furthermore, JSTUPP 1 criticizes the current handling of data practices that undermine the right of (individual) information control: “The laws actually exist for [informational control, Uhlmann et al.], but [...] many apps simply don't do this. [...] they just track the data. And yes, I wouldn't call that fair” (JSTUPP1).

To promote democratic opinion forming, JSTUPP 1 aims to establish a privacy-friendly platform that provides affordable quality content from assorted publishers. To achieve these goals, the platform experiments with fair pricing models. Fairness here means that users not only receive affordable quality content, but that it also depends on the platform's decision makers to take the interests of the publisher seriously when setting prices for journalistic content. Therefore, JSTUPP 1 claims that a flat-rate subscription-based model like Netflix or Spotify “is simply unfeasible. That would never be fair for the newspapers. And regardless of the fairness factor, we would never be able to convince them [the publishers, Uhlmann et al.] to take part” (JSTUPP1). To mediate the interests of users and publishers based on price models, the platform decided that users must only pay for the content they have read. This decision aimed to provide affordable and diverse quality content while securing a fair distribution of revenues for the newspapers. Furthermore, values such as affordable quality content, privacy and democratic opinion-forming do not only guide the search for new pricing models, but also the design of platform features like recommendation systems. Due to privacy issues and the potential problems of filter bubbles, JSTUPP 1 is critical about personalization algorithms and “always wanted to avoid [...] the way it is [...] on Facebook, Instagram or other [...] normal social media apps, that you fall into feedback loops and then see the same things again and again” (JSTUPP1). Furthermore, JSTUPP 1 always resolves perceived conflicts between the efficiency of their platform-model and informational self-determination in favor of the latter:

*We also use analytics to analyze how the app is used, [...] where we can improve stability. [...] And some people switch that off too. Of course, that's actually bad for us. So, it makes it a bit more difficult for us to decide in which direction we need to develop further. But it's also just fairer.*

(JSTUPP1)

However, although the organizational culture is characterized by both high value commitments and experiments with fair prices, the platform is confronted with difficulties in acquiring new users and news

publishers. In this regard, JSTUPP 1 mentions that they “talked to so many newspapers and it was so hard to get content from them because they are all afraid to give it away” (JSTUPP1). This vicious circle leads to challenges in reaching users. However, start-up funding and usage of open-source technologies allow the implementation of JSTUPP 1 despite the mentioned challenges. Thus, whether or not this start-up could experiment with alternatives to the current platform economy depends on certain infrastructural conditions and support to survive in the long term.

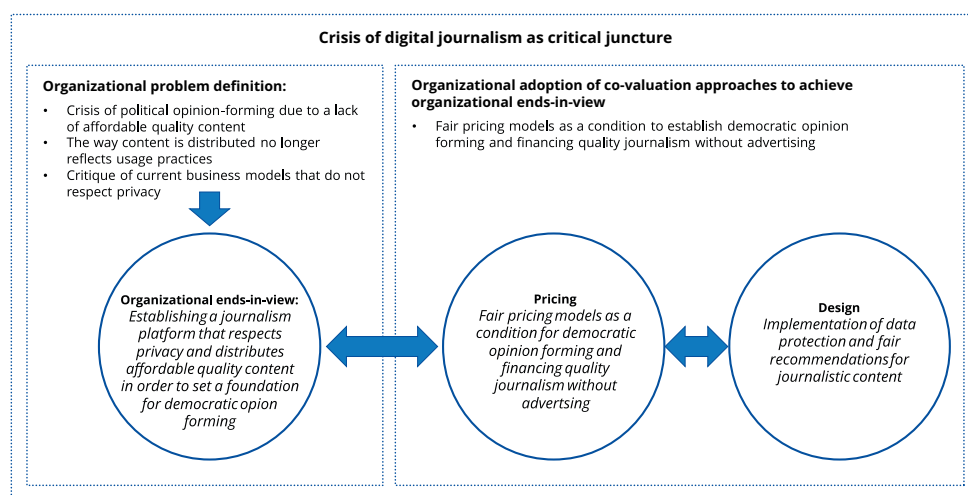


Figure 1: Start-up Journalism platform

Figure 1 shows how JSTUPP 1 would interpret the crisis facing digital journalism. As this start-up is characterized by a strong commitment to secure privacy and democratic opinion forming, values as judgement devices are mobilized to set goals for a privacy friendly journalism platform that aims to distribute affordable quality content. These organizational ends-in-view structure the inquiry for setting fair prices that are also the central means to achieve organizational goals.

## Case 2: Journalism Start-up Publishing Platform (JSTUPP 2) - Technological solutions for social challenges

In this section, we present another start-up that also uses values as judgement devices to criticize current developments of platformization and develop alternative business models. Besides the lack of adequate privacy protection of big internet companies, JSTUPP 2 mainly refers to the unchecked distribution of content that promote phenomena such as fake news or click-bait. Accordingly, users of social media “always end up in these attention-based [...] algorithms” (JSTUPP2). However, JSTUPP 2 criticizes not the social media logic as such, but its inadequate technical design and adaption:

*I think that a lot of people grow up with social media and at some point they get tired of it or want to access information that they know is*

*verified and has a certain quality feature and want to consume it in a similarly convenient way via an app or via various apps or even via the Internet.*

(JSTUPP2)

Therefore, JSTUPP 2 aims to build a platform for quality content that utilizes the advantages of social media technologies while avoiding their disadvantages on the basis of a value-oriented platform design: “We [take] social media technologies [...], but not all of them, only the basic principle [such as] personalized content, network effects through a platform model, scalability, international access to the market [...]. And combine that with our own values” (JSTUPP2). As this focus on social media technologies suggests, the central means for establishing the platform is the sociotechnical design. For instance, JSTUPP 2 differentiates itself from platforms like Facebook by using privacy friendly personalization algorithms. Therefore, contrary to JSTUPP 1, restrictive use of personalized recommendations due to specific data protection concerns and possible risks

of filter bubbles appears unfounded: “We want to know what interests you, but we don’t want to know who you are. [...] In our view, there is no conflict of objectives if you collect data anonymously [...]” (JSTUPP2). Furthermore, with the help of anonymized data analysis carried out by the platform, publishers can also find out for which content users are willing to pay and at what prices. In this regard, the CEO of JSTUPP 2 argues that

*later of course, [...] [our] business intelligence will also help and say [to a content creator], watch out, in the market with this topic we have made the experience, if you raise the threshold to 7.99€, you might only have 100 users, if you are at 5.99€ you might have 300 users.*

(JSTUPP2)

Thus, the CEO illustrates how the sociotechnical design shapes the dynamic integration of assorted actors like users and publishers and the setting of prices. Likewise, challenges regarding the establishment of a normative appropriate user participation are understood as a technical design challenge. In this sense, JSTUPP 2 refers to phenomena like hate speech primarily as a problem of data protection. In this context, the main challenge concerns having some form of identification of users and their practices that aims to prevent hate speech communication in the first place while securing anonymous use of social media functions. Thus,

*solutions could soon emerge through decentralized*

*identification technologies [like] [...] blockchain. There will probably be an identity that is cryptographically encrypted and accessible and stored decentrally, [...] without the respective service providers being able to see who you really are.*

(JSTUPP2)

Whereas it is questionable to what extent problems of a fairness culture such as hate speech can be solved primarily by technical means, this example shows the relevance of privacy as a judgement device for the design of technologies and issues like hate speech. Furthermore, JSTUPP 2 rejects classic advertising networks for the same reasons: “The advertising networks that have emerged out there [...] force you [...] to adopt their technologies [...] and then of course this complete data privacy promise is obsolete” (JSTUPP2). In contrast to JSTUPP 1, however, this start-up does not completely reject advertising but refers to content marketing to mediate economic profitability, journalistic quality aspects and privacy in the context of advertising. Here JSTUPP 2 sees the verification of specific advertising content through the platform as a competition advantage:

*We believe that the future is clearly moving towards content marketing, we also believe that [we] can be a great platform for this at some point, better than many others, because users [...] are not just on Facebook or Snapchat for entertainment, for example, and that it will be easy for many companies to produce content, good content marketing [...]. But that's a completely different form of advertising that works very well in terms of content.*

(JSTUPP2)

Generally, JSTUPP 2 aims to establish a platform model for the distribution of quality content. Compared to JSTUPP 1, quality content does not only refer to journalistic articles, but also to specific forms of advertising. The central means to distribute quality content via social media elements is the design approach that also shapes the implementation of the other co-valuation approaches. Whereas the start-up culture has a strong commitment to values such as privacy or the promotion of quality content,

it is questionable whether the focus on the design approach does justice to specific challenges of platformization. For instance, hate speech is not just a data protection issue that could be solved via blockchain-technologies. Thus, the main challenge of value mediation can be related to the design-driven approach that uses technology primarily to achieve organizational goals (see figure 2).

### Case 3: Established commercial media company (ECPOJ) - Aspects that secure economic profitability structure business-model decisions

This section focuses on a commercial media company. Since we have already discussed reactions of commercial publishers to platformization in more detail elsewhere (Engert et al, 2023), we will refrain from longer quotes from the interviews in the following. Generally, this media company relies on advertising models that use data tracking as the foundation for financing journalistic content. Therefore, developments in data protection regulation or Google’s decision to prevent data tracking via the Chrome browser are perceived as major external constraints. The reliance on data tracking for advertising has not only created high path dependencies. Furthermore, in this market-driven business model, aspects that aim to secure economic self-preservation structure organizational decisions. Therefore, the approach of *pricing* plays a central role to assess specific means to achieve this end. The reach of advertising space is the driving factor to justify prices for advertising. The important currency is the so-called „Cost Per Thousand“ (CPT) which stands for the price that advertising companies pay to media companies for reaching 1000 advertisement impressions on the booked site. To compete in the advertising market and to reach approximately the same number of users as the large platform companies, publishers aim for a certain level of user loyalty, which is expressed in the term “unique users”. These users do not land on the publisher’s pages by chance, for instance, via Google. Acquiring unique users requires a certain balance regarding journalistic content and advertising. The prices

for advertisement campaigns do not directly represent aspects of journalistic quality so that theoretically a high reach of users can also be achieved with clickbait articles. But in terms of long-term strategies, journalistic quality plays a specific role for reaching unique users. However, while in Case 1 only selected journalistic articles are associated with the label „quality content“, this publisher interprets the term content in a more flexible way. For instance, advertising formats such as

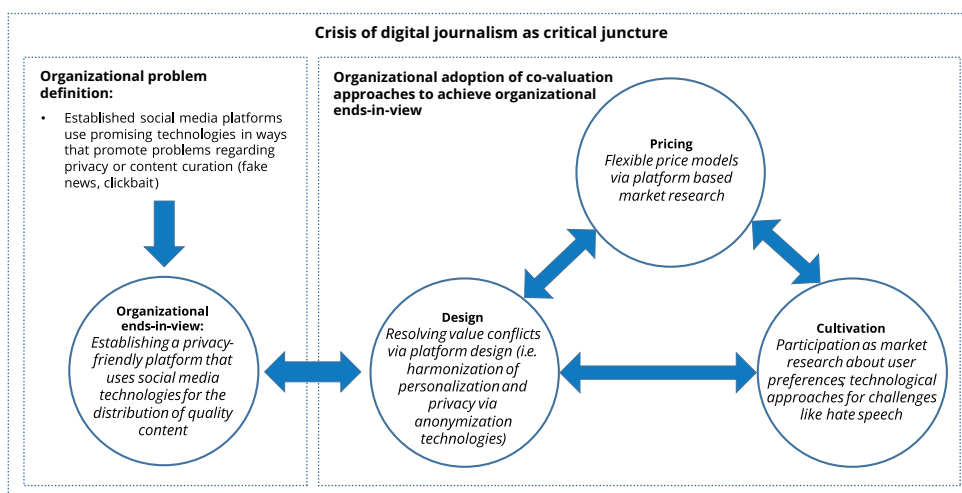


Figure 2: Start-up platform for quality content

native advertising or affiliate marketing are seen as useful content if they fulfill specific information needs (Engert et al., 2023).

Besides, the *design approach* is an important means to secure economic profitability, provided that data tracking technologies or the legal design of informed consent allow access to user data. Therefore, the publisher presented in this section tries to balance legal and technical requirements with economic profitability, „so that we do not misuse the data on a massive scale, but can still run effective advertising campaigns.“ (ECPOJ) In this sense, the publisher understands regulatory data protection provisions as an external constraint that structures decisions for business models. However, a broad interpretation of consent-layers can also legitimize data intensive business models. Furthermore, the goal of economic profitability also shapes the implementation of the *cultivation* approach. For example, the publisher relates the opportunity for users to comment on journalistic articles to economic aspects as they allow access to new data, for example via login functions: „I could imagine that there are opportunities to bind users more closely to us again and that we then also have more data from them when they are logged in. [...] Then you can do exactly what Facebook does when you log in to comment, then you have to actively accept that advertising from third-party data comes across.“ (ECPOJ)

## Discussion

The previous chapter illustrates how various actors interpret critical junctures of media structures differently due to their position in the field. Whereas the start-ups refer to the platformization of media structures as a starting point for critique and a search for new solutions to critical junctures, the publisher perceives data economic dynamics as potential disruptions of larger organizational path dependencies.

The presented niche actors mobilize values like privacy or the distribution and financing of journalistic quality content as judgement-devices to establish new business models. However, the two cases provide different strategies for mediating values that also lead to specific opportunities and challenges. Case 1 uses primarily pricing models for the distribution of quality content to promote democratic opinion-forming. Therefore, this start-up can be linked to current proposals for journalism platforms which argue for new pricing models. For example, the study of Ebrich et al. (2024) suggests that establishing a flat-rate model for journalistic content similar to the logic of Spotify would generate new market potential for publishers and could promote journalistic diversity. However, as mentioned before, the start-up in case 1 is critical of a flat-rate model due to potential challenges of a fair remuneration of publishers. Thus, publishers

and platform initiatives do not necessarily recognize specific proposals for new price models as a means for a fair value mediation. Whereas considerations on establishing new platform models as well as our presented case 1 see the central lever for value mediation in finding new pricing models for journalistic content, they do not focus on the quality of public negotiations between users on platforms that we address with the cultivation approach. Finally, the institutional framework and cooperation conditions required to

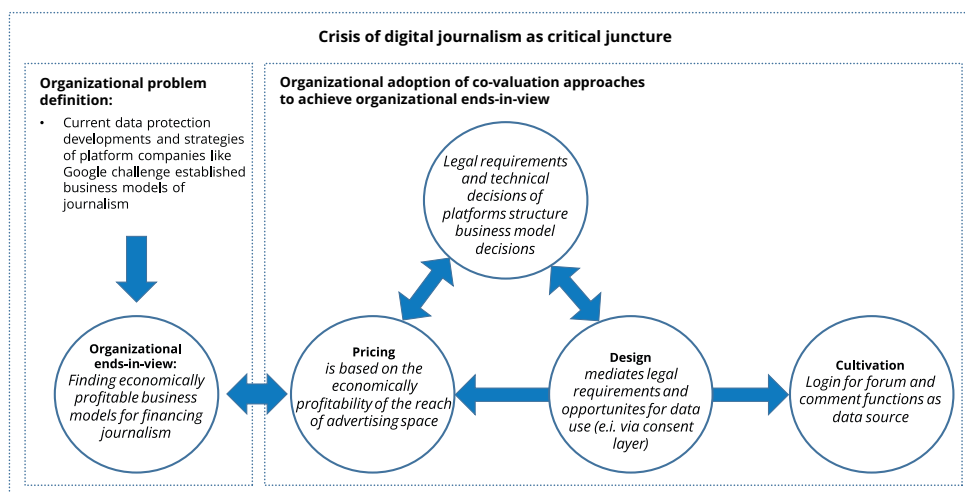


Figure 3: Commercial media company

Therefore, aspects like privacy, democratic opinion-forming or journalistic quality play a limited role as judgement devices in this market-driven business model. Because this publisher perceives itself as being driven by large platforms, data protection, for example, does not appear to be a value in itself, but rather an external condition that could enable or prevent economic business models. Furthermore, users are addressed less as citizens and more as suppliers of data, provided that the communicative exchange between users is primarily used as a new source for generating economic profitability. The following figure illustrates the business culture in which aspects that are critical for economic profitability structure the adoption of co-valuation approaches.

convince established publishers of journalistic content to participate on a journalism platform also remain an open question in research to date.

While in case 1 the value commitment to foster democratic opinion forming structures the search for fair price models, in case 2, the design-driven organizational culture shapes the strategies for the mediation of values. For instance, case 2 uses anonymization technologies to harmonize data protection with personalization algorithms. Furthermore, the start-up uses data analytics to adjust prices for content accordingly to expectations of publishers and users. In this regard, case 2 can be related to contemporary discussions regarding the so-called "Solutionist Ethic" in which value derives from



solving social problems through the means of technology (Nachtwey & Seidl, 2024). According to solutionism, social challenges are business opportunities that can be fixed by technological design. Thus, the CEO claims that technological solutions for data protection are “similar to climate protection. The technologies are already there, it’s more the political will that’s missing to actually implement it.” (JSTUPP2) As case 2 exemplifies, solutionism is less about establishing compromises between different values, but about proposing a *resolution* of value conflicts through the use of technologies. Therefore, potential value conflicts between the efficient use of personalization algorithms and privacy seem unfounded, provided that anonymization technologies appear to be a proven solution here. However, it is questionable to what extent technology is the appropriate means for every organizational end-in-view. In case 2, the design-driven organizational culture also influences how challenges such as hate speech are addressed. Although the start-up takes the issue of hate speech seriously, we assume that challenges of establishing normatively appropriate public negotiations cannot be framed as privacy challenges that are tackled by technical means such as blockchain alone. Therefore, the Solutionist Ethic tends to close the debate about potential value-laden issues that require an open public debate and the cultivation of new practices. Whereas the specific focus on establishing pricing models in order to foster democratic opinion forming leads to a lack of dynamic *integration* of co-valuation approaches in case 1, example 2 shows that the design-driven approach risks to overrun specific challenges of value mediation. However, the publisher faces limits to use values as judgement devices and co-valuation approaches due to external constraints and path dependencies. As a result of using advertising to finance journalistic content, publishers see changes regarding data protection regulation or the prevention of third party-tracking by browser companies as potential threats to business models. Consequently, the ECPOJ in case 3 uses native advertising or affiliate marketing that enable privacy-friendly advertising. However, they blur the boundaries between advertising and journalistic content and therefore create new problems for journalistic quality and public opinion formation (Lobigs, 2018). While current discussions focus on challenges to mediate journalistic quality and economic market pressure (Petre, 2021), our example shows that these aspects have to be mediated with challenges of legal and technical developments of data protection, too. In contrast, the presented start-ups try to avoid such value conflicts between privacy, economic profitability and journalistic quality from the beginning and aim to be independent of larger platformization dynamics. However, there are specific normative challenges regarding the integration of the different co-valuation approaches with respect to all three cases. Although both start-ups are committed to specific values, they focus primarily on pricing (case 1) or technological design-solutions (case 2), while participatory and public negotiations in the sense of the cultivation approach are not fully addressed. Furthermore, the ECPOJ and to some extent JSTUPP

2 understand opportunities of user participation as a potential data source that can be used for data economic revenues. Current debates around digital journalism criticize this rather reductionist understanding of cultivating audience engagement that neglects emotional and normative dimensions of participation (Karlsson et al., 2023, 564). In this sense, the appropriate cultivation of public negotiations seems to be overlooked by both the ECPOJ and the two JSTUPPs. But not only the setting of prices and establishing a justified design depend on public negotiations, but also issues like hate speech require the *cultivation* of democratic practices.

Whereas niche-actors can experiment with co-valuation approaches more freely, established outlets depend on changes of larger ecosystem conditions to find new ways for value mediation. For instance, there is a need that enterprises like Google pay appropriate prices to publishers for the use of journalistic content. However, the publishers are also, to some extent, responsible for current conditions. Instead of establishing individual and short-term contracts with Google, it would be more appropriate in the long run for publishers to cooperate to change ecosystem conditions of digital journalism (see Draude et al., 2024, pp. 43). Transforming these structures is necessary to enable more appropriate co-valuation strategies that use values like privacy or journalistic quality as judgement devices. Therefore, established publishers can also benefit from a perspective that understands critical junctures in media structures as a starting point to question established path dependencies. In particular, the long-term reproduction of value conflicts could potentially be avoided if critical junctures are taken seriously to promote a collective inquiry that leads to a more appropriate understanding and mediation of values as judgement devices.

However, although the three case studies exemplify the analytical potentials of the proposed co-valuation perspective, applying our understanding of value mediation to a broader range of media outlets would be necessary for further generalizations of our findings. In this regard, while all three cases are German media outlets, our findings can be applied beyond Germany’s borders. Furthermore, our perspective could benefit from a comparison of business models of publishers that are, for instance, not only dependent on advertising, but also use paid content. Besides, our empirical material represents only a snapshot and not a larger development of co-valuation processes of different actors. Therefore, further research could benefit from long-term studies that show how values are negotiated and change over time due to the interplay of organizational cultures and larger ecosystem conditions of media platformization.

Furthermore, our perspective on co-valuation could be broadened by a mutual integration of a pragmatist perspective on value mediation with more philosophical theories of fairness and justice to develop an equally empirically grounded and normatively appropriate perspective on data-economic fairness. A stronger entanglement of the co-valuation approaches with discussions regarding “data justice” (Dencik et al., 2022), theories of structural injustices (Young, 2011)

and perspectives that highlight the plurality of spheres of justice (Walzer, 2009; Sharon, 2021) could be promising.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we related current challenges of online journalism to the discourse of digital capitalism and platformization. This discourse usually focuses on a seemingly inescapable power of platforms and rather simple dichotomies such as capitalist exploitation through private platforms and the common good that are not sufficiently sensible for the potential ambivalences of digitization (Sharon, 2021). In this regard, we argued for a perspective that understands platform-induced crises of digital journalism as a critical juncture that could offer windows of opportunity for “pioneer-journalism” (Hepp & Loosen, 2021). Furthermore, we focused on challenges of the mediation of values that are relevant in the context of the platformization of media structures. By using a pragmatistic understanding of values as “judgement devices” (van de Poel & Kudina, 2022), we proposed an analytical perspective that differentiates various forms of “co-valuation”. Thus, we asked how values can be mediated on the basis of prices, sociotechnical design as well as through cultivation of public negotiations and participation processes. To exemplify this perspective, we analyzed how two online journalism start-ups (JSTUPP 1 and JSTUPP 2) and an established publisher of digital journalism (ECPOJ) adopt various co-valuation approaches. Furthermore, we highlighted how routines and selective factors such as solutionist orientations towards technology shape how actors in the field of journalism adopt various forms of value mediation and

define organizational goals due to current challenges of platformization. As the journalism start-ups try to overcome conflicts across values by proposing new platform models, the established publisher considers itself unable to use values as judgement devices in the same way due to external constraints and specific path dependencies of established business models. Although we focused on the analytical potential of the co-valuation perspectives, we also showed that they could guide the normative assessment of value mediation. In this regard, two aspects are important: On the one hand, each co-valuation approach raises the question of a normatively appropriate value mediation. Regarding the approach of pricing, we can ask which values are (not) considered when it comes to setting prices for business models. Enabling a normative appropriate value mediation through design requires the contestability and justification of the design-process through various relevant parties, such as users or the court of law. Furthermore, sociotechnical structures that undermine public discourse by establishing conditions for polarization dynamics or algorithmic manipulation of public opinion need to be criticized from the perspective of the cultivation-approach. On the other hand, our three cases exemplify the specific need for balancing the various co-valuation approaches. In this sense, although implementing new pricing models and privacy friendly algorithms are important for developing alternative models of journalism, challenges such as hate speech also require the cultivation of user practices and public negotiations. Generally, these aspects of value mediation could be understood as normative challenges in the sense of balancing various values as well as regarding the integration of different forms of co-valuation.

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## Rezensionen

MARCI-BOEHNCKE, GUDRUN / RATH, MATTHIAS / DELERE, MALTE / HÖFER, HANNA (HRSG.) (2022)

Medien – Demokratie – Bildung. Normative Vermittlungsprozesse und Diversität in mediatisierten Gesellschaften

Wiesbaden: Springer, 347 Seiten.

Wenn wir über Medien, Demokratie und Bildung reden, sprechen wir über die Grundpfeiler einer Gesellschaft, die sich selbst gestaltet und die in der Lage ist, ihre eigene Zukunft zu bestimmen. Der Tagungsband der Herausgeber\*innen Gudrun Marci-Boehncke, Matthias Rath, Malte Delere und Hanna Höfer *Medien – Demokratie – Bildung. Normative Vermittlungsprozesse und Diversität in mediatisierten Gesellschaften* fasst auf knapp 350 Seiten eine digitale Konferenz der TU Dortmund zusammen, die gemeinsam mit verschiedenen Forschungsgruppen, darunter das Interdisciplinary Media Ethic Center (IMEC), organisiert wurde und sich damit auseinandersetzt, wie Medien in unserer mediatisierten Gesellschaft zur Demokratiebildung beitragen können.

Der Sammelband stellt sich als interdisziplinäres Werk dar, das eine breite Palette an Perspektiven – analytisch, konzeptionell, pädagogisch, historisch-vergleichend, technisch und ethisch – vereint. Die Tagung und der daraus hervorgegangene Band betonen die Notwendigkeit lebenslanger Reflexionsprozesse, um demokratische Strukturen in einer sich wandelnden, mediatisierten Gesellschaft zu sichern. Die Diskussion erstreckt sich in 19 Kapiteln über drei Hauptthemenfelder: Information (Medien und Demokratie), Partizipation (digitale Bildung auf allen Ebenen der Gesellschaft) und Reflexion (Disruption und Konvergenz). Diese Struktur erlaubt es, die Rolle der Medien nicht nur als Kommunikationsmittel, sondern als fundamental für die demokratische Bildung und das Zusammenleben zu untersuchen. Denn auch wenn das Internet die gesellschaftliche Kommunikation ohne Zweifel revolutioniert hat und viele positive Aspekte mit sich bringt, dürfen die negativen Begleiterscheinungen nicht außer Acht gelassen werden, wie unter anderem der Beitrag von Florian Saurwein (S. 47–63) zu den Ombudsstellen als Governance-Option an der Schnittstelle von Recht und Ethik eindrücklich erläutert.

In eine ähnliche Kerbe schlägt Michelle Tannrath (S. 251–271). Denn auch wenn die Digitalisierung weltweit große Veränderungen gebracht und die Demokratie für mehr Menschen zugänglicher gemacht hat, hat diese Entwicklung gleichzeitig dazu geführt, dass rechtsorientiertes Gedankengut leichter verbreitet werden kann. Das Internet bietet fast barrierefreie Zugänge und erlaubt es (fast) jeder Person, an der öffentlichen Diskussion teilzunehmen. Oft bekommen vor allem Nachrichten, die Empörung auslösen, viel Aufmerksamkeit. Dadurch entstehen

neue Wertevorstellungen, die nicht immer mit demokratischen Werten übereinstimmen und manchmal sogar gezielte Falschmeldungen und Hass fördern. Somit wird es immer wichtiger, dass jede Person Selbstverantwortung übernimmt und sich bewusst ist, was er oder sie im Internet sagt und teilt. In dieser Situation soll die Medienethik helfen, eine verantwortungsvolle Nutzung des Internets zu fördern. Dazu gehört auch, dass die Menschen medienkompetent werden, also wissen, wie sie mit digitalen Inhalten umgehen sollen.

Unter anderem erläutert Raphael Morisco, dass es wichtig ist, zu verstehen, wie Medien uns beeinflussen und wie digitale Technologien funktionieren. Für ihn umfasst digitale Kompetenz auch das Wissen über IT-Sicherheit und Datenschutz.

Sein Beitrag „Digitale Literacy als ‚neue‘ Medienkompetenz mit einer Prise IT-Sicherheit – ein Blick auf den tertiären Bildungssektor am Beispiel der Medienwissenschaft“ (S. 153-169) weist darauf hin, dass es in den Medienwissenschaften an deutschen Universitäten oft an diesem grundlegenden Wissen fehlt. Studierende sollten jedoch verstehen, wie digitale Systeme funktionieren, um besser mit ihnen umgehen zu können. Dementsprechend sollte digitale Bildung, einschließlich IT-Sicherheit, ein fester Bestandteil der Ausbildung sein. Dies gilt sowohl für Schulen als auch für Universitäten. Nur so kann seiner Ansicht nach sichergestellt werden, dass alle Menschen jene Fähigkeiten erlernen, die es in einer zunehmend digitalen Welt bedarf. Die Frage, wie man das Internet zu einem sicheren Raum machen kann und an welchen Stell-schrauben dafür gedreht werden müsste, zieht sich wie ein roter Faden über die strukturierenden Überkapiteln hinweg. Dabei wird deutlich, dass nur durch eine Zusammenarbeit verschiedenster (staatlicher) Institutionen eine wirkliche Veränderung, die es ohne Frage bedarf, herbeigeführt werden kann. So regt Tannrath beispielweise eine öffentliche Diskussion darüber an, wie Gesetze angepasst werden müssten, um die digitale Welt besser regulieren zu können.

Vor allem der Abschnitt, der sich dem Überthema Partizipation widmet, zeigt, dass digitale, politische und ethische Bildung zusammen betrachtet werden müssen. Beiträge wie jener von Theo Hug, der die Paradoxien virtueller Partizipation untersucht (S. 95–115), und Monika Oberle, die die Bedeutung von Medienkompetenz betont (S. 117–133), machen die Komplexität des Themas deutlich. Die englisch- und deutschsprachigen Beiträge des Bandes, die sich jeweils im Rahmen von ca. 20 Seiten bewegen, reichen von rein theoretischen bis zu praktischen Überlegungen und Beispielen. Sie setzen sich mit Fragen auseinander, die von der Regulierung digitaler Plattformen über die Bedeutung von Medienkompetenz bis hin zur ethischen Reflexion von Meinungsfreiheit und Hate Speech reichen. Dabei handelt es sich sowohl um Texte, die in einer wissenschaftlichen Tradition stehen und deren Thesen mit Sekundärliteratur belegt werden, als auch essayistische Auseinandersetzungen, wie der Beitrag von

Thomas Ramge zu den „Ermächtigungsmaschinen“ (S. 25–28). Zudem sind einzelne Beiträge grafisch untermauert, um die komplexen Sachverhalte anschaulicher zu machen.

Insgesamt bietet der Band *Medien – Demokratie – Bildung* eine umfassende und differenzierte Auseinandersetzung mit den Herausforderungen und Chancen, die sich aus der zunehmenden Mediatisierung der Gesellschaft ergeben. Gerade in der Zusammenschau wird deutlich, wie notwendig es ist, digitale, politische und ethische Bildung vernetzt zu denken, um die Demokratie auch in digitalen Zeiten zu fördern und zu schützen. Somit sind die Beiträge nicht nur akademisch wertvoll, sondern können auch für Praktiker\*innen von großem Interesse sein.

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WILFRIED KÖPKE/ULRIKE BRENNING (HRSG.)

Und täglich grüßt die Tagesschau. Vom linearen zum digitalen Nachrichtenformat. Köln: Herbert von Halem Verlag 2023, 180 Seiten.

Das vorliegende Rezensionsexemplar ist ein schönes Buch. Cover-Art, Druck und Satz den Kölner Verlages sind nach wie vor ein Alleinstellungsmerkmal in der deutschsprachigen Landschaft kommunikations- und medienwissenschaftlicher Fachliteratur. Die Herausgeber legen mit „Und täglich grüßt die Tagesschau. Vom linearen zum digitalen Nachrichtenformat“ einen Band zum Medienwandel vor, der auf das 7. Kurt-Schwitters-Symposium an der Hochschule Hannover, Fakultät Medien, Information und Design im November 2022 zurückgeht. Nach mehr als einem Jahrzehnt der großen Themen zu den Umbrüchen der Medienlandschaft durch die Digitalisierung von Übertragungskanälen und Publikationsoberflächen wird hier ein einzelnes Format – die *ARD-Tagesschau* – in seiner nun mehr 70jährigen Entwicklung adressiert.

Der Band, der die Bedeutung des Formats *Tagesschau* (für Österreich vergleichbar mit der *ZIB* des ORF) als Evaluationsziel ausgibt, ist in neun Kapitel plus Danksagung und Verzeichnis der Autoren und Autorinnen untergliedert. Wilfried Köpke und Ulrike Brenning, beide akademisch in der Journalistik an der Hochschule Hannover beheimatet, weisen sich als Philologen den Medienwissenschaften zurechenbar aus. Und so sind es hier auch überwiegend KollegInnen medienwissenschaftlicher Fächer, die ästhetische und reflektive Perspektiven auf den Untersuchungsgegenstand bieten, angereichert mit empirischen Evidenzen.

So startet der Tagungsband nach einleitenden Seiten mit einem „Brief zum 70. Geburtstag an die Tagesschau“ von M. Schwitter (S. 13-16), der die Alltagsbedeutung des Formats hervorhebt um dann zu dem Frontend-Personal zu kommen (J. K. Bleicher, S. 17-40). Im Kern des Beitrages stehen sodann die Presenter, die historisch, programmstrategisch sowie aus der Rezeptionsperspektive verortet werden. Daran knüpft C. Klimmt (S. 41-68) und reflektiert auf die medienspsychologischen Motive der ursächlichen Bedeutung der *Tagesschau* und formuliert über einen längeren Ausblick digitale Herausforderungen in Bezug auf das Publikum. S. Geese (S. 69-86) ergänzt die vorausgegangenen Einlassungen um exemplarisch ausgewählte soziodemographische Daten zu Publikum in Korrespondenz zur Einpassung des Formats in das Wettbewerbsumfeld – auch unter dem Aspekt des Medienvertrauens. Eingeschoben ist der Beitrag von F. Sickenberger (S. 87-111), der die *Tagesschau*-Berichterstattung über den afrikanischen Kontinent exemplarisch einer Analyse unterzieht. Ko-Herausgeber W. Köpke, E. Pavel & F. Sasse knüpfen mit ihrem Beitrag „*Tagesschau* on Insta, TikTok & Co – serious? Rezeptionsstrategien der *Tagesschau* in den sozialen Netzwerken“ (S. 112-142) insbesondere an Klimmt und Geese an, und widmen sich ausführlich um Angebot und Nachfrage von *Tagesschau*

und Publikum mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des sogenannten Publikums. Nicht nur, dass dieses Phänomen das wohl derzeit größte Forschungsprogramm bspw. der Kommunikationswissenschaft darstellt – es macht erneut deutlich, dass wechselseitige Kommunikationsplattformen wie Player aus den Social Media primär der Individual- und Gruppenkommunikation dienen und weniger der unidirektionalen Massenkommunikation, je nach Ausrichtung des jeweiligen Algorithmus. Das offenbar zentrale Kapitel des Bandes stellt implizit die anhaltende Befremdung mit sich ändernden Gesetzmäßigkeiten von Kommunikationskanälen anhand der *Tagesschau* dar. R. Kadel (S. 143-154) bereitet den nach vorne gerichteten Epilog vor, konkret über avataristische Darstellungsformen von Sprecherrollen. Den thematischen Abschluss bildet die Ko-Herausgeberin Brenning mit einem Essay zur Tonkunst der *Tagesschau* (S. 155-171).

„Und täglich grüßt die Tagesschau. Vom linearen zum digitalen Nachrichtenformat“ hat nicht nur ein schönes Buchcover, sondern auch inhaltlich präsentieren die Herausgeber ein schönes Werk, das im Format eines gedruckten Buches seine ideale Form der Publikation gefunden hat. Kein Journal, keine epub-Domain, ein Gustostück zum Berühren, ein weiterer Beitrag zur medienhistorischen Einordnung von Fernsehformaten in Deutschland mit einzelnen Ausblicken in eine nähere Zukunft.

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Krone, Jan (2024). Der Österreichische Rundfunk (ORF) – von der RAVAG bis zu einem multimedialen öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanbieter. In: Medienwirtschaft 1/2024, S. 36-45





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