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Editor's Introduction

Communication studies is at a critical junction in facing novel challenges resulting from the dynamics of the media landscape. New technologies keep on changing how information is produced, shared, and consumed, while simultaneously creating challenges and obstacles for researchers and practitioners. Considering these developments in digital transformation, it is necessary to indicate that the existing political and economic settings constitute an additional layer of the multifaceted context of mass communication processes. The 2024 Spring Issue of the Central European Journal of Communication covers these complex issues, and in various ways presents differing aspects of how factors influence modern media characteristics and communication processes and practices.

The Spring Issue consolidates five thought-provoking articles that cover an extensive spectrum of interests, from the historical period in media studies to modern problems of digital communication. All the submissions present several useful observations on challenges that media, society, and information-sharing face in the modern world.

Our first article, "Broadcasting a Nuclear Accident: Chernobyl on Hungarian Radio" by Dalma Kékesdi-Boldog, presents a historical viewpoint on the performance of crisis communication. This article focuses on the case of how Hungarian radio reported one of the biggest nuclear incidents in history, which has implications for the current world where information dissemination is instantaneous. The article looks at how a country aligned to the Soviet bloc managed crisis communication during a major sporting event. It explains how a variety of reporters, acting as both propagandists, and seekers of the truth, reported under the Soviet system and how the news coverage evolved.

Moving to contemporary issues, Ioanna Archontaki, Achilleas Karadimitriou, Iliana Giannouli, and Stylianos Papathanassopoulos in their paper, "Environmental politics: Could social media in Greece foster the ground for an alternative environmental agenda?" seek to understand how climate-related news is disseminated and received on social media platforms particularly Facebook and Twitter in Greece between January and March, 2021. The study shows that information about the environment is still mainly provided by traditional mass media. Although the Greek population tends to have minimal confidence in traditional media and governmental organizations, they are not skeptical of climate change or EU environmental measures either. This work demonstrates that social media in Greece has not developed a counter-discursive frame concerning climate matters but rather perpetuates institutional discourses. This research is particularly relevant at this time, as we see the immediacy of the problem of the environment and the power of social media in organizing collective sentiment.

In "Digital, Hybrid and Traditional Media Consumption and Religious Reflection", Damian Guzek provides a hint of how patterns of media interaction may affect religious reflection in the emerging multimedia age. This paper seeks to understand levels of critical reflexivity dependent on media usage among Catholic media users in Poland with emotional attachments to pre- and post-Vatican II Catholicism. The imageries were collected from 30 participants through the digital media diary technique along with conducting in-depth interviews. Guzek identifies six types of media consumption patterns and media diets were identified as diverse as including social media, websites, and traditional media, and as restricted to social media only.

The research paper by Virgo Siil, "Less is more. Study on slow journalism outlets' authors" explores a novel approach to creating news content in our world full of rush. This research provides crucial insights as to how slow journalism may be useful and what may be its drawbacks as we are experiencing a world overloaded with information. Siil explores the experiences and practices of authors in slow journalism, focusing on two Estonian outlets: *Edasi* and *Levila*. From the interviews with 22 authors and the observations of the editorial meetings, the study explores the authors' incentives and how the slow journalism elements influence them.

In a section on Methods and Concepts, given the post-truth as the governing paradigm of the twenty-first century, "Fact-checkers as a professional community of experts. Research project – from idea to implementation" is an article by Karina Stasiuk-Krajewska, which offers an important analysis of the shifting position of fact-checkers. By focusing on Polish fact-checking organizations, this study contributes to the understanding of the developmental and operational aspects of fact-checking. Stasiuk-Krajewska proposes a methodological framework for studying professional communities, with a reference to fact-checkers in Poland. The author interviewed 20 fact-checkers from organizations across Poland.

In this year's Spring Issue, we present the nominees for the Karol Jakubowicz's Award of 2024 and publish an interview with Prof. Dr. Susanne Fengler and Dipl. Journalist Marcus Kreutler from the Erich-Brost-Institut for International Journalism, TU Dortmund University. The interview, conducted by Jacek Mikucki, focuses on media self-regulation throughout Europe. The interview discusses the current status shared by highly developed media systems in Northern Europe and their poorly developed counterparts in the Southern and Eastern regions. The interview explores the effects of digitalization, the importance of international standards, and how journalist associations and media companies can enhance accountability. Fengler and Kreutler also explain how the European Media Freedom Act and international cooperation could enhance media responsibility.

This issue includes two book reviews. One on "Public media and democracy: theory and practice. Public media in Central and Eastern Europe" by Katarzyna Konarska and the other "Through the Camera Lens. Characters of clergymen and nuns in Polish feature films" by Anita Zawisza.

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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Broadcasting a Nuclear Accident: Chernobyl on the Hungarian Radio

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Abstract: On April 26, 1986 a major nuclear accident occurred in the Soviet Union: Reactor No. 4 of the Vladimir Ilyich Lenin Nuclear Power Plant exploded and harmful radioactive fall-out effused. The disaster threatened most of the population of Europe who, however, could not access timely and appropriate information about the health risks, as most of the media outlets were under close authoritarian political control in throughout the countries of the Eastern Bloc. Based on an analysis of archival radio news and of political communiques, this paper describes how the Hungarian party leadership managed the communication of this crisis domestically and discusses what information, and when, was aired on Hungarian Radio (HR). Using mixed research methods, the paper reveals the impacts of loosening political control over a Soviet-type media system in the last decade of the 20th century. The paper also provides an insight into daily practices of political and editorial decision making in a communist regime in times of crisis, which is a currently understudied research field.

Keywords: Chernobyl nuclear disaster, crisis, Hungarian Radio, information policy, Soviet communist media system

INTRODUCTION: COMMUNICATE A DISASTER

At 01:23 a.m. (Eastern European Time) on 26 April 1986, two explosions shook the Soviet Nuclear Power Plant near the Ukrainian city of Chernobyl, damaging Reactor No. 4 and causing a 750 meters high fire that kept burning for the next ten days (Aszódi, 2006). Owing to the nuclear disaster, harmful radioactive fall-out effused and polluted an area of over 30,000 square kilometers. The accident had been caused by contributory negligence (INSAG-7, 1992, pp. 51–89).

Crises must be communicated in a timely and accurate manner, or else misinformation spreads, trust decreases, and social anxiety rises. Issues of reputation management must also be addressed (Heath & O'Hair, 2009, p. 6). Rapid, organized, and conscious communication is essential. By contrast, delayed and misleading communication may damage the reputation, and in some cases even the legitimacy, of the communicator. Such communication is carried out *after* the negative effects have already emerged, many of which are often unforeseeable.

The media coverage of the Chernobyl disaster was a complex case with various outcomes. It led to a major continental European healthcare threat, awareness of the technological failure of the Soviet Union, and had unforeseeable political consequences such as the declining legitimacy of the communist regime. The communist propaganda narrative during the Cold War had claimed that only the Soviet Union (USSR) could win the political and technological competition with the West, but also that every mistake would weaken the nation's position.

The prevailing winds over northern Ukraine on the night of the 25/26th April 1986 were from the south and east[1], which pushed the nuclear cloud created by the accident into Belarus within 24 hours, and the Baltics and Scandinavia within 48 hours. Treated initially as a local crisis by the Soviet authorities, it acquired an international dimension once Swedish scientists at Forsmark in central Sweden (1000 km from the accident site) analysed the source of the sudden increase in radiation levels and asked the Soviet authorities if there had been an accident at a nuclear power plant in Russia. Despite repeated inquiries by Scandinavian authorities (Plokhy, 2018, pp. 1–3), the Soviet authorities initially denied having any information about a nuclear accident ("To the Hungarian Services" Folder 3) and confirmed the crisis officially only *hours later.* More specifically, they did not use the term *crisis*; it was the Soviet Official News Agency (TASS) that issued a brief statement acknowledging that an "accident" had happened at a North--Ukrainian power plant, and a party committee was to be founded to manage the situation ("To the Hungarian Services" Folder 4). By then, the nuclear explosion threatened thousands of lives in Europe. As a result of the tardiness of the Soviet announcement, affected populations did not receive timely and adequate information about the health threat.

This paper explores how the crisis was communicated in the countries of the Eastern Bloc, and how the Soviet communist media system functioned in the region in this tense situation, while a pan-European crisis was unfolding? This paper offers a case study of Hungary, a rhetorically loyal, but maverick partner country of the Soviet Union. The paper discusses how the Chernobyl disaster was reported on Hungarian Radio. Radio coverage was particularly important, as this was the news media that operated with the shortest news cycle in 1986, while under close political supervision. This paper also attempts to answer the question of whether accuracy or partisanship was more important when it came to making decisions about the media coverage of the nuclear accident

1 See https://www.livescience.com/planet-earth/nuclear-energy/chernobyl-the-worlds-worst-nuclear-disaster

for the Hungarian public in the last decade of a Soviet-type media system. It also provides an insight into daily practices of political and editorial decision making in a communist regime in times of crisis, a currently understudied research field.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

THE HUNGARIAN MEDIA SYSTEM: A VERSION OF THE SOVIET COMMUNIST MEDIA SYSTEM

Authoritarian theory of the press considers media as the transmission belt of the party-state, and the means of mass communication are useful as propaganda instruments (Siebert et al., 1956/1984, pp. 105–146). The Soviet media system, a special version of the authoritarian media system, was established throughout the Eastern Bloc although there was a great deal of variation across the region in terms of actual practices (Bajomi-Lázár et al., 2019). The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) not only controlled the media system via direct political guidelines, but all communicational channels, media institutions as well as their essential infrastructure were owned by the organs of the party-state (Siebert et al., 1956/1984, pp. 27–28).

The Soviet information policy remained largely unchanged during the nearly seventy years of existence of the Soviet Union and was based on four main components: *partiinost* (communist partisanship); *glasnost* (transparency); *obyektivnost* (communist objectivism); and *massovost* or *narodnost* (linkage between the media and the people) (McNair, 1991, pp. 15–24). Just which of these principles was emphasized varied over time, depending on the party leadership, the ruling political concept of the day, and the actual Cold War discourse. After the demise of Stalinist despotism, mass media gained some political independence and offered a s more varied content than in the Khrushchev Era (1953–64). The neo-Stalinist personality cult of Brezhnev (1964–82), however, eliminated the little autonomy that the media had (Brooks, 2000, p. xiv; Hopkins, 1965, p. 531; McNair, 1991, pp. 33–35; Sakwa, 1993/2008, pp. 9–10). *Glasnost* (transparency) and *Perestroika* (restructuring), introduced by Gorbachev in 1986, were aimed at relaxing political pressures on the media and at opening some space for constructive debates in the public sphere (Gibbs, 1999, pp. 86–89).

The Hungarian media system during János Kádár's leadership (1956-1988) was less strict than under Soviet rule, albeit with significant variations over time. On the one hand, the media system was rhetorically committed to the state-socialist ideology and its structure—including its infrastructural and institutional background, hierarchical organization, content and expected political role—which reflected the Soviet scheme. On the other, the supervision and control mechanisms of the media were more permissive than elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe (Lánczi & O'Neil, 1996, p. 82). The level of direct political control of the media gradually decreased over the years and gave way to indirect intervention methods such as a state monopoly over intelligence, the paper industry, the publishing houses, and the infrastructure of the media, as well as the encouragement of self-censorship by a differentiated information policy. From the mid-1960s onwards, the relative flexibility of the political system was reflected in a different interpretation of the role of journalists compared to previous years: in addition to acting as propagandists, they were also expected to play a collaborative and truth-seeking role (Sipos, 2010, pp. 75–77). The communication of the Chernobyl disaster, as this paper attempts to show, was a case in point.

János Kádár had a permissive outlook in several fields, such as his remarkable de-Stalinization attitude (Földes, 2012, pp. 200–214; Takács, 2013, pp. 84–90). Kádár also announced a slow democratization and cultural opening process to the West in the late 1960s in trying to revive the Hungarian economy (Romsics, 1999, pp. 450–456; Valuch, 2005, pp. 67–68).

Media control mechanisms changed further in the late 1970s when Hungary encountered financial difficulties amidst a recession: the country had to reconsider its foreign policy and opened up its economy to capitalism as it needed international (mainly Western) financial support to manage its economic hardships. Owing to this opening process, media policy was faced with some "unwelcome" outcomes—as the policy makers put it in official documents—as cultural-ideological imports increasingly crossed the Iron Curtain (Kékesdi-Boldog, 2022, p. 185). In 1979, the leaders of the Party officially acknowledged that the policy of delivering only good news via the media was no longer sustainable, as this type of information did not meet the population's information needs. Indeed, by overemphasizing the good and deliberately hiding the bad news, media were unable to inform the public about the status of the economy. For this reason, the Party leadership decided to differentiate between the information and propaganda functions of the various media outlets. Radio, the medium of the shortest news cycle, became the primary medium, while television was expected to engage in popular genres and to broadcast entertainment, educational and cultural programs. Television was also expected to broadcast reports and interviews that echoed and reinforced the information first aired on radio. The function of the long news cycle dailies was to orient people, to help them understand the political and economic news by delivering longer, "theoretical, summarizing articles" and "explanatory material" (Az MSZMP Központi Bizottsága Politikai Bizottságának határozata…1979. III. 27.).

At the 12th Congress of the Hungarian Worker's Party in 1980, a new media regulation concept was presented, declaring the need for reliable and timely reporting. Dialogue with the public also became an important element of media policy (Berényi, 1980, p. 46). However, these concepts were not translated into actual practice, and the media continued to be politically instrumentalized until the very last years of the regime.

Despite the strong political, economic, and military dependence of Hungary upon the Soviet Union, media could not always act as a means of agitation and propaganda (cf. Bajomi-Lázár, 2005, p. 24), as outlets had to reflect on everyday events and specific issues, too – such as the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. At the time of the catastrophe, *glasnost*, the Soviet policy of transparency initiated by Mihail Gorbachev, had been in effect for about a month. Changes in the Hungarian media occurred in the same year, contributing to a gradual opening of the public sphere in the late 1980s (Bajomi-Lázár, 2005; Sipos, 2010). The first Hungarian press law, passed in 1986, was a real breakthrough, and declared the idea of accuracy instead of partisanship.[2] In the same year, a major taboo—the whereabouts of the remains of the martyrs of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, buried in unmarked graves for decades—was first broken in the official public sphere in the late-night show "*Bagoly*" ("Night Owl") by journalist Miklós Győrffy and without consultation with the Party officials of Hungarian Radio (Győrffy, 2007, p. 129). The first Hungarian music radio channel *Radio Danubius* was also established in 1986, which was the first time that a media outlet served purely entertainment goals, not propaganda (Bajomi-Lázár, 2005, p. 29). *Radio Danubius* was meant to air programs for a specific audience of East German tourists spending the summer at Lake Balaton. These changes slowly expanded the borders of the public sphere, the limits of speech, and encouraged journalists to do their job more professionally. As the following sections will reveal, the redrawing of these borders was also manifest in the radio coverage of the Chernobyl disaster.

HUNGARIAN RADIO

Radio was one of the most popular outlets for decades, reaching thousands of people, and hence the communist leadership paid special attention to it. Institutionally, *Hungarian Radio* was separated from *Hungarian Television* in 1974 by a Declaration of the Council of Ministers (1047/1974. IX. 18). This statement specified that there were three main tasks for the broadcast media in Hungary. The first was to participate in the propaganda activities of the Party, the second was "modern and fast broadcasting," and the third was to orient and to educate people via high quality programs in an effort to "help them build socialism" (Declaration of the Council of Ministers, 1047/1974. IX. 18).

[2] It stated that "[t]he job of the press is to provide authentic, precise and up-to-date information" (1986. évi II. törvény a sajtóról 2§ (1) [Press law 1986/II 2§ (1)]).

Political supervision affected the radio's newsroom, too, but *Hungarian Radio* gradually became a special medium during the last decades of the Kádár era. There were more live broadcasts from the 1970s onwards, indicating that political concerns had declined (Tertinszky, 1998). Some consider *Hungarian Radio* an island where the imaginary borders were gradually expanded (Agárdi, 2004). According to the journalists of the broadcaster, Director-General István Hárs was a odd person: one the one hand, he was a faithful communist and a member of the Central Committee, on the other, he was an open-minded leader who tried to ban fewer but tolerate more topics on the air (Bolgár, 2014). He slowly transformed a "propaganda radio into an informative radio" (Farkas, 2014, p. 30). Cultural mediation was very important for him, therefore he ran a reliable news service and aired high quality programs with authentic, trustworthy editors, journalists, and anchors (Agárdi, 2004). Hárs allowed for a range of viewpoints to be presented on the air, as a result of which the radio broadcast multicolored programming (Bolgár, 2009).

Radio in general was an important news source during the Chernobyl crisis: most people (59 per cent) first heard about the Chernobyl disaster via the airwaves (HU OSA-420-2-2:1 A8203). This is also including *Radio Free Europe, Voice of America* and the *BBC*, openly available for the Hungarian at that time. People occasionally used information from these sources to confirm or to complete the news issued by the official news agencies of the Soviet Bloc as, according to the party directive, news from other state-socialist countries could only be derived from the "official" Soviet communiques (I. Bedő, personal communication, December 4, 2018).

Radio Free Europe (RFE) was founded and financed by American individuals and its establishment was catalyzed by the Cold War information competition. According to its own definition, *RFE*'s task was to provide reliable and free information to the public of the Eastern Bloc (Cummings, 2009: 10–11). The importance of *RFE* lay in broadcasting radio programs in their native languages – including Hungarian – to the populations of the countries beyond the Iron Curtain. As a "soft power" or "peaceful propaganda tool," *RFE*'s purpose was to counter the state-socialist governments' political influence – mainly Soviet propaganda – in the Eastern Bloc (Holt 1999: 12, Puddington 2000: 5–6, Johnson 2010: 37).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of this research project was to disclose when the Hungarian officials informed the public about the crisis and how the disaster was communicated in Hungary. To illustrate the specific characteristics of the Hungarian version of this Soviet-type media system, it focused on three main research questions (RQ):

- RQ1: When was the very first piece of news about the accident broadcast in Hungary? RQ2: What kind of information was shared about the level of nuclear radiation over Hungary with the public in the studied period?
- RQ3: What health protection recommendations were issued in Hungary?

These were the topics that affected the daily life of the people the most (HU OSA-420-2-2:1 A8203). Awareness that the nuclear cloud had reached Hungary's airspace triggered daily questions concerning decision-making situations, such as: "should children be allowed to play outside or not," "should tap water be drunk or not," "should one take iodic pills or not," and "should one eat fresh vegetables or not." These dilemmas permanently reminded people of the danger (Harper, 2001).

DATA-COLLECTION AND LIMITATIONS

To answer these three research questions, a descriptive analysis was conducted of the sources found in the Archives of *Hungarian Radio*, the National Archives of Hungary, and the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security, and coupled with personal interviews made in 2018 with the former chief editor of *Hungarian Radio*, Iván Bedő. In line with Sipos's argument (2007), the interviews were not used to "reveal the truth," but to interpret and to frame the findings. The information provided by the interviewee was seen as a construction of the past from the perspective of the present.

The collected data included 238 scripts of radio news and covered the period between 28 April and 19 May 1986. This interval was chosen because the first Chernobyl-related news item in Hungary was aired on April 28, and May 19 was the first day when no daily radiation measurement data were issued by the Hungarian National Civil Defense (MNL OL-XIX-A-2-af-00147-II-szn/1986."147/a). Only the texts relating to Hungary were included in the sample. Consequently, the sample did not involve official Soviet reports, accounts on the radiation levels in the other Eastern Bloc countries, nor other news, reports and interviews about the accident. Because of the uniform information monopoly of the Party, the three official Hungarian radio channels, controlled by the same person, were not treated separately.

The broadcasts of *Radio Free Europe* have been preserved and stored at the Hoover Institution in Stanford but access to them is limited. Hence only two of the daily boxes of the written material were analyzed (sound recordings being unavailable). When comparing the contents of *Hungarian Radio* and of *RFE*, two broadcasts and the Hungarian Daily Broadcast Analysis of 28 and 29 April from this database have been selected.

The sources in the Archives of *Hungarian Radio* were lacking and difficult to analyze because the scripts were neither properly catalogued nor numbered. They were only categorized according to the day of the broadcasting, and the copies of the newsreaders and those of the news editors were not sorted. This was an important limitation because the texts may have been changed just before the newsreader received them to read on air. Further, the first audio records of the Chernobyl accident were deleted for reasons unknown, and the original scripts of the news bulletins were rerecorded in 1993.

Because of the missing and mixed archival fonds, a special coding system was set up to label the sources. References are hereafter made based on the first letter of the radio channel (K for *Kossuth Radio*, P for *Petofi Radio* or URH for *Hungarian Radio*), followed by the time and date of broadcasting by Central European Time, and the last items being the signatures of the news editor and of the typist. The signatures are important because of the news editing practice of *Hungarian Radio*: the editor was on duty from afternoon to morning, and it was a common method for them to write the news in advance the previous evening. Whenever something important happened during the night, the prewritten news item was updated (I. Bedő, personal communication, December 4, 2018). The titles of the news items are also included in the code.

Almost 40 years after the Chernobyl accident, it was difficult to define which source was prewritten and which was updated in the process. Further, because of the missing catalogue and sound record, it was impossible to determine which news items were actually broadcast.

DATA ANALYSIS

To answer RQ1, it was necessary to reconstruct the timing of the information released, a chronological order of the radio news was set up before a content analysis could be conducted with a focus on the key information said or repeated in order. The steps of the Hungarian crisis team, including the very first information broadcast on the Hungarian airspace, are displayed on a timeline (see Figure 1). RQ2 relates to the content of the news and hence focused on the wording of the scripts. In search of an answer, all the words used to express explicitly or implicitly changes in nuclear radiation level have been listed, and then the scripts were categorized into three clusters regarding whether they suggested that the level of radiation was about to increase, to decrease or to fluctuate. RQ3 examined the health protection recommendations. Here descriptive content analysis was conducted in order to reveal the repeated topics and the frequency of these occurrences compared to the entire sample was counted.

FINDINGS

Regarding RQ1, Hungarian officials first issued official information about the disaster on the night of April 28 (MNL OL XIX-A-83-a-863. jkv.-6.np./1986. 12/b.). But on April 25, the day before the accident, the Soviets had requested a reduction in Hungarian electricity imports, referring to the malfunctioning of a Soviet power plant (MNL OL XIX-A-2-af-Ma-00147-VII-szn/1986. (IpM M-2523).). At that time, the Hungarian crisis team was still unaware of the accident. They were informed, unofficially, a day later, on April 26, by Swedish, Finnish, and Polish sources (MNL OL M-KS-288. f. 5. cs. 968. ő.e.-1986. 4/b.). The Scandinavian specialists reported that they had identified special chemical substances indicating a zonal damage in a nuclear power plant. According to unofficial Polish sources, the amount of the radioactive iodine-131 isotope in the Masurian Lake District had greatly increased (MNL OL XIX-B-1-ai-1-a-579/1). On April 28, the Civil Defense issued an order for increased readiness in Hungary. On the afternoon of April 29, the Hungarian Consul General in Kyiv provided information to the Hungarian leadership in encrypted telegrams marked "urgent" and indicating that a serious power plan disaster had happened, and many people had been injured (MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1986-SZU-145-532-002679/1986.), the roof of the power plant had collapsed, and the level of local nuclear radiation was very high (MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1986-SZU-145-532-002679/1/1986). A Hungarian expert committee headed by Mihály Berki, the National Tribal Commander of Civil Defense, was convened on the afternoon of April 29 to investigate what had happened in Chernobyl. A crisis management team was set up and assigned local tasks. As Mihály Berki put it, "we have no reliable information. The Soviet comrades do not provide us with information" (MNL OL XIX-B-1-ai-1-a-579/1986.). From April 30 onwards, news release about the disaster was managed directly by the Hungarian Information Office and was supervised by the Hungarian crisis management team (MNL OL XIX-A-2-af-Ma-00147-VI).

The first relevant news item was aired on *Hungarian Radio* two days after the disaster, on 28 April at 9 p.m. It was short and comprised general statements such as "the injured people were given medical attention" and "a special government committee was established" (P 28/4/1986 9:00 PM, LL/Kné). This short news item was uninformative about the real situation because healthcare and political activities are general actions in time of crisis, in other words, it did not warn the public about the real threat. But the end of the report included a remarkable piece of information as it said that nuclear radiation was also measured in Scandinavia. The first half of the news relied on information issued by the Soviet News Agency (TASS) and the second half was taken from the listen-to service of *Hungarian Radio* (Germuska, 2010, p. 196). At the top of the programme's paper was a handwritten "L", meaning either or both listened-to and the *BBC London*. According to the political instructions in effect during the entire Kádár era, only official Soviet news sources could be cited, but news editor Iván Bedő, head of the newsroom in charge of the news about the accident, broke this rule that night. As he observed later, it was undoubtedly an extraordinary case which he tried to confirm by using listened-to Western broadcast information with Hungarian reporters in Moscow before airing it (I. Bedő, personal communication, December 4, 2018). Even though he had no more information than that provided by the BBC, Bedő decided to let the news be aired.

Radio Free Europe broadcast the first news item about the accident on the very same day (the time of broadcasting is not known, but presumably it was before the Hungarian news item was aired). However, in contrast with the Hungarian news item, it was longer, more detailed, and also mentioned the time-delaying and information-withholding behavior of the Soviet officials ("To the Hungarian Services" Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty broadcast records, Box 3157, Folder 3).

An hour later in Hungary, Bedő received the official communiqué of the *Hungarian News Agency* marked "just for the information of the editors." This meant that the news editors could read the news, but could not publicly reveal any information (Bánáti, 2014). Despite the prohibition, Bedő let the new information be aired at 10 p.m. (K 28/4/1986 10:00 PM KM/HAR), repeated at 11 p.m. (P 28/4/1986 11:00 PM KM/HAR), and repeated yet again an hour later (K 28/4/1986 24:00 KM/HAR). The first news bulletin was completed with more details taken from this announcement and included information about the location of the power plant: "next to the Rivers Uzh and Pripyat, and near the Kiev aquifer." It added that a nuclear cloud was going through Scandinavia's airspace and a rise in radiation levels had been measured there. The following sentences were removed from the script of the news: "It was assumed that the nuclear cloud did not come from Scandinavian nuclear plants" and "there was no information about the actual danger, victims or casualties." It was also mentioned that, according to the Soviet Cabinet, "official measures were taken" and "the injured were given medical attention" (K 28/4/1986 10:00 PM KM/HAR).

At 3:00 a.m. the next day, the original news was reworded, now stressing that a "serious accident" had happened. It was also added that the nuclear cloud had quickly moved thousands of kilometers and nuclear contamination was detected from Denmark to Finland (P 29/4/1986 3:00 a.m. LL/Kné). Ninety minutes later, the news only said that a nuclear reactor had been damaged and an official committee established (K 29/4/1986 4:30 AM KM/HAR). Thirty minutes later, the second news was repeated (K 29/4/1986 5:00 AM KM/HAR). The last news bulletin was broadcast at 8 a.m. with the content of the 5 a.m. news repeated (K 29/4/1986 8:00 AM KM/Gné).

One hour later, a new chief editor took over and new kinds of news stories were broadcast. At 9 a.m., it was only said that a nuclear reactor had been damaged in Chernobyl and a Soviet committee had been established, and it was stressed that "there is no power plant in Hungary similar to the one damaged" (P 29/4/1986 9:00 AM Zp/Kné). This was the last news bulletin about the accident until that afternoon. The consequences of the accident for Hungary were first mentioned that night (P 29/4/1986 7:00 PM NGY/vm).

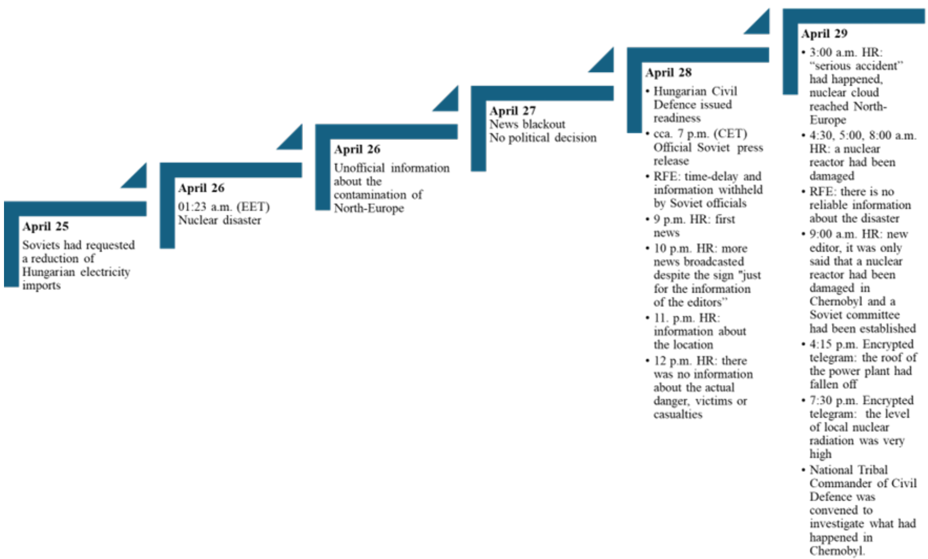
In contrast to this, *Radio Free Europe* continued to share information on April 29 with a long report, during which the station noted that high level radiation was measured in Scandinavia on April 27. The *RFE* also added that although Sweden had sent diplomatic requests to the Soviets for information, the Soviets did not respond in time and had tried to hide the facts ("To the Hungarian Services" Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty broadcast records, Box 3157, Folder 4). According to the Hungarian Daily Broadcast Analysis of April 29, the *RFE* did a Western press review and concluded that there was no reliable information about the disaster and that experts were only trying to reconstruct what had happened (Hungarian Daily Broadcast Analysis for Tuesday, 29 April 1986). All the daily news summaries stated that the Soviet deputy minister – in response to Western reports – denied having any major losses; according to his claim, the number of the injured was under one hundred. The report also noted that the Soviets were criticized for failing to inform the neighboring countries after the reactor accident (Hungarian Daily Broadcast Analysis for Tuesday, 29 April 1986).

Regarding RQ2, since May 1, the Nuclear Power Plant Accident Response Committee had been convened on a daily basis at the National Civil Defense Headquarters. On May 2, a press conference was held and information was provided on the launch and operation of a Hungarian radiation measurement system (MNL OL XIX-A-2-af-00147-VII-szn-tájhiv/1986.).

The available radio scripts make it clear that several terms were used to refer to nuclear radiation. The following phrases (translated from Hungarian by B. D.) were found: "(air/radioactive) contamination," "(natural) background radiation," "air mass contaminated by radioactive substances," "level of the nuclear radiation," "level of radiation," "level of the radioactive exposure," "nuclear contamination," "radiation level," "radioactive substances," "radioactivity," and "the radioactive content of the air." The official radio news did not use consequent measurement units, nor were exact data of the nuclear radiation level communicated.

Most of the radio news dealt with the "reduction" (34,87 per cent) and the "fluctuation" (17,65 per cent) of nuclear radiation. The rise in contamination (8,82 per cent) was often mentioned, either along with a conditional wording, or complemented with the phrase "not significant." Of the analyzed news items, 7,56 per cent said that there was no change in radiation levels. The news that radiation was near the normal, i.e., the pre-accident, level, that the actual radiation was not significant, or that it was far from the dangerous level, accounted for 26,89 per cent of the total sample. Other news items (4,2 per cent) discussed the following topics: "no more contamination comes," "vegetables may be contaminated," and "the radiation will not rise again."

Figure 1. Timeline of the information and the news coverage of the disaster in CET time zone



HR: Hungarian Radio, RFE: Radio Free Europe

Regarding RQ3, the most salient agendas of the National Civil Defense included nuclear radiation measurement and the precautionary actions recommended for the protection of the Hungarian population (MNL OL XIX-A-2-af-00147-VII-szn-tájhiv/1986.).

Of the 238 news bulletins, 95 radio scripts discussed some health protection recommendations in the studied period, which means that almost 40 per cent of the radio news gave preventive practical advice. The first piece of information—aired at midnight on April 29—specified that a Hungarian expert group had been established to assess the consequences of the accident (URH 29/4/1986 11:30 PM KL/Gné). From May 1 afternoon to May 2 forenoon, it was repeatedly noted that, considering the actual "natural background radiation," it was not necessary to launch any countermeasures in Hungary (P 1/5/1986 5 PM KM/Gné; K 2/5/1986 10:00 AM KM/Gné). The first official health protection recommendations were issued on the afternoon of May 2 when it was noted that the level of radiation had risen for the first time (K 2/5/1986 2:00 PM KM/Gné). This radio news included two elements: lettuce should be thoroughly washed because of surface pollution and people should buy inspected packed milk. The same recommendations were repeated in almost every news bulletin (94,28 per cent of the Hungarian-related news about the accident) until May 10. The washing of lettuce was mentioned again—for a total of five times—between May 13 and 14 when the news also said that a pasturage ban had been imposed (P 13/5/1986 9:00 PM ZP/KZS). That "taking medicine or iodic pills was unnecessary" was highlighted six times (6,31 per cent). That "there was no limitation to drink water" was mentioned two times (2,1 per cent), and that "all foods were safe and edible" was mentioned once (1,05 per cent).

The two main recommendations—to wash the vegetables and to drink only inspected milk—were still in effect "as a precaution" (P 13/5/1986 9:00 PM ZP/KZS). After that, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that there was no surplus radiation in Europe, and it was not necessary to take any further precautionary measures (MNL OL-XIX-A-2-af-00147-VI-szn/1986).

The analysis of the radio coverage of the Chernobyl disaster was completed by examination of a weekly political radio magazine called *168 Hours*. This was aired every Saturday afternoon, a highly popular time slot for radio listening, and had a huge audience. Two weeks after the accident, on May 10, *168 Hours* dedicated more than 40 minutes of the 90-minute show to discussing what had happened in Chernobyl. A Hungarian news correspondent from Moscow gave a detailed summary of the incident, noting that "the true significance of what had happened could not be assessed immediately, and therefore incorrect information could reach Moscow." There was an interview with a radiation biologist who provided detailed radiation measurement data and talked about the possible consequences of the increase in radiation levels. Then a genetics expert information about the taking of iodine tablets and, finally, the show discussed the restrictions on food export (550026 168 hours 1986. V. 10. Kossuth Rádió 16:00–17:30).

One week later, on May 17, the Moscow news correspondent gave more detailed, and more accurate, information about the accident. Quoting the Hamburg daily *Der Spiegel*, he said that according to the president of the Soviet news agency the party leadership had received information about the accident on April 26, "but at that time the technical staff of the reactor did not yet know that a serios accident had happened. They thought they could handle the situation themselves." He added that the operators had "made their first decisions randomly, which was not efficient. Some measures have made the situation worse." The president of the news agency admitted that an official government announcement should have been issued a day earlier. The next topic discussed was the restriction on food export and the contamination of vegetables. There was also an interview aired with the manager of the tourism association who talked about the negative impact of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster upon domestic tourism (550342 168 Óra 1986. V. 17).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper explored the communication of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in Hungary. Based on an analysis of primary sources issued by the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, and aired on *Hungarian Radio*, it offered an insight into the mechanisms of a relatively flexible information management in a time of crisis.

Official documents show that the work of the Hungarian crisis management team was hampered by several circumstances. The Chernobyl accident was unprecedented, which explains why there was no crisis management practice or preventive experience available. Furthermore, there was not even a uniform, international, example to follow for the units of radiation level measurement. The Party documents indicated that the information officially communicated by the Soviets arrived late and provided too few clues about the nature and magnitude of the accident. It is also clear that the Hungarian party leadership was not always given an adequate quantity and quality of information and hence did not initially know how to have the accident reported.

The communication of the catastrophe was a mirror of some of the characteristics of the Hungarian mutation of the authoritarian media system in the last decade of the regime. Radio news on the issue—just like the official Soviet statement—was two days late. Considering the official archival sources, there is a suggestion that the delay in Hungary was not caused by the domestic media withholding information, but by the lack of information brought about by the delay of the Soviet officials as well as their efforts to conceal the details of the accident. *Hungarian Radio* reported on the disaster immediately after it had officially been admitted by the Soviets. In the first hours, political interests were replaced by professional considerations, and radio listeners received news from several sources, including top secret and Western ones.

Even though the communication of the crisis was under strict and permanent state control, from April 30 onwards (MNL OL XIX-A-2-af-00147-VII-szn-tájhiv/1986; MNL OL XIX-A-2-af-Ma-00147-VI), the wording of the news of *Hungarian Radio*, at that time the only official radio station in the country, was not regulated at all. The visible aspect is that the news scripts were shortened and reworded many times by the news editor to fit the actual airtime available. The interview with the chief editor of *Hungarian Rad*io highlighted one more aspect about the domestic communication of the accident: the human factor: news bulletins were repeatedly changed in line with the intentions of the journalist who was in shift at the time. Most notably, Iván Bedő, having assessed the situation on the night of April 28, broke the rules of official information policy and let confidential, Western, information be aired.

Compared to the Hungarian press, where information was strictly controlled by the Party and no reference was made to Western news sources at all (Kékesdi--Boldog, 2019b), radio news bulletins informed the public about the accident from a differing perspective. Until the morning of April 29, there was a short (self-)censorship-free period when radio listeners were given information from both official Soviet and Western sources. As a result, the public not only heard about the damage done to Reactor no. 4, but also about the rise in radioactivity levels, detected thousands of kilometers away. This piece of information may have helped the audiences understand how serious the accident in Chernobyl had been.

This decision of the chief editor did not cause any political outrage. He was not sacked, nor was he publicly shamed, and he could carry on his work a few days later. Bedő, however, received a disciplinary punishment and a three-month premium deduction (Germuska, 2010, p. 197). Yet, as he said, this penalty was not a serious sanction; all it meant was that he could not get any extra jobs for the ensuing three months (I. Bedő, personal communication, December 4, 2018). In other words, *Hungarian Radio* was a sufficiently permissive platform to inform the audiences about the disaster at this time.

The quantity of news bulletins was relatively high in the studied period. Overall, 238 news bulletins, i.e., more than ten per day, discussed the level of nuclear radiation in Hungary during the 22 day period studied. Based on the content analysis of the news, it is safe to conclude that the official state-socialist propaganda was not disrupted by the nuclear disaster. In the age of a bipolar world system, Soviet fair-weather relationships could not be damaged by the reporting of the real medical, environmental, and economic consequences of the disaster, which aspects were not even mentioned at first.

It is important to note that there was not any news blackout in the Hungarian media. A crisis management team was set up early and presumably, to avoid panic among the audiences, it chose a communication strategy that was highly concise in terms of the content of the announcements and formal in terms of their style.

In terms of the wording of *Hungarian Radio's* news, equivocation was frequent. Even though the nuclear cloud had undoubtedly reached Hungary, the radio news did not clearly mention the rise in radiation levels. Either the phrases about the rise were formulated in the conditional tense, or they were followed by some calming statement such as “not significantly” or “far from the harmful level,” or the news did not use the term “rise” at all but mentioned a radiation level in fluctuation. When the news told listeners about the contamination, no exact measurement data of nuclear radiation were provided. The inconsistency of the terms of measurement could be confusing, and it did not help ordinary people to understand the degree of the threat. Uncertainty was also manifest when listening to the health protection recommendations issued by the Hungarian authorities, as these continued to be in effect after the WHO reported that they were no longer necessary. The news about the unchanged levels of radiation in Hungary was on air as long as the Hungarian expert committee was uncertain about the details: only from May 1 onwards, i.e., after the Ministry of Agriculture and Food had ordered a pasturage ban in several counties, did announcements in the Hungarian media indirectly acknowledge the presence of harmful substances.

The analysis of Hungarian Radio's news broadcasts is informative about the following dynamics in the domestic communication strategy:

The news editor and the journalists of the radio reacted professionally to the situation as they tried to quickly obtain information about what had happened and confirmed the news by referring to several sources, to the extent possible, in the first 24 hours. As a result, all the information available was made public immediately after the Soviet statement.

Then, however, the Hungarian Party leadership—in part owing to the lack of information—switched to 'manual control' and defined the media's agenda and frames, while *Hungarian Radio* no longer had the chance to deviate from it. In these days of geopolitical vulnerability, political interests and the prevention of panic were more important than the dissemination of adequate information.

This changed only two weeks later when the news editors and journalists of the radio could produce content about topics beyond the official agenda, which resulted in more details about the disaster and its consequences for Hungary being revealed, and even the responsible behavior of the nuclear engineers and of the Soviet officials was seriously questioned. This may have reduced the uncertainty and fear that arose in society after the accident and its domestic communication.

The radio coverage of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster highlights two further features of the Hungarian public sphere. First, the various role interpretations of the journalists. There were 1) propagandists such as the chief editor on April 29 who, in an effort to avoid conflict, deleted both the Western and the classified pieces of information from the news, 2) collaborative media professionals who tried to balance between diverging interests, and 3) truth-seeking journalists who played a decisive part in the dissemination of information and later in its interpretation. Secondly, the studied news coverage demonstrates that loosening political control over *Hungarian Radio* gave radio journalists more leeway. The editors of *Hungarian Radio* publicized classified information in a less controlled evening time slot. As a result, radio provided detailed and accurate information for a few hours. This kind of journalistic courage that prioritized accuracy instead of partisanship, appeared again two weeks after the accident in the weekly political radio magazine. By mentioning that the authorities did not initially assess the significance of what happened in a proper manner, and several wrong decisions were made, the authority and integrity of the Soviet Union were seriously questioned.

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HU OSA-420-2-1:31 8192 Bolgár György: A csernobili szerencsétleněg a Magyar Rádióban [György Bolgár: The Chernobyl disaster on Hungarian Radio]

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550026 168 hours 1986. V. 10. Kossuth Rádió 16:00–17:30, editor: Ákos Mester.

550342 168 hours 1986. V. 17. Kossuth Rádió 16:00–17:30 editor: Ákos Mester.

K 2/5/1986 10:00 AM KM/Gné “Magyar jelentés a sugárzásról” [Hungarian report about the radiation]

K 2/5/1986 2:00 PM KM/Gné “Magyar sugárszint mérések” [Hungarian radiation-measurements]

K 28/4/1986 10:00 PM KM/HAR Szerencsétlenség szovjet atomerőműben [Disaster in a Soviet power plant]

K 28/4/1986 24:00 KM/HAR “Szovjet atombaleset” [Soviet nuclear accident]

K 29/4/1986 4:30 AM KM/HAR “Szovjet atombaleset” [Soviet nuclear accident]

K 29/4/1986 5:00 AM KM/HAR “Szovjet atombaleset” [Soviet nuclear accident]

K 29/4/1986 8:00 AM KM/Gné “Szovjet atomerőmű baleset” [Soviet power plant accident]

P 1/5/1986 5 PM KM/Gné Szovjet kormányközlemény [Statement of the Soviet Government]

P 13/5/1986 9:00 PM ZP/KZS Radioaktivitási szint Magyarországon [The level of the radioactivity in Hungary]

P 28/4/1986 9:00 PM, LL/Kné „Robbanás egy szovjet nukleáris erőműben” [Explosion at a Soviet nuclear power plant]

P 28/4/1986 11:00 PM KM/HAR “Szerencsétlenség szovjet atomerőműben” [Disaster in a Soviet power plant]

P 29/4/1986 3:00 AM LL/Kné “Szovjet nukleáris baleset” [Soviet nuclear accident]

P 29/4/1986 7:00 PM NGY/vm “Légszennyezés” [Air pollution]

P 29/4/1986 9:00 AM Zp/Kné “Paksi erőmű helyzete” [Situation of the Power Plant of Paks]

P 7/5/1986 7:00 PM KM/ré “Mérések Magyarországon + sugárhelyzet és következményei” [Measurements in Hungary + radiation and its aftermath]

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Environmental Politics: Could Social Media in Greece Foster the Ground for an Alternative Environmental Agenda?

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Abstract: The sharing of news across various social media platforms has become an integral part of our daily information intake. But our understanding of the specific types of environmental news stories that gain widespread traction across diverse media platforms remains limited. In our study we examine the most popular posts appearing on Facebook and Twitter for a three-month period (September – November 2021). Our research revealed that social media users predominantly depend on traditional media outlets rather than seeking information from alternative news sources. The news shared on social media platforms primarily originates from political actors and institutions, either in the form of statements or press releases. This content tends to focus on the societal and economic implications of the crisis. Consequently, social media in Greece has not yet managed to establish an alternative narrative or agenda surrounding this issue.

Keywords: climate change, legacy media, social media, environmental issues, climate news

INTRODUCTION

Climate change or climate crisis is described as an “unobtrusive” topic (Schafer, 2015) based on its complexity bearing effects that become tangible in the long run. However, it still occupies a significant portion of media’s coverage, even though its intensity varies across time and between countries (Schafer et al., 2013). For years traditional news media outlets have been the primary sources of information on environmental issues (Hase et al., 2021; Schäfer, 2015), while media portrayals of the environmental topics seem to affect the publics’ perception and stance regarding the importance of ecological sustainability (Broadbent et al., 2016; Stecula & Merkley, 2019). As a result, these “media representations” have for a long time provided the primary axis, on which the public discourse on environmental issues has been founded.

However, due to the meteoric growth of social media and their appeal especially to younger generations, the control once enjoyed by legacy media over information distribution and narrative construction on public issues has now been significantly challenged (Wohn & Bowe, 2016). Scholars argue that social media, by enabling the participation of multiple and diverse actors in the shaping of public agenda, hold a democratizing potential in the contemporary digital era. In other words, in this new “hybrid media system”, there are the premises for the emergence of a new discursive power from a wide spectrum of actors (Jungherr et al., 2019). In addition, current studies reveal that social media have the potential to foster civic action for environmental protection (Roshandel Arbatani et al., 2016). However, we still have limited knowledge on the type of environmental news stories that become “viral” across assorted media platforms. In other words, the question is whether or not there is a “news recipe” that makes particular stories successful in terms of social media diffusion and reach.

By employing a quantitative content analysis of the most popular posts on climate, both on Facebook and Twitter over a three – month period (September-November 2021), this study seeks to investigate whether there are specific traits or particularities that make certain environmental news stories popular on these platforms in Greece. By tracing and comparing the main news stories on climate-related issues posted by online users, groups and Greek legacy media on Facebook and Twitter, we try to identify the main themes and types of stories mostly shared on these platforms. Secondly, we explore the potential differences among the sources of news stories shared by non-media professionals (users’ pages and groups), with the aim of ascertaining whether the news media platforms enhance the diversity of news information by expanding the range of topics as well as the pool of sources (beyond legacy media), resulting in an enriched and pluralistic public debate on climate-related issues.

Our findings seem to question the potential of social media to establish a new agenda within the public debate regarding climate change. Moreover, our findings revealed that Facebook alternative sources are promoting mainly infotainment-oriented content, whereas most posts on Twitter are coming mainly from legacy media or institutional actors. In other words, social media platforms, at least in Greece, tend to serve as a means of reinforcing institutional speech or as an interactive space of entertainment and distraction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

PERCEPTION OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN GREECE

Greece is in the northeast of the Mediterranean Sea, a region characterized as a "climate change hotspot" and has been experiencing numerous events connected to climate change during the last decades (prolonged heatwaves, wildfires, floods etc.). As a result, public awareness and anxiety over the climate crisis is increasing within the country. According to 2021 Eurobarometer survey's findings, 84% of Greeks identified climate crisis as a "very serious problem" compared to the 78% share of EU27. Moreover, 78% of the population believed that the government was not doing enough to "tackle climate change" (Eurobarometer, 2021).

Another topic closely related to climate change is the transition to green or renewable sources of energy. Greece has achieved most of its 2020 energy and climate targets (IEA, 2023). Nonetheless, the reduction in energy demand and GHG emissions was mainly caused by Greece's prolonged economic contraction (IEA, 2023). According to Halko and Gkampoura (2021), the main increase in energy poverty in Greece took place from 2009 to 2013. Although, there has been a decrease from 2014 onwards, it is noteworthy that even in 2021, 17.5% of the total population was unable to adequately heat their homes (EU avg = 8%).

Greek media have traditionally treated climate change with consensus on the anthropogenic causes of climate change and on the promotion of renewable energy sources as a means for tackling carbon emissions. Nevertheless, as Gkiouzepas and Botetzagias (2017) note when examining more specific and controversial climate change policy decisions, newspapers appeared to align themselves along partisan lines.

Greek media's environmental editors point to politicians and large corporations exerting pressure on the media, influencing them to exclude environmental topics that clash with their interests (Kostarella et al., 2013). The scarcity of environmental news can be attributed to two additional factors, as reported in the same study: the limited readership for such news and a lack of journalistic expertise and experience in covering these matters. Tsekos and Matthopoulos (2008) underscore the insufficient collaboration between Greek journalists and scientists when reporting on environmental issues, further contribute to the problem.

The study on media coverage of the Mati wildfire in Greece in 2018, conducted by Karyotakis (2022), revealed that news outlets treated the wildfire as a political matter rather than an environmental one. Similarly, research by Hovardas (2014), on the coverage of the 2007 wildfires reveals, that the Greek press framed the disaster as „unnatural" and „unexpected," with newspapers showing clear partisan biases. Newspapers aligned with the governing party adopted the narrative of an „asymmetric threat" propagated by the government, presenting the wildfires as the outcome of a supposed conspiracy plan. This approach aimed to deflect blame for the government's failures in managing the situation.

Due to perceived political and corporate influence, the population in Greece has shown low trust in the media, with only 19% expressing trust in 2022, according to the Reuters Institute Report (Newman et al., 2023). The same study reveals that a significant portion of online users (61%) currently rely on social media as their primary source of news, with Facebook being the most popular platform, accounting for 46% of the respondents.

FRAMING CLIMATE CHANGE IN LEGACY NEWS MEDIA

Journalists are not experts on climate issues; thus, their perception of climate change is basically formed by the sources they rely on (Kleinberga, 2022). In her study of how climate change is covered by the media in Latvia, Kleinberga (2022) found that climate coverage is homogenous, relied upon prepackaged material and promotes institutional voices (politicians, government officials) as news sources. In their study, Badullovich et al. (2020) highlight that the most common frames, as appeared in their extended literature review, are of Scientific, Economic, and Environmental thematic orientation. Moreover, other frames, such us Public Health, Disaster and Morality and Ethics are starting to gain considerable attention by researchers in recent years. Recent analysis of media representations on climate change reveals a shift has taken place on the primacy focus of journalistic coverage (Schäfer, 2015). From representing climate as a pure scientific issue, the media are now emphasizing the societal aspects giving rise to new political and economic debates. These political and economic concerns have identified as a common theme of journalistic coverage on climate change, since they "are generally considered more newsworthy than the effects on the ecosystem" (Engesser & Brüggemann, 2015:14). In the same vein, in their analytic literature review on frame analysis of climate change, Schäfer and O'Neill (2017:22) argue that science-centric frames are losing ground to socio-political frames. On their part, Stecula and Merkley (2019) point out that certain frames with economic connotations, like harms or uncertainties regarding climate mitigation policies have been on the decline in the mainstream media since they are considered to have an adverse outcome in peoples' propensity to support climate action. By contrast, positive framing, e.g., highlighting the economic benefits of climate action, is on the rise, as it is more successful in mobilizing people to engage in environmental activism. By and large, as Vikström et al. (2023:17) argue, the "economic framing of climate change seems to most adamantly cling to the status quo frames", since climate change in the media discourse has been "subordinate to economic policy" (Vikström et al. 2023:18).

Other studies identified a shift in industry actors' climate change rhetoric through the years in accordance with scientific or political developments (Schlichting, 2013). Last but not least, as a part of their study, Hase et al. (2021) analyzed the main themes of frames raised by the ten most cited studies in the field and conclude that the news coverage of climate consists of the following frames: climate science, environmental impacts and changes, climate politics, economic impacts, societal and cultural impacts. These are further merged into three dimensions; a) a scientific dimension which refers to scientific evidence or processes regarding climate change, b) an ecological dimension, which involves the effects of climate change on nature, like weather effects or disasters and a c), societal dimension, which puts people at the forefront and how they cope with or cause climate change.

Compared to other countries, studies on environmental issues framing in Greece, still lags and as a result we cannot fully understand how these processes work in a polarized media system.

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENTAL DEBATE

The influence of social media on democratic politics is a widely discussed topic incorporating antithetical claims. On the one hand, there is a simplistic approach perceiving social media platforms—through virtual communities—as an alternative public sphere permitting influential public discussions, which incorporate viewpoints frequently not displayed by the legacy media (Çela, 2015). This reflects a clearly optimistic perspective, describing social media as having revitalized the public sphere with "the networked population" having the potential to participate in public speech and be part of collective action (Shirky, 2011: 29).

This new description refers to a supposedly multifaceted sphere of social networks, which play a considerable role in realizing the public debate beyond national borders and thus contribute to a transnational public opinion. However, this benefit is believed to reflect an exaggerated representation of the internet's democratizing power (Iosifidis, 2011: 619). The reason lies in the social media platforms' constraints that in impeding civil political discourse are in effect making the revitalization of a public sphere infeasible (Kruse et al., 2018).

Among these constraints are inequality in information access, (not unlimited but characterized by an aversion to differing or competing viewpoints), as well as unfree or distorted behavior due to the existence of surveillance practices and filtering processes based on algorithms (Kruse et al., 2018: 64–65).

Another important issue regarding the role of social media in shaping the online debate on the environment has to do with the possibility of alternative framing of the current events, giving birth to new conceptions of the issues at stake. Relevant research has recently revealed that climate change is framed differently between mainstream news media organizations and climate movement actors based on X (formerly Twitter). Indeed, Chen et al., (2023: 385) argue that X frames the environmental crisis in a way that provides insights into the consequences of climate change and calls for action. In terms of climate movement coverage on X, policy changes and responsibility attributions are two frames that stand out, characterized by a much more frequent appearance on users' discussions within a platform bearing temporal patterns of discourse (Chen et al., 2023: 405–406).

Other environment-oriented frames, exhibited by social media platforms, relate to how global climate NGOs present their strategic messages on Facebook. It is concluded that overall, the NGOs resort to the diagnostic frame through messages that mainly reflect "problems" associated with climate change. The topic being discussed more frequently is climate actions, followed by climate impacts and efficacy (Vu et al., 2021: 104–105). The discussions' themes between NGOs coming from developed and developing countries have proved to differ with the former, showing a tendency to discuss actions to a greater extent. In this frame building process, the agendas between social media platforms and legacy news media are not necessarily contradictory. A study investigating how traditional news media and social media, (mainly X but as Twitter), influenced each other before and after President Trump's announcement of withdrawing the U.S.A from the Paris climate agreement, revealed – in some aspects of the climate issue – a significant correlation between the agendas of Twitter and newspapers (Su & Borah, 2019: 245).

As to the activist aspect of the environmental issue, social media use has also been found to be positively related to the environmental engagement. This is exemplified by young people employing social media in global social movements as a tool for activism with the aim of drawing attention and attracting people to join the movement through calls to action. Among the fundamental strategies adopted by activists, as revealed in Greta Thunberg's case of Instagram posts, is framing climate change as an issue of ethical and moral dilemma, while at the same time resorting to hopeful emotional appeals and to motivational framing to recruit supporters (Molder et al., 2022).

METHOD

As part of the EUMEPLAT project, this research follows a methodology framework designed for analyzing platform journalism in ten EU countries (Cardoso et al., 2021). The present study focused on conducting a quantitative analysis of popular Greek posts (N=320) related to climate on two social media platforms: Facebook (FB) and Twitter (TW; prior to the 2023 name change to X). These posts consisted of both professional content from media outlets' pages and user-generated content from public pages and groups. The selection process involved identifying posts relevant to the European Union (or Europe) and their ranking was based on users' engagement metrics such as „total interactions" on FB and „reach" on TW. The data for analysis spanned from September to November 2021. During the analysis, we thoroughly considered both the posts, as well as any accompanying links. This means that if a post contained a hyperlink leading to a specific website or news source, we took that into account in the coding process, which involved several aspects, such as identifying the format of the posts, whether they were presented as text, images, videos, or a combination of these elements. Moreover, we determined the agent or entity responsible for posting the content, whether it was an individual user, a media outlet, or another source. Additionally, we coded the primary subject of the posts, identifying the main topic or theme being discussed. To provide a comprehensive analysis, we also examined the type of source associated with each post, differentiating between legacy media, alternative sources, blogs, or any other relevant sources. In cases where the posts included journalistic content, we further examined the type of news presented, whether it was a simple news item, a feature article, an opinionated article, an interview or an editorial.

Another important dimension we considered was the scope of the posts. We distinguished whether they focused on global, European, national, regional, or local matters. Furthermore, we analyzed the implied frame of the posts, classifying whether it was scientific, environmental, societal, or any other relevant categories. By exploring these various dimensions, we aimed to provide a comprehensive and detailed understanding of both the content and context of the posts analyzed.

Based on the theoretical framework provided above, we can summarize our main research questions (RQs) as follows:

- RQ1: What type of news stories gain traction on social media platforms?
- RQ2: Which are the most prominent topics discussed in social media in the period under investigation?
- RQ3: Which is the most popular dimension regarding environmental posts on social media?

RESULTS

In our analysis, the content coming from professional media accounts is juxtaposed to the content derived from users' groups and public pages on FB, as well as content coming from users of TW. Online users that keep a public page to post content are mostly politicians, and to a lesser degree journalists, influencers, and other celebrities. As shown in Table 1, the most popular format of content in social media posts includes links to external sources. Links are used in most posts on TWr, as well as within the media professional accounts. The latter was expected since media organizations use social media platforms to drive traffic on to their websites. However, users on FB's pages and in groups prefer to use images when posting content. This is an interesting finding, since most users do not find it necessary to include a source for their allegations. A compelling image, which may sometimes be also out of context, can be enough to capture attention and drive on engagement. Videos are not yet treated as a popular format by media organizations to present the news. By contrast, this is a popular format among FB users, mostly consisting of politicians, who need to promote their public image.

Table 1: Type of post format (N=320) on Facebook (FB) and Twitter (TW)

	Text	Link	Image	Video
Fb all users	3	6	40	11
Fb groups	3	12	44	0
Fb media	1	56	2	1
Tw all	6	40	9	5
Tw media	0	58	0	2
Total	13	172	95	19

When probing in greater depth the type of links shared on social media platforms, it can be concluded that most of the times they come from legacy news media. One notable exception is users on Twitter that prefer to link their content to other type of sources, mostly coming from public institutions and corporate websites. As shown in table 2, news coming from alternative media and blogs are underrepresented in our sample.

Table 2: Type of news source (links and video) on Facebook (FB) and Twitter (TW)

	Legacy news media	Alternative media*	Blog	Other
Fb all users	8	1	0	0
Fb groups	3	3	1	5
Fb media	57	1	0	0
Tw all	12	2	1	32
Tw media	59	0	0	1
Total	139	7	2	38

*Note: Alternative media refers to online only media such as digital newspapers, news blogs and video-logs (vlogs)

In the context of the typologies of texts employed by online users for news coverage, they are mostly simple news stories, in the sense that they report on facts on climate change and environmental news but provide little context. Analytical articles in our sample are rare and are mostly translations of news pieces from international news organizations. Opinion articles, interviews and editorials are almost non-existent in our sample.

Table 3: Type of news text (Links and Video) on Facebook (FB) and Twitter (TW)

	Simple news item	Feature article	Opinion article	Interview	Editorial
Fb all users	8	1	0	0	0
Fb groups	2	0	0	0	0
Fb media	50	9	1	0	0
Tw all	10	4	1	0	0
Tw media	42	16	0	0	0
Total	112	30	2	0	0

Regarding topics, the cost of energy is the most prominent one during the period under investigation. News media reports on government measures to tackle the rising costs of electricity and gas, while there are posts in our sample from the opposition, criticizing the government's decision to close coal mines and lignite plants during "such turbulent times". For example, one of the most popular posts on FB came from a politician of the far right who wrote:

> Why has the #ND (New Democracy ruling party) gone on a frenzy to close lignite plants, when half of Europe is returning to them due to the energy crisis? It's a million-euro disaster for #Greece. ■ New Democracy suffers from an obsession with non-responsibility. For all the disasters they brought about they blame the pandemic, climate change and the energy crisis. They REFUSE to see their responsibility and mismanagement of the crises. ■ (They) Sell

> off all strategic businesses and use unbelievable excuses. ■ The government refuses to reduce the tax on gasoline, resulting in the citizen suffering to make ends meet. ■ Mainstream media are attacking Kurtz while they themselves are controlled by the government and are running sponsored ads for articles against other (party) presidents. Millions of euros were handed out to the mainstream channels and newspapers...
> (FB post)

Another popular topic on media accounts is Greece's reduction of CO2 emissions in 2020 by 7.2% compared to 2019. This statistic, however, overlooks the reasons behind this "achievement", that point to the economic recession rather than the implementation of environmentally friendly policies.

Policies for climate change are popular among both FB and TW users, (mostly politicians presenting the newly created Ministry of Climate Change and Civil Protection), while general and broader content regarding the environment (unusual weather conditions, wildfires, floods etc.), can be found in FB groups, as well as on media organizations' accounts on both platforms.

Users in FB groups and pages also post more generic content about nature, flora, and fauna. Many of these posts were a call to action for people to oppose the new legislation regarding stray animals. In some of these posts the EU appears as an evil organization imposing its plan of wiping out both Greek people and animals and the Greek government as their willing collaborator. Most of the posts were also calling for people to revolt.

> (...) the criminals of the state who carry out the European death – directive of "legal" euthanasia to "reduce" their (strays') population in the cheapest and most immoral ways. They will leave nothing standing, neither people nor animals (FB).

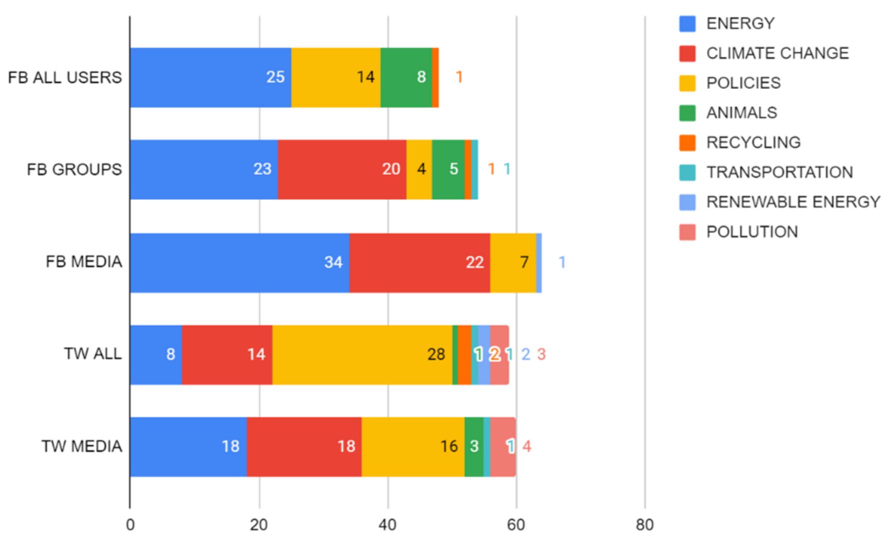
Another controversial issue that occurred mostly on FB pages falls under the renewable energy category—wind turbines. This topic seems to divide politicians and institutions on the one side of the argument and local communities on the other. A characteristic example of a popular post in a Facebook group reads as follows:

> (…) We here, once again pioneers, set out to destroy everything, selling off our most important national capital, which is none other than our natural wealth. Local communities, numbed, uninformed, or misinformed by corporate "parrots" about the coming destruction and the extent of the interventions in their place, most of the time remain silent spectators. The map of terror changes the landscape of Greece...we will see with absolute clarity how the

> Greek landscape will have been shaped in a few years, when the 20,000 wind turbines will have been installed in our most proud mountain ranges, in our most dreamy desert islands, in the most charming parts of our inhabited islands, in our capes known for their wild beauty (…).
> (FB group)

Other topics such as recycling, pollution, waste, and water management are discussed to a far lesser extent. Most of these topics are connected to European campaigns for raising awareness. This was to be expected since the period of investigation included the European Week for Waste Reduction (EWWR). As shown in Chart 1, TW users engage in a wider range of topics compared to those on FB.

Chart 1: Main topic of each post (N=320)



In the context of the environment, the most popular dimensions are societal, followed by ecological lastly scientific (Chart 2). A careful look at our sample confirms that climate change and environmental news are turning into highly politicized topics. Polarization can bring under the same umbrella a range of people supporting various causes, from the animal rights movement to the Euroscepticism.

As shown in Chart 3, the economic impact is the most prominent dimension in the news, followed by climate change policies. However, FB group users are mostly preoccupied by climate change's impacts on humans, while TW users are posting issues that raise citizens' awareness (campaigns, events etc.). Climate politics is a popular dimension, especially on TW, reflecting a reasonable trend since it is a popular platform among politicians, journalists, and activists in Greece.

Chart 2: Climate dimension in each post (N=234)

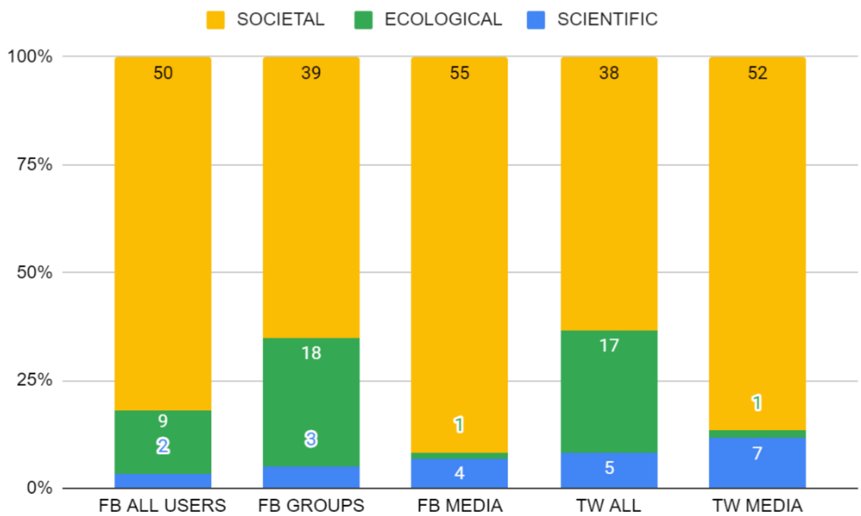
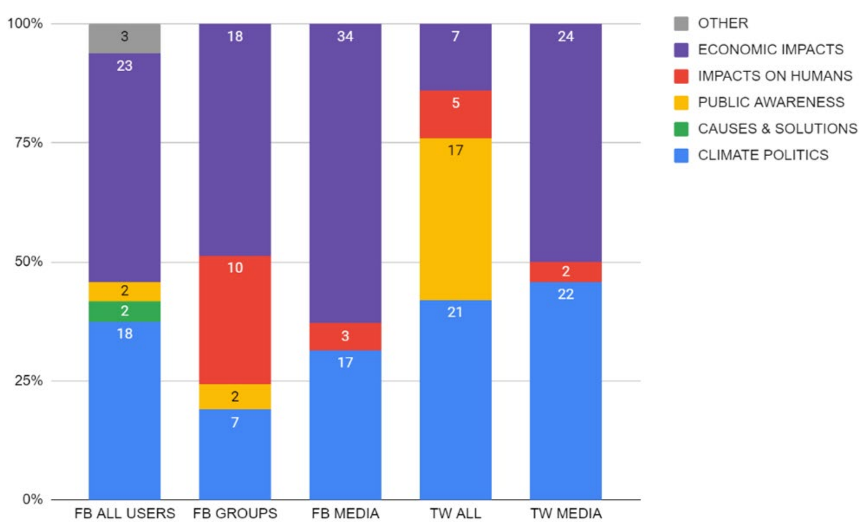


Chart 3: Aspects of the societal dimension



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In the present study, we examined the most popular posts regarding climate in terms of engagement on two social media platforms, Facebook (FB) and Twitter (TW). During the period under investigation (September to November 2021) the cost of energy is raised as the most prominent topic of the online public sphere. It is a time frame preceding the Russian invasion of Ukraine with the cost of energy having already risen considerably. This topic was expected to be of high importance for the population in Greece, since almost 1 in 5 citizens could not heat their houses properly, even before the latest developments (Eurostat, 2023).

According to research findings, policies aimed at tackling the climate change issue also show a high incidence on both social media platforms. The supremacy of climate change policies, as a debatable topic raised primarily by FB and TW users, reflects an interesting trend. Our findings are in accordance with previous research focusing on dominant frames appearing on TW accounts dealing with climate movement (Chen et al., 2023). Calling people to action has also been found to be another major topic raised by the most viewed posts under investigation, particularly those disseminated on FB. This finding has already been confirmed by past research investigating the activist aspect of the environmental issue on Instagram (Molder et al., 2022) and examining the climate movement actors on TW (Chen et al., 2023).

The research findings indicate that the articles shared on both platforms are mostly simple news stories. The sources are traditional media and other institutional actors such as the government, the European Commission, and other institutions and, to a much lesser degree NGOs. Moreover, the legacy news media that dominate the online public sphere, report on climate news based on press releases coming mostly from the government and the European Commission, and content from other European media. Our findings echo the results of Kleinberga (2022) on climate representation on the Latvian media, where she concludes that most of the media rely for the coverage of climate issues on authoritative sources (politicians and government officials), thus enabling the promotion and the diffusion of official political narrative to the public sphere.

In accordance with the research projects implemented so far in the field of environmental crisis coverage, our findings indicate that news organizations report on the climate issue displaying the societal dimension and place emphasis on the economic impacts of climate change. It is worth mentioning that our research reflects the findings of an earlier study which compared the media coverage of climate between the Global North and the Global South (Hase et al., 2021). That study revealed that while media organizations in countries belonging to the Global North show a preference on climate science, coverage in countries of the Global South is mainly focused on the societal outcomes and the implications of climate change in people's lives.

The societal aspect of the environmental issue dominates in terms of frequency of occurrence is a clear indication of the social media platforms' potential to operate as a participatory public space. In such a space marginalized or under-represented voices can also be heard, alongside the strictly scientific ones. However, this emphasis should not be perceived as an exclusive type of framing adopted solely by social media. In effect, a wide range of framing tactics found in the journalistic coverage of the climate change is adopted by the legacy news media. For example, Schafer et al. (2013:169) conclude in their study that extreme weather events and climate characteristics, or scientific publications do not play a significant role in increasing media's attention to climate issues. Plainly said, science alone cannot push the climate change agenda forward. By contrast, events associated with institutionalized politics that act as triggers of media coverage regarding the climate change, seem far more effective. Therefore, it is a shared feature appearing both on legacy news media output and on social media platforms content, implying that the latter is informed by limited dynamics in setting an alternative agenda. Online users on Facebook, however, do promote content related to climate change impacts on humans. News items related to climate politics have a significant presence on both platforms, as well as among all groups under study. On the other hand, the special attention paid by the news organizations' posts to the economic impact is an approach found as well in legacy news media journalistic coverage (Engesser & Brüggemann, 2015) and can be partly attributed to the tendency of media outlets to use social media platforms as a means of attracting the online audience to their news portals.

The striking aspect is that although citizens in Greece have little to no trust in the news media, in government, and in institutions, they do not question climate change and EU policies in this field. This is reasonable since citizens in Greece experience the consequences of climate change firsthand, as their properties are endangered by natural disasters every year. There are certainly groups of social media users and popular posts of far-right politicians that challenge the policies implemented in the environmental sector, however their content remains for now on the fringes of the online public sphere. This finding is worrying since environmental topics become increasingly politicized.

Between the two platforms under study, Twitter seems to be more oriented to contributing to citizens' awareness, through postings on campaigns and on relevant events, despite the prevalence of climate politics as a popular topic being disseminated. This feature partly refers to unconventional narratives, appearing on the platform, without disregarding, at the same time, the mainstream discourse of the institutional actors. This is in line with previous research highlighting that even though Twitter is highly concerned with mainstream media content, it provides some space for viewpoints' expression and discussion on issues neglected by the mainstream media (Rogstad, 2016).

By and large, the inefficiency of social media users to establish a new or alternative agenda in the public debate regarding the environmental crisis should come as no surprise, since in contemporary media ecology a reciprocal influence among various media entities (traditional media, online media, and social networking sites) in terms of the agendas being promoted is taking place. Particularly in polarized issues, such as the environmental crisis or the climate change, the question of the potential interrelationship between mainstream media and new digital platforms becomes more relevant than ever with the inter-media agenda setting (Kim et al., 2017) possibly affecting the quality of democratic public discourse.

The homogeneity of the news shared on social media platforms must be further examined, as well as the challenges journalists face when reporting on climate change, since people tend to form their ideas on environmental issues mostly from the news they get.

Despite these particularities and far from the competitive relationship between social media platforms and legacy news media in terms of agenda setting dynamics, it is believed that online technologies, including WEB 2.0 applications, carry the potential in promoting pro-environmental awareness and action, which incorporates all environmentally friendly and sustainable attitudes and stances in life (Ballew et al., 2015). As Carvalho suggests (2010:175), citizens' roles as "political subjectivities" with the power to address the issue of climate change has significantly been downsized by the mediated public discourse. However, in the light of the new media era, the prospects of citizen mobilization and the re-inventing of themselves as political agents of change on societal issues are yet to be discovered.

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Digital, Hybrid and Traditional Media Consumption and Religious Reflection

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Abstract: When a person incorporates a diverse selection of digital, hybrid, and print news into their media diet, scholars can analyze these sources as indicators of the user's reflexivity on the religious content. This study broadens our understanding of the relationship between the diversity of Catholic believers' news feeds and their capacity to conduct more critical reflection. We explore the relationship between different media diets and reflexivity through a discursive analysis of 30 digital media diaries and their related 30 in-depth interviews collected among traditional Catholic and post-Vatican II media users. Our results point to two patterns emerging between reflexivity and media consumption. The more diverse the repertoire of a given Catholic media user's consumption, the more likely they are to engage in reflection about the content of this media. At the same time, traditionalist Catholic media consumers, consuming counterpublic, homogenous digital content, are still able to engage in deep reflection.

Keywords: digital media, hybrid media, traditional media, media consumption, religious reflection, traditional Catholics, post-Vatican II Catholics

INTRODUCTION

As researchers have documented over the past 40 years, individuals' reflective practices have much more in common with contextual media consumption (Lindlof, 1991; Rlindlof, 1988). Media users have strikingly distinct interpretations of media, which lead to alternative understandings of the same content

(Palmer, 1986), and thus vary in terms of news consumption (Jędrzejewski, 2017). Therefore, it's not surprising that media is an essential aspect of how individuals engage in reflective practices (Cake et al., 2015; Farr & Riordan, 2015). Reflective practices refer to the process through which a person uses their existing knowledge and real-life experiences to evaluate new information, and further, media information (Baume & Scanlon, 2018; Ramaker et al., 2015). Thus, critical reflection is a key issue for journalism and audience reception.

On the one hand, qualitative studies suggest that in newsrooms, journalists' desire for increased self-reflection and its implementation in practice are two separate factors (Buijs, 2014; de Haan, 2012). Some studies even demonstrate journalistic resistance towards critical reflective practices, perceiving them as overly academic, too rational, and time-consuming (Buijs, 2014; de Haan, 2012; Groenhart, 2013). On the other hand, a growing number of studies indicate a decline in critical reflexive practices among members of society (Hunter & Dahlke, 2023; Urzúa & Asención-Delaney, 2023), including people practicing religion (McNamara & Purzycki, 2020). These studies call for further investigation based on the question: does a diverse media diet, namely consumption content including diverse religious topics, counteract the loss of critical reflexivity? Reflective thinking connects the theory and practice of individualistic thought (Baume & Scanlon, 2018) and practice (Schön, 1992), and therefore not engaging in reflective thinking may reduce how much time individual consumers engage with and reflect on different groups, including diverse religious communities. This vicious cycle inhibits the creation and maintenance of a reflexive society (Beck et al., 1994).

These studies focus on how critical reflexive practice is a framework, through which consumers can address existential issues in the past, present, and future (Rodgers, 2002). This framework creates a highly structured form of thought focused beyond merely describing the human religious experience. At the same time, however, critical reflection can organize a consumer's thinking process and yield profound insights into understanding seemingly obvious and unambiguous matters often left unquestioned (Duron et al., 2006; Rodgers, 2002).

Critical reflective thinking, however, does not take place in a vacuum. Considering that contemporary societies function in conditions of progressing deep mediatization (Hepp, 2019), a discussion of reflexivity requires one to consider the context of change in social refigurations (Hepp, 2013). We can assume that the progress of mediatization, understood as a change in media and communication that causes a change in culture and society (Hepp et al., 2015), should lead to changes in the critical reflexive practices of media users and participants in the communication process. Studies indicating rapid loss of reflective thinking ability in response to advanced communication technologies show that this process is unidirectional and reduces one's critical thinking ability (Greenfield, 2014; Spitzer, 2014).

However, previous observations of mediatization processes prove its linear nature (Stähle, 2022), which may translate into an increase or decrease in critical reflexive practices. When we contextualist this within modern de-mediatization trends (Kopecka-Piech, 2023), we will see that an individual's deeper critical reflective practices on digital existence necessitate improvements in human mindfulness and a return to authentic relationships (Lagerkvist & Peters, 2018). Moreover, even in the face of advancing mediatization, consumers' ability to think deeply about ubiquitous communication technology allows them to participate in specific mediatization processes that unify people rather than tearing them apart (Hepp et al., 2014) and increase their knowledge and awareness instead of limiting it (Kopecka-Piech, 2019).

Religious mediatization, in particular, showcases how digital rituals and the participation of technology in updating religious experience are now more than ever grounded in on human reflexivity (Evolvi, 2019), the free decision to be part of a religious community, or to recognize certain authorities (Cheong, 2013; Campbell, 2021). Thus, digital religion, created through various types and sets of media, transforms religious individuals into religious users of this media.

Regardless of whether we accept the arguments that mediatization causes dementia, or that the process of mediatization has the simultaneous potential to decrease and increase critical reflectivity, scholars have yet to explain the critical reflective patterns of religious people in the process of media consumption. This article attempts to fill this gap by addressing and analyzing the relationship between the diversity of content that Catholic media users consume and their level of critical reflective practice. To this end, we will first introduce the issues of media consumption and the critical reflectiveness of traditional and post-Vatican II Catholics. Next, we will present the research methodology and results. Finally, we will discuss the results obtained in the context of mediatization and the reflective approach.

MEDIA CONSUMPTION

The search for media consumption patterns, understood as the selection of preferred media and platforms with the objective of generating understanding for the covered issues (Verdugo & Fierro, 2014), is gaining popularity. However, there are few studies focused on critical reflexivity in this process. The main research trends instead focus on the general impact of media relations on their users, indicating the presence or absence of the media effect (Potter, 2011; Grover et al., 2022) and the mediatization effect (Esser &Matthes, 2013). Meanwhile, studies on the impact of specific media types emphasize that the diversity of this media is the result of assorted formats and content. On the one hand, these studies highlight significant inference resulting from the format and its content, e.g., those between tabloids and broadsheets or between public and commercial media (Baker et al., 2008). On the other hand, the politicality of the medium is a long term determiner in its importance among users (Strömbäck et al., 2016).

As a result of the politicization of these mediums, it is clear that the impact of specific types of media cannot be reduced to observing the media effect or the mediatization effect alone. Only by focusing on the involvement caused by the consumption of specific sets of media can we assess the importance of the daily practices of their users, including the process of creating and maintaining meanings.

Most studies use media consumption as a direct paraphrase for media use (Harrison & Cantor, 1997). This is especially evident in political news consumption, which has the power to sway and polarize public opinion (Kondor et al., 2022). Paradoxically, religious issues that ignite social debate rarely become the basis for regular studies in this area. A few exceptions are primarily quantitative, including a study on increased consumption of religious media and a decline in support for same-sex marriage (Perry & Schnabel, 2017). Regardless of the relationships shown, they cannot capture elements of reflective thinking by negotiating meanings in the context of the past, present, and future (Rodgers, 2002).

When exploring issues that require empathy and compassion, linking media consumption with reflexivity can show us the correlation between well-designed technology and deep thinking (Lee et al., 2023). However, this study does not document the quality of reflection during the process of media consumption itself. Qualitative radio consumption patterns, investigated through in-depth interviews supplemented by Q-sort methods and factor analysis, fill this gap (Jędrzejewski, 2017). This technique assumes that media users do not consume a single type but mixed media sets (traditional, digital, and hybrid) based on their sociodemographics, variety of used sources, approach to the news feed, and the outcomes of this process. Apart from that, qualitative religious media consumption patterns, investigated through observations and in-depth interviews, show the existence of individual media sets supplemented by hidden and relatively private means of communication through platforms (Hall et al., 2023), which occur regardless of what the official media of their churches provide them with.

Throughout the process, they also perform specific intellectual work that leads them to diverse beliefs and social attitudes. Let us move this perspective into the space of media consumption. Here, we are able to provide answers about the role of media sources in the quality of reflection as media users' practices (Bird, 2010), looking for both the causes of the perceived state (why) and the dynamics of this state (how).

TRADITIONAL AND POST-VATICAN II MEDIA USERS

Our interests focus on the publics' critical reflection in the religious content offered by the media. With this in mind, it is fruitful to study the media created around and about the Roman Catholic Church. Two arguments make this a particularly attractive move. First, contemporary Catholicism is characterized by an apparent tension between two opposite forms, namely the post-Vatican II Catholics and the traditional post-Tridentine Catholics. The first group covers supporters of an existential formation drawing on the theological changes enacted by the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) and the latest interpretation of the popes leading to the present Pope Francis. The second group consists of the custodians of the tradition referring to the Council of Trent (1545–1563) and the teaching of the popes until the mid-twentieth century. Both sides of the dispute show competence. This proves that Catholicism has long since become a field of technological change, whether it serves to cultivate old rituals or reaffirm religious values in secularized societies (Anderson, 2016; Lynch, 2018).

This existential Catholicism, based on the assumptions of the Second Vatican Council, dominates numerically and is represented by most institutions of the Roman Catholic Church, including Pope Francis himself. As for the faithful, most of them are not even aware that they represent the mainstream and not Catholicism as a whole. The specificity of post-Vatican II Catholics results from their belief in the common priesthood of the faithful (Vatican Council, 1965a) and the duty of dialogue with the world since some truth also functions outside the Church itself (Walsh, 2016). As far as Pope Francis is concerned, his teachings unconditionally engage with and in this dialogue. Therefore, regardless of whether or not the potential interlocutor of the Church's side recognizes God's agency in it, the Church itself undertakes to be the first to reach out with understanding and consent (Francis, 2020).

In the case of post-Tridentine Catholicism, we mean the diverse communities of Roman Catholicism characterized by a firm and unambiguous identity centered on the Tridentine Mass and the pre-Vatican II approach to the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ (Pius XII, 1943), i.e., a perfect community of priests and the faithful. On the one hand, this is a community characterized by a belief in having a license to the truth and means of salvation. On the other hand, this community stands on the conviction that it is a "biblical remnant" in which the authentic Church of Christ has survived. Contrary to pre-conciliar formations, dialogue is not a priority here. A monologue takes its place, which the Church itself defines as the authentic teaching of revelation (Lefebvre, 1998). One characteristic of this formation is the fact that this monologue is conducted in the digital space thanks to the incredible computer efficiency of the traditionalists.

However, there are no extremes to its boundaries, as evidenced by the discourse depreciating Pope Francis himself (Guzek, 2023).

Considering both groups' potential motivations and abilities to undertake structural reflection, we see two basic patterns of its possible occurrence. In the case of post-Vatican II Catholics, negotiating the teaching of the Church in the context of a believer's life is at the heart of the whole process. Exposure to religious content may provide the believer with spiritual nourishment or, on the contrary, lead to counteracting Church regulations contrary to one's conscience (Cunningham, 2009).

Among post-Tridentine Catholics, we see the basis of their reflexivity in counter-public activities (Fenton & Downey, 2003; Evolvi, 2019). This is primarily due to the inclination of some believers to negotiate religious authority naturally (Campbell, 2021) and the opposition to the digital leadership that characterizes Francis' pontificate (Narbona, 2016). It may also be associated with their animus towards any form of power, including religious power with political potential (Ivereigh, 2014).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

For this study, we utilize qualitative approach that combines digital media diaries and in-depth interviews, and the designed methodology has two main advantages. First, the methods complemented each other, providing data that allowed the reconstruction of (1) surveyed users' process of media consumption, (2) the creation of meanings during this consumption, and (3) the role of reflection in the whole process. Second, in recognition of potential gaps or inconsistencies in the collected data, the interviews at the end of these digital media diaries clarified doubts and existing conflicts in data.

The first step of data collection was selecting the sample and recruiting candidates. The characteristics of the sought-after participants required a recruitment process using the snowball method. Every recruited person was asked to encourage similar people to participate in the study and to indicate potential recruitment environments. Acquiring a wider group of participants through personal contacts, contacts with priests of traditional communities, and opinion leaders in Catholic circles made it possible to attract two socio-demographically diverse groups of participants.

The recruitment of the first group of so-called traditional Catholics was based on the following criteria: they attended Mass in the traditional Latin rite, predominantly expressed reserve about rather than support for the Second Vatican Council, were cold rather than enthusiastic about ecumenism, used the Internet daily, and were over 18 years of age. The second group, which we defined as post-Vatican II media users, consisted of participants who met the following criteria: they participated in the Mass in the new rite in the vernacular, expressed support rather than criticism towards the ecclesiastical changes of the Second Vatican Council, supported ecumenism more than negated it, used the network daily and were over 18 years of age.

In the interests of cohesion and overcoming bias, the initial recruitment of 40 people representing various socio-demographic types was assumed. As many as 10 participants were expected to drop out during the study (COVID-19 pandemic, unexpected health problems including cancer, job loss, etc.). So, the final sample was distributed in three ways: the majority were identified as traditionalists versus post-Vatican II media users; there were fewer participants aged 60+; and city dwellers outnumbered rural dwellers. The structure of the sample is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants in compiling digital media diaries and in-depth interviews

		aged 18–34		aged 35–59		aged 60+		
		urban	rural	urban	rural	urban	rural	
male	traditional Catholics	4	3	1	1	0	0	15
	post-Vatican II Catholics	1	1	4	0	0	0	
female	traditional Catholics	7	0	2	0	0	0	15
	post-Vatican II Catholics	1	0	2	0	1	2	
total		13	4	9	1	1	2	30

Digital media diaries offer a great method for collecting data from recruited participants. In March 2021, study participants were asked to compile a monthly digital media diary to record their contacts with news feeds about the papacy. A single entry in the diary asked the participants to describe their contact with the news feed about the papacy, the event's context, and the news content's reflection. Given that digital media diaries are increasingly used in communication and media studies (Berg & Düvel, 2012; Jürgens & Stark, 2017; Kaun 2010; Kondor et al., 2022), adopting such an approach guaranteed obtaining knowledge about the sources of religious information and ways of utilizing this information that would be translatable and reproducible across the fields. In addition, it provided access to links related to the obtained information.

Next, we conducted semi-structured interviews after the collection and analysis of the digital media diaries. These interviews were based on a common scenario of an in-depth interview, also including diary references to individual entries and discoveries made by participants. The interviews lasted an hour and covered topics related to the Pope and the daily consumption habits of religious media. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, they were only conducted by phone, recorded and transcribed. The study received a positive opinion from the Ethics Committee of the University of Silesia in Katowice (no. KEUS.50/07.2020). All participants gave their informed consent to participate in the study.

Digital media diaries and transcripts of in-depth interviews were transferred to the MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software environment, where they were treated discursively based on discourse theoretical analysis (DTA) assumptions (Carpentier, 2017; Carpentier & De Cleen, 2007). This specific macro textual and macro contextual type of media discourse analysis derives from an approach that identifies discourse as "any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of articulatory practice" (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 105).

Since DTA does not have one specific procedure (Filimonov & Svensson, 2016), it was conducted in two stages. The first covered coding with in-vivo codes used to identify the discourse's nodal points and axial categories. The second included the analysis of antagonism, understood as "confrontation between non-negotiable moral values or essential forms of identification" (Mouffe, 2013, p. 7). In both stages, the search for media consumption patterns, the relationship between news sources, and the reflexivity of users utilizing this news were considered. Undertaking such actions was related to answering two main research questions (RQ)

- (RQ1) What were the traits of the media consumption patterns of the surveyed Catholic users?
- (RQ2) How were the media consumption patterns presented in relation to reflective thinking practices?

POLISH CATHOLIC LANDSCAPE

Poland is a good illustration of the tension between the post-Vatican II mainstream and the pre-Vatican II minority. Paradoxically, when we look at those countries experiencing friction between the two formations, it is difficult to accept a less controversial analytical context than Catholicism in Poland. The reasons for this state of affairs can be found in three arguments.

First, limiting Catholicism to two opposing religious formations, traditional and progressive, is challenging. Social practice proves the existence of diverse groups within Roman Catholicism (Lynch, 2018). While some of these groups are based on the primacy of openness and dialogue, and others assume exclusivity, they all function on the guidance of religious ministers who acquire competence in the field of religious visibility (Herbert, 2015; Stępniak, 2020). In the United States, this visibility is more difficult due to the pluralism of faiths and values (Bellah & Hammond, 2013).

Thus, some forms of Catholicism are visible to the extent that they can distinguish themselves from other religious propositions, which is well illustrated by the issue of headscarves worn by traditional Catholic women in American churches (Cieslik & Phillips, 2022). In France, however, this minority traditionalist Catholic group is identified through activity within the church vestibule (Barras, 2017). Religion in the social space is even suspicious (Garay, 2013). As opposed to these two examples, none of the mentioned extremes takes place in Poland.

Second, the example of Poland points to the incomplete secularization characteristic of a significant part of the world (Casanova, 1994). Religion is losing importance in this area but still belongs to the social imagination. On the one hand, the rituals people cultivate are related to a specific religious life cycle. Whether a believer or a doubter, events like the Corpus Christi procession show participation in religious practices important to the social imagination rather than showing one's deep religious faith. On the other hand, secular public institutions cooperate with representatives of religion based on fusion (Grzymała-Busse, 2015). Representatives of the dominant Church are eager to formulate political demands during political campaigns (Leśniczak, 2016).

Third, Catholicism, which is essential for Poland, remains peripheral to the wider Catholic world. Until recently, Poland thought it belonged to the center of Catholicism due to the leadership of Pope John Paul II, the Polish Pope in the Catholic Church. With the pontification of Pope Francis, the role of local episcopates has increased. Recently, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Poland has reflected on various problems in a way differing to that of the neighboring conference of bishops from Germany. The Polish episcopate repeated the teachings of John Paul II rather than proposing its solutions (KEP, 2017). However, a defining characteristic of this phenomenon is that friction between support for solid implementation of the ideas of the Second Vatican Council and the struggle to secure the freedom of worship of traditionalists also appeared in this country (Jóźwiak, 2021).

Combining these three arguments into one, we see that a marginal case from the perspective of the entire Catholic Church can provide something objective. On the one hand, Polish Catholicism lies somewhere between the American and French models. At the same time, Polish Catholicism expresses the benign nature of the phenomenon, which in the mentioned models takes a rather radical form of the church-state relationship. On the other hand, religion that continues to shape the social Imaginarium of this country, at the same time having the resources to interfere in the political scene, has faced the tension between tradition and progress described at the global level. In this sense, the findings based on Poland may enrich the understanding of the phenomenon in the space of the entire Catholic Church.

MEDIA CONSUMPTION AND PATTERNS OF REFLECTIVITY

An individual's media consumption depends on many factors, such as interest in the content of the news medium, trust in the medium, or its geographical and social outreach (Jędrzejewski, 2017; Schrøder & Larsen, 2010). Considering that the study participants were asked to compile digital media news diaries about the papacy, especially about Pope Francis, the source of the news and trust in it were derived from noting the contact with a specific news item. The analysis of these contents, their sources, and ways of articulating the attitude towards them allowed identifying constellations of individual media repertoires.

Based on individual repertoires, we attempted to identify common media consumption patterns separately for the post-Vatican II group and the traditional Catholic media users. Since individual repertoires were highly dispersed, we undertook to build a typology based on two successive steps. On the first level, we looked for common media repertoires. In the case of traditional Catholic users, the diverse research material forced us to also consider non-periodic media supplements in the form of religious literature and sermons during the Mass. At the second level, we looked for other distinguished patterns resulting from discourse analysis. In the case of post-Vatican II Catholics, this was the participants' attitudes toward the agency of Pope Francis. In the case of the group of traditional Catholics, the basis for differentiation was determined by their approach to conspiracy theories and dividing the world into sacred and secular spaces.

SIX TYPES OF RELIGIOUS MEDIA CONSUMPTION

We were able to identify the optimal six types of media consumption based on the researched material covering the aforementioned groups of post-Vatican II and traditional Catholics. Within the group of traditional Catholics, we distinguished types of negotiators, descriptors and contesters. In the post-Vatican II group, we selected digital followers, hybrid followers, and supporters. The specificity of each type is presented in Table 2, available below.

Table 2. Media consumption patterns broken down by news sources

Group of users	Type of media users	Media diet of users	Characteristics of media user types
traditional Catholics	negotiators	social media and websites, traditional media (TV or printed press)	supportive approach to conspiracy narratives; connection of secular and sacred
	descriptors	social media supplemented by websites or traditional TV and radio	ambiguity in approach to conspiracy narratives; separation of secular and sacred
	contesters	social media	opposition to conspiracy narratives; separation of secular and sacred
post-Vatican II Catholics	digital followers	social media	evident positive position to the pope
	hybrid followers	social media and websites, traditional media (TV, radio, printed press)	evident positive position to the pope
	supporters	social media and websites, traditional media (TV, radio, printed press)	negotiated positive position to the pope

Regarding the traditional Catholic media users, negotiators were the first types of media users we identified. Called this name that reflected their specific media consumption practices, negotiators were consumers of the most varied media diet based on multiple sources and a mixed repertoire that primarily included digital sources. Digital media consistently was their primary sources of information concerning the pope. Later, however, it was supplemented by traditional media, such as TV or the paper press, and non-periodical media, i.e., religious books. A diverse set of media served this type of users to acquire and discuss content related to the papacy constantly. Consequently, their rich media diet was the basis for reviewing the actions of Pope Francis and negotiating an individual approach to the Pope.

These characteristics of negotiators are complemented by their specific attitude toward conspiracy theories regarding Pope Francis. Negotiators demonstrated familiarity with conspiracy theories linking the pope to the Freemasons, sourcing information from both books and online content. However, their engagement with these sources appeared ambivalent. While they encountered material that might provoke unsettling inquiries or perhaps elicit amusement, they also expressed a distinct inclination to further explore this subject matter to develop informed perspectives. Finally, negotiators had a diverse media diet but did not delineate sharply between the secular and the sacred.

Another group of consumers, who we called the descriptors, also relied on a varied media diet. Although they most consume digital media, descriptors obtained news from traditional television and radio. However, they did not show deep tendencies to discuss the information obtained. Their consumption was characterized by reporting the facts and opinions of others. Critical thinking about the information they obtained gave way to emotional reactions to the information. The aspect that most defined descriptors was their embrace of digital media as a gateway to the world. In fact, digital media offered them essential and current information about the pope and the Church, evoking emotional reactions.

The descriptors demonstrated a complete refusal to listen to and disseminate conspiracy theories. Despite being aware of narratives that suggest the end of the papacy or Francis' involvement in a conspiracy with the Freemasons, they did not take these seriously. When it comes to the relationship between the secular and the sacred, descriptors depicted a clear division into distinct activities for worldly matters and separate activities in the sacred realm.

The last type of survey participants identified were the contesters. Social media was the main indicator of their media diet. Unlike the previous two types, the repertoire that made up the media diet of the contesters was poor. It turns out, however, that even based on a limited media diet, these users could develop a counter-publicity model. By acquiring digital content about the papacy, they undertook polemics with the actions of Pope Francis and the Roman Curia. Contesters presented clear separation of secular and sacred and a perplexing approach to conspiracy theories. On one hand, they were familiar with Pope Francis' purported connections with the St. Gallen Mafia or Freemasonry. On the other hand, they maintained a certain distance when questioned about their stance on this content.

Looking at post-Vatican II Catholic media users, we see that the first type, the digital followers, was characterized by an undifferentiated media diet based on digital sources. Facebook and news portals were their basic sources of information about the papacy, and these presented a far from critical stance toward Pope Francis viewed as celebrity and mentor. Some of the users also used the news app from Google. Such a media diet supported their belief that the current Pope fits their vision of the Catholic Church and Francis himself is practicing the right model of religious leadership.

Another type, defined by us as hybrid followers, was characterized by a rich media diet based on social platforms and information portals. Traditional media also appeared to be an important supplement in the following order: television, radio and the printed press. This type had a decidedly positive attitude towards Pope Francis. Unlike digital followers, these hybrid followers consumed diverse media content.

The last type of the presented post-Vatican II groups were supporters. Their varied media repertoire was based on social networking sites, news applications and news portals that supplemented radio and television or radio and the print press. Considering their method of utilizing the obtained information, we will notice that the discussed types of users used their obtained media content to build arguments supporting the pontificate of the papacy and the Catholic Church's perceived new style of functioning.

REFLECTION AND RELIGIOUS MEDIA CONSUMPTION

The key supplement to the characteristics of the six media consumption patterns presented above turned out to be the level of reflexivity among individual users of each type. These were articulated by the participants of the study in the month-long process of completing the digital media diary and during their subsequent participation in the in-depth interviews (Table 3). We assessed the level of critical reflective practices in the diaries and then evaluated them on the materials from the in-depth interviews based on the assignment to three grades: low/moderate/high. We assigned low reflexivity when the diaries and interviews were mainly characterized by descriptions of the facts that occurred. Moderate reflexivity was used when the description of facts was grounded in causes or predictions. We identified high critical reflexivity practices in descriptions that included a continuum of themes with references to past and future predictions. Keeping this in mind, it turns out that a specific media diet was the beginning of the process of creating meaning and starting a discussion on the reality of church life and, more broadly, the social life that interested the participants.

Table 3. Media consumption patterns and degrees of reflexivity

Group of users	Type of media users	Level of users' reflection	Users' approach to Pope Francis
traditional Catholics	negotiators	high	mixed
	descriptors	low	mixed
	contesters	high	negative
post-Vatican II Catholics	digital followers	moderate/ low	positive
	hybrid followers	moderate/ low	positive
	supporters	high	positive

A comparison of the highly reflective types (negotiators, contesters, supporters) highlighted in Table 3 indicated that the more diverse the media accessible to the consumer, the more positive the attitude towards Pope Francis turned out to be. Contestation took place where the media diet was based solely on digital sources (traditional contesters). However, in the case of mixed sources of information, deep reflection led either to the affirmation of Pope Francis' work (the post-Vatican II supporter type) or to partial accommodation of his agency within his vision of what the Catholic Church is supposed to be (the traditional negotiator type).

The moderate reflection undertaken by digital and hybrid media followers of media users selected within the post-Vatican II type turned out to be less conditioned by the media repertoire. The specificity of these users meant that, regardless of whether they were based only on digital sources or based on a mixed repertoire, they showed relatively similar reflective patterns by observing and following content related to the papacy. Therefore, these users were more passive than active. The observation they made referred to what was in the past, present and even the future, so it was reflective.

Often, the diverse sources available to the individual did not prevent them from undertaking only a superficial analysis. The discussed problem's past, present and future influences the currently dominant optics of a given problem. This is exactly how we could characterize the descriptors of the traditional respondents type because their opinion was only based on content from online sources. In addition, their poor media diet perpetuated an insular media environment. Descriptors excitedly reported other people's opinions instead of making an independent analysis or presenting their original conclusions.

Combining the reflection process with media consumption patterns, we can assume that the participants of the study presented a clear directional relationship related to the diversification of the media diet, which also leads to deepening the reflectivity of this diet's consumers. However, it cannot be forgotten that in the case of strong counter-publicity visible in the type of contesters, it was not the media diet that determined the level of reflectivity. On the contrary, the tendency among the contesters to oppose the papacy depicted in the media was revealed regardless of their poor media diet. However, the available research material was insufficient to determine this phenomenon's potential causes. We can only assume that they were based on one of the two alternatives: either the contesters exploited a poor diet in such a way that their counter was based on weak arguments, or they took part in the study without commitment to or with concerns about accessing their daily media consumption cycle. This could lead to their selective participation in the study.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

As our study has shown, by enriching the media diet with a diverse repertoire of digital, hybrid and traditional media, this mostly translates to an in-depth reflection on the religious content to which the content of these media refer. As a result, when answering the first question (RQ1), "What were the media consumption patterns of the surveyed Catholic users?" – our analysis led to their identification of six types of consumption of religious media due to the typologically and qualitatively diverse repertoires of the media diet.

Considering that the mentioned types refer directly to the consumption of religious content, it is in vain to look for their equivalents in the existing literature.

A strong parallel emerges between the described type of emotional descriptors and the type of lurk presented in studies on the use of social networks (Kim, 2018). Using the media without any particular purpose, the consumers react very emotionally when negative content is presented in them on the platform. However, when we omit the topic of emotional reactions, descriptors turn out to be closer to other types of network users presented by Kim (2018), i.e., social network enjoyer focused on net surfing for pleasure and the relationship type focused on information.

Addressing the second research question (RQ2) "How were the presented media consumption patterns related to reflective thinking practices?" – we noticed that, within the presented types, there were two consistencies between the diversity of media diet and the degree of reflexivity. On the one hand, our analysis highlighted a clear pattern of deep reflection on the media content, resulting from the confrontation with many typologically diverse sources of news about the papacy. On the other hand, in the case of niche users with a clear opposition to the papacy (contesters type), the basis of their judgments was a character trait supported by content obtained only from digital media.

The first of the perspectives presented above, indicating that the diversification of the media diet led to an improvement in the quality of reflection, may take the form of a general postulate. Assuming after Rodgers (2002), that reflection today must still include the perspectives of the past and the future, we will add that its foundations in a deeply mediated world should be based on the most diverse repertoire of means of communication. The broader this repertoire, the greater the probability of the consumer confronting various points of view that lead users to make intellectual efforts.

The second presented perspective concerned contesters breaking out of the scheme of reflexivity based on diverse sources. This finding reinforced Bird's (2010) view, according to which daily online consumption practices contributed to the polarization of users' positions resulting from their ideologies. The aspect that is new in our study concerns the range of religious content and that the contestants belonged to a minority type of Catholic traditionalists.

When we look at the postulate of expanding the diversity of the media diet from the perspective of general social changes under the influence of media technologies (Hepp et al., 2015), it turns out that we are dealing with a postulate, part of the mechanism of mediatization of religion (Hjarvard, 2012), whose composing element is the increased presence of religion in the media (Herbert, 2015; Stępniak, 2020). It is clear, however, that from the perspective of a media user, the tangible results of the mediatization of religion can be seen in easier access to a wider set of religious content. In practice, the more media that provide religious news, the greater the field for users to perform individual intellectual work, which takes the form of deep reflective thinking.

We must emphasize that, in this study a digital diet affects critical reflexivity, it is impossible to unequivocally confirm that more digital news leads to reduced reflectivity (Greenfield, 2014; Spitzer, 2014). Our findings only point to the notion that a relatively homogeneous digital diet can be the basis for extensive online communication practices when it concerns a type with a rigid identity and strong identification against the mainstream, similar to a social media echo chamber (Terren & Borge-Bravo, 2021). This seems to accord with other findings in the field of counter-public dynamics (Fenton & Downey, 2003), specifically Rhodes' (2022) study documenting why social media echo chambers condition consumers to be less critical of political information. However, it should be clarified that consuming religious content is secondary to a deeper and prior attitude, a religious attitude that aids the process. Reading is only a secondary confirmation of beliefs. The participants' level of reflexivity depends on the depth, quality and intensity of these beliefs. These attributes grow during one's religious life, formation and upbringing. In general, it can be presumed that the conservatives participating in the study had a deeper, stronger religious life than the post-conciliar Catholics, and this resulted in, among others, greater reflectivity even with a poor media diet.

COMPETING INTERESTS STATEMENT

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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Less is more. Study on slow journalism outlets' authors

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Abstract: The concept of slow journalism has evolved from dissatisfaction with speed-driven journalism. Discussion about this form of journalism has revolved around what it should be; principles it should follow, and how. Although authors play an essential role in achieving slow journalism's goals, there is a lack of empirical research about their motivation and practices. I interviewed 22 authors and conducted four observations in two slow journalism outlets in Estonia. The results show that the authors are motivated by contributing to society, their autonomy, and self-fulfillment, which they were often not afforded in other outlets. However, some journalists had difficulties switching from one set of principles and values to another and experienced problems with time management, storytelling, and self-motivation. Non-journalists may bring some advantages in following slow journalism principles and working with sources.

Keywords: slow journalism, storytelling, alternative journalism, journalism practice, time pressure

INTRODUCTION

Journalism is often defined by speed, which is one of the instruments that helps media outlets stay ahead of the competition (Hermann, 2016) and one of its aspects that makes it threatening to power holders (Örnebring & Schmitz Weiss, 2021). The presence of too much speed causes society to lose its multifaceted reality (Palau-Sampio, 2019), context, and understanding (Eriksen, 2001), which attributes to rifts in society (Gibbs & Warhover, 2002) and undermines media credibility (Barranquero et al., 2016; Eriksen, 2001). Slow journalism has emerged as a counter-movement to the trend of hurry, following the example of the slow food movement (good, clean, and fair) to compensate for the problems caused by fast media and to balance it (Le Masurier, 2015). Slowness is a tool that helps fulfill its social responsibilities by taking time to focus, reflect, dig deeper, search for the best sources, enjoy the process, and appreciate the "other" (Ball, 2016; Thomas, 2016).

While slow journalism gives the authors time to find and create quality content, it is still unclear if they use these opportunities that way and what motivates them. By following its own principles, slow journalism should show by example that journalism can be done differently. However, the authors' point of view of what this looks like needs to be clarified and whether and to what extent these principles are followed in everyday activities, and what difficulties the authors may face.

This is a continuation of a previous study (Siil & Kõuts-Klemm, 2023) that focused on the operating principles of slow journalism outlets *Edasi* and *Levila*, which motivated this research focusing on the authors. The catalyst for this reasoning comes from Mendes and Marinho (2022) who conclude in their literature review that there has been limited attention on authors' views and perceptions about slow journalism, their routines and practices. In this study, I use the umbrella term "authors" since not all interviewees in this study identified as journalists, and wrote mostly analytical or opinion pieces, essays. I interviewed 22 authors and observed four editorial meetings to find answers to the research questions (RQs):

- RQ1: What motivates (or demotivates) authors of slow journalism?
- RQ2: How are slow journalism principles affecting the practices of authors?

SLOW JOURNALISM AND ITS AUTHORS

Rushing affects journalists, as they are expected to produce a lot of content quickly, which leads to a decrease in the quality of coverage and to the risk of authors burning out and leaving the field (Reinardy, 2010, 2013). This favors the usage of stereotypes and simplistic images, with no time to see the bigger picture (Harrington, 1997). At the same time, media work is based on the desire to autonomously and creatively tell stories, which tends to take place within a distinctly commercial context (Deuze & Prenger, 2019) that in turn restricts fulfilling their roles (for example, watchdog), autonomy (Allan, 2022) and creativity.

When searching for and using sources, journalists tend to focus on authorities, celebrities, and geographically closer areas since they are more accessible, take less time, and are cheaper to research. But in the process, peripheral groups, marginal areas, and those with little influence do not get a voice (Palau-Sampio, 2019; Vihalemm, 2022) because finding them, winning their trust, working with them and cooperating takes more time and effort. The critical approach of journalists requires time to slow down (Craig, 2016).

The fuzzy concept of slow journalism (Cheng, 2021; Le Masurier, 2015; Neveu, 2016; Rauch, 2018) has been associated with several forms of journalism and can include elements of other forms of journalism. However, slow journalism differs in its priority of social responsibility, slowing down, taking time to search, find sources (Greenberg, 2007), doing research (Gess, 2012; Neveu, 2016) and shaping the story.

The nature of this form of journalism is determined above all by avoiding the harmful effects of speed on the practice of journalism (Le Masurier, 2015), putting society's needs first. Research by Fulton and Scott (2021) shows that slow journalism for Australia's *ABC* journalists is "a change in practice, the importance of community engagement and the ability to invest time in finding and developing stories," and Le Masurier (2015) in an interview in London with the editor of *Delayed Gratification* emphasizes that they cannot follow news values.

Theodore Peterson (1984) describes six journalism tasks in social responsibility theory as (i) providing information and (ii) discussion, (iii) enlightening the public, (iv) safeguarding the rights of the individual, (v) servicing the economic system (advertising), and (vi) maintaining self-sufficiency. The principles of slow journalism prioritize the first three, as the latter tasks force authors to rush.

The goals of slow journalism described by various researchers are related to authors and their practices: giving voice to underrepresented groups (Palau--Sampio, 2019), creating understanding (Ball, 2016; Craig, 2016), avoiding polarization (Drok & Hermans, 2016) and the use of stereotypes. Other, no less important aims, are being ethical but thorough (Gess, 2012), delving into topics and being creative (Greenberg, 2007), using narrative storytelling (Neveu, 2016), treating both authors and audiences fairly (Neveu, 2016; Rauch, 2018). Slow journalism should seek out untold stories, reduce the noise in the public information space, emphasize more context, accuracy, and quality rather than speed and competition, avoiding sensationalism, scoops, and high-profile events (Ball, 2016; Berkey-Gerard, 2009; Neveu, 2016; Thomas, 2016).

Moving at a deliberate pace is not a goal or a value but a tool that helps fulfill slow journalism's societal goals by taking time to focus, reflect, dig deeper, search for and create trust with sources (Fulton & Scott, 2022). Slowing down is the defining concept in the practical aspect, which helps the authors achieve their goals.

Considering the high standards and expectations put on slow journalism, it has been called a 'Weberian ideal type' (Neveu, 2016). The authors of slow journalism must meet high and versatile expectations in working with sources, collected material, and its delivery (Le Masurier, 2015). This study aims to advance the knowledge on the authors' experiences with slow journalism, if, how, and why the authors are following the principles of slow journalism.

DESCRIPTION OF OUTLETS AND AUTHORS

THE OUTLETS

Edasi (founded in 2016) and *Levila* (founded in 2019) each combine their own medium and formats in their content. *Edasi* identifies as slow journalism, publishes a quarterly print magazine with most of its online content behind a paywall. *Edasi* covers social, cultural, business, travel, well-being and lifestyle topics often as analytical opinion pieces by experts and as interviews with one source. *Levila* publishes for free investigative, narrative pieces irregularly, it identifies as a media lab, and its principles correlate with those of slow journalism (Siil & Kõuts-Klemm, 2023). *Levila* experiments with formats and genres, focusing on social issues. In both outlets, the founders serve as editors-in-chief, authors, and fill other roles as well. *Levila* relies on funding from investors and donors, *Edasi* is mainly financed by operating revenues, subscriptions, advertisements, and in a lesser degree by donors. *Edasi* has an average of 40–50,000 unique users per month and more than half of the readers are from Tallinn, *Levila* has 10–40,000 unique users, an average of 20,000 per month, and almost three quarters of *Levila*'s users are from Tallinn (Sikk, 2023).

Estonia has a population of 1.3 million (of which almost 30% speak Russian as their mother tongue), but its media market is highly competitive, its media sector is primarily shaped by the rules of the market and the behaviour of the audience; and resources for the production of quality journalism are declining (Kõuts-Klemm et al., 2019). In Hallin and Mancini's (2004) model of media systems, Estonia falls in the category of Nordic democratic corporatist model.

More than 61% of Estonians follow the news every day or more frequently. The audience that reads print newspapers fell from 90% in 2008 to 51% in 2017 while the readership of online newspapers grew: 47% of adults read online newspapers in 2018. The number of internet users grew from 67% in 2008 to 90% in 2017 (Vihalemm & Kõuts-Klemm, 2017).

THE AUTHORS

I interviewed 22 authors – 11 in *Levila*, 11 in *Edasi*, of whom 2 are founders who also contribute as authors. Some authors have contributed to both outlets. Both outlets have authors who have worked as journalists or studied journalism (14) and those who have not (8). Since not all identified as journalists, I use the term "authors". Although some were not journalists, they had previously published opinion pieces, analytical essays, critiques or interviews, so everybody had experiences with other outlets to compare it with *Edasi* or *Levila*. Some of the authors were on the payrolls of one of the outlets. Both outlets had some authors who participated in editorial meetings. There are authors who have contributed many articles over the years and there are those who have published just a couple of pieces.

Those with previous journalistic experience allowed for comparison with the journalistic practices of other outlets. Interviewees with no journalistic experience enabled a comparison between journalists and non-journalists.

The interviewees were selected on the grounds of having published at least two (articles, video, audio) pieces in *Edasi* or *Levila* to collect data about their experiences with sources, because thorough work with sources is one of the prerequisites of slow journalism.

I did not include the authors' age or gender as variables since they were irrelevant to achieving the research objectives. Most interviewees were men, and the age of authors varied from from early 30 years of age up to Estonian retirement age (65 years). The participants gave their informed consent about being aware of the study's aims and their confidentiality. To maintain their confidentiality, I removed identifiable characteristics in the results section (names, gender, preferred medium, previous and current employers).

METHODS

I conducted 22 semi-structured interviews, which were coded R1-R22 to give the interviewees anonymity, from spring 2022 to summer 2023 and observed four editorial meetings in the fall of 2022. The in-depth semi-structured interviews lasted between 35 and 90 minutes. The interviews focused on four topics. The first concerned the authors' practices (topics, focus, sources, style, storytelling, structuring, time management, work stages, struggles, etc.). The second concerned motivation (why these outlets? what role do they fill? demotivation). The third involved experiences with each of the outlets (similarities and differences in slow journalism, reasons for leaving, and feedback). The fourth focused on interactions with editorial boards (pay, help, intervention or suggestions for stories and feedback). I chose the topics and asked about motivation based on previous literature which focuses on what and how slow journalism should strive to achieve (its motive), so it is vital to know the same about its authors.

I transcribed and coded the recorded interviews (practices, principles, interaction with outlets, sources, producing process, problems, motivation, comparison with other media, etc.). The codes were both inductive, generated when analyzing the data, and deductive, based on research previously published, i.e., expectations expressed for authors of slow journalism. After the coding, I analyzed the data to find coinciding areas in the interviews, common topics (Braun & Clarke, 2006), initial open coding followed by selective coding, and converging some codes in similar areas (e.g., motivation and demotivation). I anonymized and analyzed the transcriptions on a laptop without web access.

I also conducted two non-participant observations in each of the outlets' editorial meetings (n=4; participants in each meeting n=4–6), noting what was discussed and what topics, practices, principles, and issues emerged. The observations lasted approximately two hours. I coded and analyzed the written notes from the observations in the same way as the interviews. The participants in the observations were the editors-in-chief (e.g., the founders), authors, editors, and an assistant to the editor-in-chief.

The sample is small, but for an exploratory qualitative study, 10 to 15 interviews should be sufficient (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Observations allow the collection of "clean" data, but as a researcher I kept in mind the danger of subjective interpretation (Given, 2008; Mey & Mruck, 2010). Observing the editorial meetings made it possible to compare results from interviews, corroborating or contradicting the information given by authors and founders.

To shed light on the views, experiences and practices of authors of slow journalism, I sought answers to the questions of what (de)motivates authors of slow journalism and what practices they use.

RESULTS

AUTHORS ARE CHOSEN CAREFULLY

The founder of *Levila* stated that giving authors time and a good salary does not guarantee results. According to the authors, these issues stem mainly from time management and self-motivation.

> R18: When I said before that it is nice to have that freedom and trust, at the same time, you get tired of it very quickly. It would be much easier if someone told you to "go there and do it now," I would not have to think all the time whether it is important.

The authors defined themselves as having a liberal worldview, at the same time trying to remain neutral and understand the "other." Both outlets have authors who have not worked as journalists. According to the founders and authors, journalistic background may make it difficult to follow the principles of these outlets, and according to some authors, the attitude of the sources towards non-journalists is more favorable because there are trust issues with other outlets.

> R21: [the author] must be a good writer, must not be evil, not push their narrow agenda, must have the ability to generalize social topics, /…/ it is even better if they are not journalists or regular authors in Estonian media.

Trust was one of the keywords in the description of the relationship between the outlet and the author. The authors consider the ability to manage time, self-mobilization, focus and finish, self-discipline, and creativity as essential characteristics. In the case of *Edasi*, the ability of some co-authors to write an opinion piece quickly was also expressed since they have other occupations. However, some worked on pieces for a longer period. The authors found that this work requires an author who gives sense to their work values, prefers quality over quantity, does not aim for wide distribution and clickbaits, has social and context perception, and does not focus on the day-to-day politics but on the more significant currents underlying it all.

Issues appeared at any stage depending on the author's background: non-journalists may need help in the preparation period when they must look for sources and contact them. Journalists' may face difficulties with abandoning ingrained journalistic practices, news values, style, and adhering to the slow journalism principles, finding topics and sources accordingly.

> R1: People [with journalistic background] have a very rigid view of what journalism should be, but I look at the media in a very broad sense, to the point that there are no limits. Ethics, trust, cooperation, facts – all this is important. But everything else, how to make these connections, how to build this story: it doesn't make sense to set it in stone. Our best stuff doesn't come from people with journalism degrees.

According to the interviewees, renowned authors, specialists in their field are part of *Edasi*'s marketing and motivation for the authors. Pride of belonging to an 'elite' group of authors and doing high-quality and enjoyable work was also expressed by *Levila*'s authors. Satisfaction and pride are related mainly to the brands of the outlets, as their emphasis is on creating better content than other media.

TOPICS FOLLOW THE GOALS OF SLOW JOURNALISM

The outlets' general social goals influence the topics based on which stories are selected. The principles described by the authors include creating coherence in society, making sense, generalizing, giving context, stories' timelessness, giving voice and quality. I observed during editorial meetings that the founders ensure that the topics adhere to the main goals, but the authors are still influential at this stage.

> R3: There is no point in doing some longer story if you are uninterested. Otherwise, nothing will come of it anyway. Moreover, the focus is still decided by you – you are familiar with the material and what in it is most important and interesting.

The authors have a great deal of control over their pieces. They perceived the trust placed in them by the editor-in-chief and great freedom in choosing the focus and form of the pieces. This does not mean that anyone and every story is published indiscriminately; the previous selection excludes, for example, authors with an agenda and content marketing.

Journalists and non-journalists could benefit from combining the two groups; journalists would ensure journalistic professionalism, technical skills, and contacts. Non-journalists bring to the table different points of view and practices, deep knowledge from their field, and trust from sources; according to one author, it could also be an educational and interesting form of cooperation for the journalists themselves. According to one interviewee (R11), slow journalism requires a different type of editing and editors, one that gets involved in the story before it begins and supports and guides the author from the beginning.

PREPARATION AND WORK WITH SOURCES TAKE TIME

Thorough work with sources is integral to the goals of slow journalism, for example, in covering underrepresented groups or covering a new angle, trying to understand, while avoiding stereotypes and sensationalism. Trust was highlighted in the relationship between authors and sources. According to the authors, there is a mistrust of journalists, both in the case of public figures and ordinary people, due to personal negative experiences or sources considering the general quality of journalism to be low. According to the authors, finding a source who agrees to comment with their name and face can be time-consuming, and the effort must be worth it, which shows another facet where the quality of slow journalism may manifest itself.

> R14: His [the source's] one argument for accepting me was, "It is a good thing you are not a journalist. With you, I can talk." So, me not being a recognized journalist opened the door for me.

Edasi's coverage of underrepresented groups manifested in cultural figures who tend to be overlooked by other outlets but also in that hard-to-access public figures are willing to be interviewed by its authors.

Levila focuses primarily on underrepresented groups and topics, searching for relevant sources, which makes the work of these authors difficult in many ways.

> R5: If you want to publish a story about real people, real life, it is always more difficult than writing [a story] about public figures, politicians who are always available here in Tallinn and interested in appearing in the media.

Those who conduct interviews were characterized by the desire to work with sources face-to-face, they like to give the source their time, and not limit themselves to a few obligatory comments with a brief phone call or email as experienced in other media. The thorough work with sources is evident in the preparation of the stories, where the authors drove tens to hundreds of kilometers to spend time with sources before recording, and the interviews ranged from an hour to six hours.

> R6: The biggest difference from outlet X is the speed and amount of news; [in *Levila/Edasi*] there is time to do background work, read, talk to sources several times, not be satisfied with one quick comment.

The non-journalist authors' competence in the same professional field as the sources allows them to establish a connection, act as equals, and the quality of the resulting piece is correspondingly better. Because of the trusting relationship the sources interfere much less in the story than expected, and they allow leaving previously forbidden facts and quotes in the story when they see in which context and how these are used.

CAPTIVATING THE AUDIENCE WITH STORYTELLING AND QUALITY

Along with author-centeredness and autonomy, greater personal responsibility was mentioned, for example in the choice of topic and in telling the story. According to the observations and interviews, the tone of the stories should be balanced, "to understand, not to condemn" (*Levila*). At the same time, *Edasi* is "not malevolent," which does not equal soft topics but avoiding conflict as a news value. The language should be simple (which does not mean plain) and avoid officialese and foreign words if possible. The story is expected to be well-thought-out, easy to follow, creative, well-structured, flowing, and with a personal touch. Authors are expected to create high-quality content, use an excellent, unique style, and storytelling regardless of genre or medium.

The authors' style was expressed in the way they created the story: some sat behind a computer and wrote or edited most of the story in one go, while others carefully and painstakingly constructed or composed the story for up to a couple of months and tried to create as logical a story as possible through meticulous structuring.

> R15: The most difficult thing is to develop a structure or an approach. [I have] the desire to try new structures, not to repeat myself.

Levila's stories contain more sources, often in the form of audio or video, which requires a more complex story and narrative storytelling, but the desire to vary and develop their style and storytelling was expressed by some authors of *Edasi* as well. Authors noted that they have the time to develop their style, make it more compact to avoid creating an unnecessarily bulky story.

Although the goal is not necessarily to spend a long time creating a story, many other aspects of this process (work with sources, shaping the story, quality assurance, thoroughness, etc.) were related to the longer schedule these outlets allow. The use of time across the stages of creating a story varied depending on the author, genre, and medium – some analytical pieces were done in an hour, while some required long preparatory work and reading of dozens of articles, up to the drawing of cartoons and illustrations lasting several weeks, or documentary projects lasting months.

The authors without a journalism background conduct their interviews without relevant technical skills and training. Help with transcribing was sometimes offered to some authors, and the editor later processed the material since several of the authors contributed for free. Some who did not receive help with transcribing found that interviewing for *Edasi* needs to be compensated more adequately, otherwise they don't feel motivated to contribute with that kind of stories.

The authors from both journalistic and non-journalistic background reported professional evolution in their interviewing techniques, storytelling skills. Also, on a more general level, learning to set the story's focus: what you want to say with it.

STRUGGLES WITH TIME MANAGEMENT

The general principles of slow journalism influence everyday practices: all parties involved are given time to delve into context, extrapolate, and avoid news values of conflict, sensation, celebrities, scoop. The authors found that slow journalism does differ from other forms in its principles and practices.

> R14: It [slow journalism] is kind of like it [journalism] should be. It is like an ideal model /…/ I immediately understood that it is not mainstream journalism because that threshold differs. It is higher. You must approach things differently or come in through a different door.

The need to let the story "settle" or "sink in" emerged as an essential part of the process, i.e., the pause between interviewing, creating the story, and sometimes the draft and finishing, when the material is not actively worked on. This provides an opportunity to find the story's core – an approach, focus, or style – from which the rest of the story flows and enables the author to manage, consolidate, and structure elements of complicated topics.

Issues with time management sometimes resulted from the authors being engaged in other jobs or activities. Dealing with other tasks partially overlaps with the "settling" process mentioned earlier, but with that comes a risk that the more passive period stretches so long that when the author returns to the story, they no longer remember its parts and elements and must start from the beginning. For this reason, some stories have been left unfinished. To solve this problem, the authors proposed more editorial meetings, working in the office together to exchange ideas or cooperate with another author. Discussing ideas and problems with someone even before the work with the article begins and keeping each other on schedule can alleviate the problems with complicated stories and storytelling.

AUTHORS' MOTIVATION SUPPORTS QUALITY

The authors emphasized that a good story in these outlets is only produced if the author is motivated and interested in the topic. The motivation of the authors to contribute to society stems primarily from dissatisfaction with haste, superficiality, thoughtlessness, sensationalism, gossip, opposition, conflict, mass production, and the exhausting work atmosphere in other outlets. According to the authors, these are caused by a profit-based way of thinking.

> R6: In big media companies, their [authors'] backs are against the wall all the time, they have to do it, the deadlines are approaching, and the paper will be published tomorrow – whether there is news or not, the paper still has to be published.

Dissatisfaction with the experience in other media was expressed by the interviewees in the desire to take time out and focus: "getting off the conveyor belt," "getting off the wheel," "taking a break from the media wheel". Slow journalism gives time and freedom to work on skills and mediums, motivating authors with a corresponding interest to contribute to these outlets.

> R22: I am now doing all the things I could not do that I saw as wrong in outlets X, Y, or Z – I will fix them now. I am free from it and no longer must stick to click-hunting /…/ I've got the freedom to do exactly the kind of thing that is like ideal journalism for me.

The quality and positive brand of the outlet motivates authors – in case of *Edasi* sometimes for free. The latter viewed their co-authorship as an intellectual hobby. The authors are motivated by autonomy, self-realization, time, and a chance to use different forms, genres, and volumes. For many, the freedom from volume limitations was one of the most significant differences from other media. This freedom also worked the other way: there was no need to make the story longer than necessary. In *Levila*, with its salaries above the average in the Estonian media market, pay was mentioned as a motivator. Although *Edasi*'s fees are lower some of its authors also mentioned pay as one of the motives.

The authors' motivation helps them to stay on track while creating a comprehensive, complex story that sometimes takes several months or to write an in-depth analytical story for a lower fee or for free.

The prominence of one's work in these outlets with low output, which could be overlooked in the mass of information in other outlets, was also connected with pride and self-fulfillment. The authors found that their work and contribution are more valued in outlets with a slow publication cycle and smaller content quantity.

Possible demotivational aspects were the hypothetical scenarios where *Edasi*/*Levila* edged closer to other media in practices, content, and principles, as well as political-ideological leaning to extremes, underpayment, and the uncertainty associated with the possible termination of the outlet or it becoming (too) exclusive.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR THE OUTLETS

A pleasant atmosphere and working with like-minded and inspiring people were mentioned and compared to negative experiences in other outlets. According to the experiences of the interviewed authors, in the investigative section of the more prominent media houses, the journalist may be required to stop working on a story and do another, faster and more current story, characterizing the difference between these two forms of journalism.

When writing stories for other outlets, they felt harassed by volume limitations, whether on paper or online. At the same time, *Edasi* and *Levila* were found to be more suitable outlets for in-depth analyses of complex topics.

> R5: Just give me time, and I will do everything /…/ I have time [in *Edasi*/*Levila*] to do my job as it should be done.

The founders of both outlets fulfill several managerial roles and some superficiality in performing these duties is unavoidable: in the case of *Levila*, distribution or marketing problems were mentioned, which are also related to difficulties of reaching a wider audience and thus giving value to the authors' contribution. In *Edasi*, marketing was highlighted primarily as rather exemplary, although some were dissatisfied, especially with regards to reaching audiences outside the capital. Similar concerns were expressed regarding the reach of *Levila*, but cooperation with larger outlets emerged as one possible solution. Difficulties with reaching peripheral areas can make it difficult for the outlets to achieve their goal of uniting different social strata. The possibly low impact of the outlet was mentioned by a couple of the authors as a reason for leaving *Edasi*/*Levila*.

The authors expressed concerns about the outlet which relies on one founder. This was partly seen as a weakness of the outlets, and the authors felt that the founders should delegate their tasks so that they themselves could focus on strategy and decrease the risks. Outlets that are dependent on the founder could also lead to funding problems.

> R20: Some of the investors who did not want to invest said that, well, it is all very nice, right, but a one-man band is a considerable risk.

In the case of *Levila*, the outlet is independent of the media market but dependent on donors, and some authors were hesitant to tie their future to an outlet with such an unstable funding model.

The authors viewed *Edasi* and *Levila* as neutral outlets and associated other media's polarizing behavior and ideological bias with creating problems in society. At the same time, some authors voiced opinions that *Edasi* publishes stories from people with liberal views and that *Levila*'s similar bias is expressed in the content and the choice of topics.

There were inconsistencies concerning feedback; some authors received sufficient feedback from the outlet, and there were those who said that it was lacking, and they would need more of it to improve as an author. The fact that other outlets try to copy their work and offer opportunities for cooperation based on their achievements in *Levila*/*Edasi* was also seen as positive feedback.

> R5: And the really good things are not produced [in other outlets]. But if you do it [a successful project] in *Levila*/*Edasi*, you'll get a call from outlet X: "hey, we think we could do these things [in our outlet], that's cool stuff".

Some authors thought that slow journalism would function best as a subdivision of a large media house, ensuring a uniform professional level and funding while maintaining creative freedom. Others countered that autonomy disappears in a more prominent outlet, and other problems of a media house creep into other divisions, which would corrupt the principles of slow journalism and prevent the fulfillment of its goals.

In addition to time management, an existentialist or an identity problem can arise with bigger autonomy. In addition to reporting and analyzing what is happening in society with their stories, authors are forced to make sense of their own roles and goals, since the editorial board doesn't do it for them, contrary to other outlets. Some authors with journalistic backgrounds voiced this issue.

> R16: The moment of truth arises: what do you really want to do? When the burden [of time pressure] was taken off, it was like a vacuum: it is easy to do the first or second story, but when doing the fifth, you must already motivate yourself; there was no need for it in daily coverage. Now there is no speed argument anymore.

The authors found that when comparing other outlets (whether daily or weekly newspapers, magazines, news media, cultural outlets or business papers) with *Edasi* and *Levila*, the latter differ in terms of deadlines, style, content, principles, goals, autonomy, creative development, quality, and self-fulfillment opportunities for authors.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Slow journalism aims to show by an example that journalism can be done differently, without the controversial practices of superficial reporting, conflict, sensationalism and polarization. Interviews and observations to study whether and to what extent the idealistic principles of slow journalism are followed in everyday practices in two Estonian outlets, *Edasi* and *Levila*, confirmed the benefits and motivation of slow journalism for the authors but also revealed some issues.

Two main groups of authors were manifest: those with and those without a journalistic background. A journalistic background might not always be helpful in slow journalism, as haste and a stereotypical way of working, using sources and structuring the story can be hard to abandon for some. Also, some sources would not have agreed to the interviews if the authors had been journalists, confirming that the credibility of both the press and journalists has been undermined. This implies that one of the goals of slow journalism – to use sources not covered by other media – could be partly achieved using non-journalists. At the same time, authors with previous media experience can do journalistic work "the way it should be done" with sources, giving a voice to underrepresented groups.

Authors' motivation is linked to practices of slow journalism: slowing down, thorough work, and developing their skills allow self-fulfillment, pride, autonomy, and satisfaction with their work, which they do not get in other outlets. The authors considered slow journalism a luxury (Greenberg, 2007). Following the high standards of slow journalism creates a strong brand of social responsibility and quality for the outlets, which in turn motivates the authors, again emphasizing the perceived difference in quality between slow and fast journalism.

The authors have both personal (self-fulfillment, time) and societal (creating understanding) motives that overlap with each other, as social contribution brings a sense of self-fulfillment, while the development of skills allows them to create more relevant and better stories for audiences. This satisfaction coincides with the notion expressed by Deuze and Prenger (2019) that autonomy and creative freedom motivate media workers and support the professionalism of journalism. Interviewees used the term "author's genre" and other expressions to underline the outlets' trust in the authors' decisions, style, and autonomy compared to other outlets. Authors control almost all aspects of their story, including focus, sources, timetable, style, storytelling, and emotion. This may spark the interest of younger audiences who expect more emotion and subjective views from authors (Andersen, 2022). The authors' motivation would be reduced if the outlets became more like problematic practices in other media, i.e., polarizing, ideological, sensational, hasty, and superficial.

However, the benefits come with difficulties that stem from significant autonomy, working alone with voluminous and complicated material and sources. Authors may face difficulties with time management and working with complicated stories, structuring the story to be easy to follow, and engaging. This creates issues with self-motivation or even identity for some. The authors in other competitive outlets had less autonomy and more aspects of their work there were predetermined, while in slow journalism, they can't rely on external motivation; they must motivate themselves.

The low production of these small outlets motivates the authors since their work does not disappear under other stories, unlike in high-producing outlets. On the other hand, the smallness of the outlets comes with potentially demotivating qualities: in-depth stories created with great effort do not always have enough circulation, which reduces their impact. One solution appeared to be cooperation with major outlets, which is supported by the slow journalism's ideal of avoiding competing.

Interviewees' difficulties with time management appeared among journalists and non-journalists alike and were sometimes related to working simultaneously in several places or outlets. Quitting other positions could alleviate this problem, but it would be more difficult for non-journalists to earn a living. Also, the advantage of these authors stems from professional activities and knowledge in other fields. So, paradoxically, some of these authors continue to have time management and time pressure problems that counter the idea of slow journalism. One possible solution emerged: cooperation with other authors and greater support and feedback from editors, which allows the development of ideas and technical skills, as well as increases the sense of belonging, which would primarily support those authors who are not part of the core editorial group.

Slow journalistic outlets might act for journalists as a kind of an oasis (Rauch, 2018) where they can work with topics and practices they are not able to use elsewhere, and having realized their ideas, they can later return to other outlets with new storytelling skills, working with sources and different mediums.

This study shows that following the principles of slow journalism motivates authors and enables them to produce in-depth and high-quality content. They have time to develop their technical and creative skills, enjoy the process, avoid burnout, and be proud of the result. On the other hand, this "ideal type" of journalism (Neveu, 2016) comes with its own set of issues; great autonomy requires reliance on the authors themselves in terms of time management and self-motivation. Some authors with ingrained values and practices from speed-driven outlets may face difficulties adapting to slow journalism principles. The solution to some problems in this field can be greater cooperation with other authors, a partnership between experienced and less experienced in journalism, and closer cooperation with editors in earlier stages of producing a story.

Although this qualitative study is based on a small sample in a small country, the insights gained from this study could inform a quantitative study which provides an instructive set of findings to prevent and solve issues that come with working on slower journalistic pieces in other outlets.

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Fact-Checkers as a Professional Community of Experts. The Research Project – From Idea to Implementation

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Abstract: The following article presents an elaborate methodological concept that, in perspective, can serve as a model for analyzing professional communities (such as journalists) understood primarily as symbolic and discursive communities. This concept was partially tested by the author during her research on the community of fact-checkers (FC) in Poland. This study used in-depth interviews. The article presents the research design and its implementation, as well as the preliminary generalized results of the study. Special attention is paid to the usefulness of the IDI method in the context of professional community research, and to the difficulties that may be associated with the use of this method.

Keywords: fact-checking, discursive community, professionalisation, disinformation, methodological model, IDI

INTRODUCTION

Fact-checking, which the online Cambridge Dictionary (2024) defines as "the process of checking that all the facts in a piece of writing, a news article, a speech, etc. are correct" is considered one of the important activities in the context of combating disinformation. According to the DUKE Reporter's Lab, there were 424 active fact-checking organizations worldwide in 2022, just over half of which were non-profit organizations (Stencel, Ryan and Luther, 2023). Their activities have resulted in hundreds of analyses and reports published on the websites of these organizations, as well as growing public recognition of fact-checkers as a professional group, or, as experts in verifying information. Their activities are also extensively subsidized by the European Commission and other institutions, reflecting the important role attributed to them. Some fact-checking organizations also cooperate with private entities.

Considering the above data and from the point of view of the presented research issues, it should be emphasized that fact-checkers can be considered a specific expert group, relatively close to journalism, although certainly not identical. In this environment, certain activities, and tendencies can be observed, which make it possible to treat fact-checkers as a separate professional community (community of experts), referring in its activities to a relatively consistent identity and self-description, including ethical values. It is worth noting that fact-checkers maintain relatively extensive relations with each other at the international level (mainly thanks to cooperation in international projects). Interestingly, international relations tend to be more intense than those at the national level. The reason being the growing polarization of media systems, which has an impact on the community of fact-checkers.

An institution that sets professional standards on a transnational scale is the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), which is based at the Poynter Institute (Poynter, 2024). The IFCN publishes data and reports on the functioning of the FC community in most European countries and also on a global scale. The network also conducts training sessions and workshops to develop professional competence. But most significantly, in the context of the FC community, the IFCN promotes a code of ethics to which all the members must adhere and implement, for which the Network provides advice. Currently, 107 verified fact-checking organizations are active institutional members of the IFCN. It is worth noting that a condition for maintaining membership in the network is that the organization regularly undergoes an evaluation of the professional standards it applies (based on IFCN's code of ethics).

The aim of the article is to present the research design and its implementation of the study on fact-checkers as a professional community, as well as the preliminary generalized results. Special attention is paid to the usefulness of the in-depth interview (IDI) method in the context of professional community research, and to the difficulties to which this method may be associated.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The evolution in the field of fact-checking is an example of one of the important trends of modern societies, which is the progressive specialization and, directly related to it, the increasing role of experts (Giddens, 2001). Progressive specialization of knowledge produces groups of experts that in turn undergo processes of professionalization, becoming professions operating in specific social fields, for example, the field of science or art (Bourdieu, 2007). Progressive specialization can also be considered an effect of the structure of the discursive field (episteme) of modernity (Foucault, 1997 Laclau & Mouffe, 2007), within which truth and the specialized knowledge related to it become central values (semantics). This type of semantics is central especially to the discourse of science as certain knowledge about the world but is also an important nodal point (Laclau & Mouffe, 2007) of other discourses, including the discourse of journalism (Stasiuk-Krajewska, 2018).

Paradoxically, progressive specialization leads to fragmentation and a certain type of structural "unverifiability" of knowledge about the world. The reason is that the essential (and indeed the only) criterion of its verifiability remains the opinion of a specialist-expert, i.e. a representative of a profession that has symbolic power in a particular field, and therefore the power to decide what is and is not true. People trust medical knowledge not because they are able to fully verify its veracity (for it is too specialized, and therefore requires extensive expertise), but because it is presented to them by expert specialists—professional physicians. The situation is similar, albeit probably to a varying degree and scale, with knowledge concerning, for example, law, economics, or international relations. Also, although in those contexts the matter is much more complicated with knowledge of current events relevant to the world, which is provided to us by "professional journalists."[1]

Thus, access to truth (and knowledge), semantics constitutive of the self-description of modernity, is provided to non-experts by experts, who are therefore representatives of professions and holders of specialized knowledge. This conclusion leads to an indication of the particularly important role in modern societies of professional groups, which are the special guardians and disposers of "true knowledge about the world," and thus of the discursive order of modernity.

But is a professional group defined? Who is a professional and what is a profession? The answer to these questions is neither easy nor clear-cut, especially in the case of experts engaged in professional public communication (not only journalists or Public Relations specialists but also fact-checkers).

Two paradigms for defining a profession exist. The first is the taxonomic approach, the essence of which is to identify specific institutional determinants of the functioning of a profession. These determinants mostly include the possession of specialized education (preparation), which allows the acquisition of specific skills; the existence of professional associations and codes of professional ethics, as well as adherence to the norms arising from these codes; and finally – relative autonomy in the implementation of professional roles (Carpentier, 2005). Thus, the taxonomic paradigm of the profession, while providing some relatively concretized determinants, leaves quite a lot of room for interpretation. This

[1] The „truth about the world" presented in media messages is essentially a mixture of information and interpretation. The process starts with interpretating which information should be considered relevant, as highlighted by the agenda setting theory well-established in media studies (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 2014).

is especially in the context of the level of autonomy enjoyed by expert representatives, but also specialized skill and the level of adherence to professional ethics. It is worth mentioning that this approach presents a perspective that isexternal to the representatives of a particular profession, considering as decisive those determinants that are not necessarily related to their identity.

The second paradigm is a completely different approach that, when defining a profession, uses categories, which refer to the identity or self-description of its representatives. This trend primarily includes the framing of the profession as a community of symbolic practices (Carlson, 2016; Carlson & Lewis, ed., 2015; Meltzer & Martik, 2017; Wenger, 1998). This community shares certain common ideas; common knowledge (which delimits the boundaries of a profession and lends it specific symbolic power, according to the concept of power/knowledge: Foucault, 1980) and ideology; a sense of belonging; values; typical activities or sources; and finally – mutual relations. The main tool for creating a professional community conceived as a symbolic community is language, and at a more complex level – discourse (a shared interpretation of the world) (Kong, 2014). In this view, an element constitutive of any profession is the "ideology of professionalism," which is a set of values (semantics) creating a system of beliefs or characteristics considered specific for a community that can be defined as a professional (expert) community. The typical semantic chain of such an ideology primarily includes values such as public service, objectivity, autonomy, commitment, and a specific "sense of ethics" (Deuze, 2004).

Relatively close to the view of a profession as a symbolic community is to interpret it as a discursive community (Swales, 1990). In both cases, the focus is on the semantics and processes of interpreting the world and producing symbolic identity that occur in the communities. However, in the case of a discursive community, more emphasis is placed on the bottom-up processes of discourse (and professional identity) production, while in analyzing a profession as a symbolic community, one is more concerned with an individual's processes of adaptation to existing symbolic structures. Unsurprisingly, in this approach, the discursive practices (as Foucault understands them) of most interest are those characteristic and constitutive for a profession (and therefore they define its boundaries). These practices include the typical specialized vocabulary, the dominant genres of speech or text in specific discursive communities; stabilized mechanisms of intra-group communication (e.g., in the context of building consensus around particular values); stabilized mechanisms of communication with the external environment; ways of sharing knowledge, communication rituals, etc.

RESEARCH MODEL – PRELIMINARY ASSUMPTIONS

The dichotomy of approaches to professions presented above (taxonomic versus symbolic-discursive approach) can lead to interesting conclusions in the context of research on professional groups (professions). Because the juxtaposition of these two approaches makes it possible to create an extensive, but relatively coherent and fairly comprehensive catalogue of the determinants of professions. In other words, a catalogue of artifacts (usually of a symbolic nature) that should be analyzed to reconstruct the social framework of a profession.

A limited catalogue in the terms of taxonomic definitions could be:

- Specialized: skills; specialized education; career paths;
- Existence of professional associations;
- Existence of codes of ethics and other documents regulating ethical standards relevant to the profession;
- Commitment to ethical standards (as declared in the statements of representatives of the profession);
- Relative sense of autonomy and independence (as declared in the statements of representatives of the profession).

In terms of definitions that emphasize the category of community and discourse, the characteristics of journalism are presented[2] in Table 1.

Table 1: Journalism as a discursive community

Characteristics	Journalism
A common range of knowledge about the world	Concerning current events
Shared ways of interpreting the world	e.g. as the scene of a struggle for political influence
Values	Truth, independence, social responsibility, etc.
Ideologies, narratives, mythologies, including foundational ones	e.g., media as the fourth estate
Typical activities	Primarily preparing and publishing journalistic materials, but also participating in debates, social media activity, etc.
Interactions and roles	Reporter, editorial secretary, homepage editor, etc.
Sources of knowledge about the world	Documents, informants, other media, etc.
Dominant type of activity*	In the area of information gathering and commenting on social reality
Mechanisms of socialization	Studies, practice, etc.

2 It is very important to emphasize that the examples from the field of journalism are only random approximations that are not based on in-depth analysis, but rather on the reconstruction of the discourse of journalism as a profession. Their function is to be just a clarification of the categories used, not an exhaustive description of professional journalism.

Characteristics	Journalism
Rules and norms of social coexistence that apply to members	e.g., mutual respect, trust
Shared beliefs	e.g., about the special role of independent journalism in democracy or the restriction of journalistic freedoms by political authorities
Features and functions attributed to the profession	Activism, high communication competence, control of political power, informing the public
Building identity by pointing out differences from other professions	e.g. Public Relations specialists
Processes of reproduction of meanings and ideologies	Debates, trade magazines, introduction to the principles of institution, etc.
The occurrence of a generalized ideology of professionalism	Public service, objectivity, autonomy, commitment, and a specific "sense of ethics"
Ways of acquiring knowledge	Analyzing documents, reading the content of other media, talking to experts, OSINT**, etc.
The nature of the unique world knowledge produced	Up-to-date, socially relevant, and useful to the audience
Typical vocabulary, metaphors	Information, fact, checking, journalistic investigation, etc.
Other discursive constructions, such as syntax, rhetorical figures, expressive and deontic meaning, presuppositions, implicatures, keywords, word-stigmas, names, ad-hoc expressions, etc. ***	e.g. citation of the sources
Typical genres	News, feature, etc.
Communication rituals	e.g., presentation of industry awards
Communication behaviors	e.g. establishing consensus or assuming authority during media debates or on social media of individual professionals, commenting on the behavior of other experts
Stories	e. g., stories of persecution of journalists or media
Symbols used, including graphic symbols	e.g., microphone, camera
Authorities and "black sheep" (identified in community discussions as role models or examples of unacceptable behavior)	Examples of professional and non-professional journalists
Institutions and institutional practices	Broadcasters, associations, regulators, councils, etc.

Key

* Here, "type of activity" is understood not as activities that are undertaken by experts, but as the types of activities that are considered by them to be constitutive of the profession. Of course, the categories "typical activities" and "predominant activity type" partly overlap, but they are not identical

** open source intelligence

*** Warnke and Spitzmüller, 2009

The preliminary reconstruction of the diverse elements presented above, which must be explored and analyzed to reconstruct the functioning of a given symbolic (discursive) professional community, perfectly illustrates the complexity of the issue. It also points to some important paradigms, methods, and tools to capture the multidimensional nature of professionalization.

Initially, one should certainly look at the texts produced within the professional community. Content analysis will be helpful here to identify the basic values, norms, stories, myths, etc., that are actualized in the documents created by the community (for example, in ethical codes, self-definitions, or program positions). This will be an analysis from the ethnographic level, that is, an analysis of the "surface of the text" (Fiske, 2010). Among the most relevant documents of this kind for the fact-checking community is the already-mentioned code of the International Fact-Checking Network. On the front page of its portal, the organization declares: "We believe truth and transparency can help people be better informed and equipped to navigate harmful misinformation" (Poynter, 2024). The IFCN's Code includes five principles:

1) Commitment to Non-partisanship and Fairness (referring in essence to the objectivity of fact-checkers, who should apply the same principles to all sides of political or worldview disputes);
2) Commitment to Standards and Transparency of Sources (committing fact-checkers to prepare texts in such a way that the reader can trace their work, to check the reliability of the information and the source for themselves);
3) Commitment to Transparency of Funding and Organization (a principle mandating disclosure of funding sources and connections of fact-checking organizations);
4) Commitment to Standards and Transparency of Methodology (mandating precise presentation and explanation of the methodology used);
5) Commitment to an Open and Honest Correction Policy (noting a commitment to correcting errors and mistakes and admitting any errors).

In analyzing the texts, however, it is necessary to go further than simply reconstructing the semantics present on their surface – in the direction of text deconstruction and discursive analysis. It is worth pointing out the dominant metaphors and narratives that actualize themselves in the texts, subject positions, etc. (Warnke & Spitzmüller, 2009), ideologies (here in a broader sense, as discourses that constitute interpretations of the world, such as democratic values that are the basis for the proper functioning of society). In this context, it is worth examining the various discursive practices that are carried out within the community. It is also important not to forget the graphic elements that constitute and at the same time reveal the discourses (ideas, values, ideologies, semantics) to which the community refers (Jewitt, 2014). In this context, a particularly relevant (distinctive and specific) discursive practice is the typical text model (which can be described in principle as a genre[3]), which is the "fact-check" (the report, also popular, seems less interesting because it is less specific). In this case, those (mainly structural) elements of this type of text that constitute it as a (quasi-)genre, separate, for example, from journalistic information, should be considered important.

The seven most important structural elements of the fact-check genre are as Stasiuk-Krajewska (2024) describes:

(i) a photo depicting disinformation content (accompanying either or both the headline and lead; repeated in the proper text)
(ii) a précis, integrated into the graphic, labeling the disinformation as a hoax
(iii) the headline
(iv) Date (and time) of publication and reference to the social media of the portal
(v) The lead (simple or complex)
(vi) Relevant text (supported with illustrations, but separated by intertitles)
(vii) References to sources (integrated into the text or as a separate section)

The aspects that differentiate the fact-check genre from a potentially related genre of media news, are not simply the special importance attached to graphic elements or the exceptional care taken to refer the reader directly to sources. There is also, striking in its regularity, the lack of the name of the author of the text.

There is evident correlation between discursive practice and the values (semantics) referred to by the professional group of fact-checkers in their self-description (revealed, for example, in the cited code of good practice). The formal features of the fact-check genre explicitly refer to the discursive opposition of truth and falsehood, decisively taking the side of the former. They prove their credibility by referring to scientific findings, and thus they build the position of fact-checkers as experts – experts who are objective, independent and impartial. As such, they have the authority to decide what is true and what is not. This kind of authority can be potentially disturbing, hence the important role of any communicative elements designed to show the process of arriving at this truth – to preclude the possibility of the suspicion that this truth is of any discretionary nature. The discursive truth of fact-checking, like the discursive truth of journalism, is constructed as having the character of objective knowledge about the world, as a "report of facts".

In the context of research on the professional community, it is also important to point out the interrelationships between the actors (including institutional ones) operating within the analyzed community. In this context, reference should be made primarily to the actor-network theory (Arbiszewski, 2012) and

[3] The caution in the above statement stems from the difficulty of defining the category of genre.

its possible applications in the process of collecting, processing, and analyzing data in the form of network analysis (Kawa, 2014).

It is worth noting that the methodological concepts indicated above generally refer to qualitative methods. This is no accident. Such an assumption arises not only from the research objectives and problems but primarily from the limitations of the research material. The analyzed community is relatively small (in Poland, based on the criteria that will be discussed below, it is possible to identify about 50 fact-checkers), but there are too few texts for it to make sense to analyze them, for example, with the methods of corpus linguistics (Pawlikowska, 2012).

Because of the characteristics of the analyzed symbolic community, the method of in-depth interviews (IDI) seems to deserve special attention. This is due not only to the already mentioned relatively small size of the community but also to the specificity of its representatives. The IDI method is worth considering when potential research participants are difficult to reach; when the researcher is anxious to obtain in-depth information from one person, and finally – when there are concerns that the presence of others may block statements (Maison, 2001). Representatives of the fact-checker community, as representatives of the profession, are undoubtedly experts in their field. This makes it possible to obtain in-depth, elaborate, and valuable answers to the questions asked. On the other hand, some of the themes relevant to the research may be somewhat unclear to the interviewees (e.g., questions about values), while other themes may prove difficult or uncomfortable (e.g., questions about relationships within the community). Hence, the IDI method enables the researcher to draw interesting and reliable conclusions with a relatively small group of respondents, while at the same time providing an opportunity to establish a communicative relationship with the interlocutor (e.g., addressing their concerns), seems particularly valuable.

OWN RESEARCH

In view of the above, it was decided to use the IDI method. The purpose of the research was to reconstruct the self-description (identity) of the fact-checker community in Poland, with a particular focus on the relationship of this self-description to that of of journalism. The analyses were conducted in the context of the assumptions of the theory of profession as a symbolic and discursive community.

In the context of the planned study, referring to the analyses of the discursive practices of the analyzed community briefly presented above, four research questions (RQs) were formulated, which were then the basis for designing the tool, the in-depth interview scenario.

- RQ1. What does the work of fact-checkers look like (daily routines, challenges, good practices, tools they use)? How do they practically carry out their professional tasks?
- RQ2. What are the personal stories and motivations of fact-checkers (how did they reach this point, what drives them, what frustrates them, what was the most difficult situation they encountered in the context of their work)?
- RQ3. How do fact-checkers define their profession (social role, tasks, key competencies, future of their profession, relationship to journalists, institutional location, public perceptions)?
- RQ4. How do fact-checkers define disinformation (threats, causes, mechanisms, counteraction)?

Based on the research problems formulated in this way, the following interview scenario was developed (supplemented in the presentation below with information on which of the questions were linked to a specific research problem).

1.

- Tell us what you do for a living, what type of institution you work in, and what specifically falls under the scope of your activities.
- Describe one day of your work/work activity. Do you work every day? According to some kind of schedule? Who/what regulates your professional activity?
- Where do you find topics for fact-checking?
- What method do you use (how do you proceed step by step)? How does the information verification process work?
- What happens to the results of your work; where and how are they published afterward? Is this method of publication satisfactory to you?
- What do you consider to be the greatest professional challenge for fact-checkers?
- What are the main principles that guide you in your work?
- Who or what is an authority for you?
- What are the main mistakes a fact-checker can make?
- What tips would you give to your younger colleagues?
- What are good practices in fact-checking (give a specific example)?

2.

- How did you get into this profession? Why did you get into it?
- In your daily work – what frustrates you the most?
- In your daily work – what drives you the most, what gives you satisfaction?
- What is your worst experience in relation to the work of a fact-checker?

- What do you consider your greatest personal success, your discovery, your best experience and why?

3.

- How do you define fact-checking?
- What do you think is the most important task of a fact-checker? Where does their role end (e.g., is it just fact-checking or also publishing, educating, etc.)?
- What values guide your work – what is most important to you in what you do, what goals do you set for yourself?
- What does fact-checking bring to society? What is its mission?
- What are society's expectations of fact-checking? Do you think they are adequate (achievable, in line with what the industry really does)?
- How do you think the work of fact-checker(s) is socially appreciated?
- When are you proud of your work?
- When do you feel disappointed about your work?
- Do you think fact-checking is already a profession?
- Do fact-checkers form some kind of community, are in contact with each other, know each other, maintain relationships, etc.? If so, in what way?
- In your opinion, what is the relationship between fact-checking and journalism? How are they similar, and how do they differ?
- How does the relationship stand between these communities at the moment, in your opinion? What should the ideal cooperation between journalists, media institutions, etc. and fact-checkers look like?
- What, in your opinion, should be the ideal situation for employing a fact-checker (e.g. an external expert for the medium, a person employed in the editorial office, or someone working in complete isolation from the journalistic community)?
- Do you think that generally – in Poland and around the world – fact-checkers are objective in their work?
- Do you think that in general – in Poland and around the world – fact-checkers are independent in their work?
- How do you imagine the future of fact-checking? Do you think it will gain importance, develop, or rather not? How will it evolve?
- What is, in your opinion, the main problem about your colleagues (your community)? What irritates you?
- What do you think is the strength of your community?

4.

- How do you define the category of disinformation?
- In your opinion, what are the main reasons for its spread?
- What, in your opinion, are the main trends in disinformation today?
- What are the main threats posed by disinformation?
- How can disinformation be countered? What is the role of fact-checking in this context?

The survey was conducted using the in-depth interview (IDI) method. A total of 20 interviews were conducted with representatives of the fact-checking community in Poland. On average, an interview lasted about 60 minutes, with the shortest lasting 32 minutes and the longest lasting 94 minutes. Interviews were conducted both offline (40%) and online (60%). Interviews were conducted with representatives of all relevant fact-checking organizations in Poland, including in particular:

1. Konkret24 (5 interviewees)
2. FakeHunter (4 interviewees)
3. AFP (2 interviewees)
4. “Demagog” association (6 interviewees)
5. others (fakehunter.pl, Pravda Association, 3 interviewees)

A preliminary analysis of the material obtained seems to lead to the following general conclusions[4]:

1. The community of fact-checkers has a relatively stabilized professional consciousness, based on clearly defined procedures, genres, and skills that are necessary for the profession.
2. The fact-checker community can be considered a symbolic professional community in the sense that it defines itself very clearly in terms of values; however, it must be emphasized that these values are not original to the value system in journalistic ethics.
3. Of importance is that these values are operationalized in professional practice in the form of a coherent set of recommendations for professional conduct.
4. The fact-checker community has a strong sense of connection with journalism as a profession, but it is associated with a rather critical assessment of the current state of journalism and the media; the specific perception of the relationship between journalism and fact-checking depends on the employment model in which the fact-checker works.

[4] A full presentation and analysis of the research results is under development and will be presented soon.

5. In general, two models of employment of fact-checkers in Poland can be distinguished – within a media institution and within an association; the implementation of one or the other model has a significant impact on the professional awareness of individuals.
6. Fact-checkers have a sense of high ethical standards of their profession, and consider themselves objective and independent.
7. The community is concerned about the polarization that it observes (and assesses as negative) in the journalism industry.

From the point of view of the considerations presented here, it seems particularly important that the implementation of the survey confirmed the usefulness of the method applied and the tool designed in the context of the purpose of the survey and the research problems (questions). In implementing the survey, there were some difficulties (e.g., differing communicative competence of the interviewees, fear of expressing opinions, difficulties in distancing oneself from one's environment, misunderstandings in defining abstract concepts). However, the fact-checkers were very open to participation in the research and helpful in organizing it. This is an important indication of a more general nature – representatives of expert communities are eager to share their knowledge and have a sense of mission in promoting it. This is another argument in favor of the choice of method and tool. The results obtained, after their detailed analysis and interpretation, should be correlated with the results of other research in this area – in terms of surface and deep textual structures, actualized discourses, or mutual relations in the field.

Only such a holistic approach will make it possible to grasp the peculiarities of the fact-checker community as a professional community. This example does however explain the essential and characteristic elements of the formation and functioning of such communities in a more general sense, indeed as phenomena specific to modernist societies.

NOTICE

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INTERVIEW

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Media self-regulation in contemporary Europe

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Jacek Mikucki: How do you evaluate the state of media self-regulation in contemporary Europe?

Susanne Fengler and Marcus Kreutler: The landscape is very imbalanced. We find well-established (and well-funded) media accountability systems in many Northern European countries, while in several Southern European countries, media self-regulation functions only at the regional level, if at all. Even France does not have a press council yet. Established instruments of media self-regulation across countries are challenged by digitalization – of content creation and media use patterns – and of course mis- and dis-information.

Jacek Mikucki: How does Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) compare to the rest of Europe in terms of media transparency and media self-regulation?

Susanne Fengler and Marcus Kreutler: In CEE, the Baltic states were the first to introduce media accountability systems. Estonia was strongly influenced by Finland; but even here two competing press councils exist. Hungary is an example how the label of media 'council' can be abused too easily. We strongly hope for the development of promising initiatives in Poland.

Jacek Mikucki: How do national media self-regulation and accountability standards reflect freedom of expression and human rights policies? What role do international standards play?

Susanne Fengler and Marcus Kreutler: Media self-regulation can only flourish in a context of press freedom, and a minimum of mutual trust and respect between media professionals and policy-makers. Our “Global Handbook of Media Accountability” clearly shows this, drawing upon a comparative study of 44 countries worldwide.

International organizations can be very relevant actors pushing for media accountability. The press council in Bosnia and Hercegovina is a good example for this. However, we can also observe many countries where – well-intentioned – international donors have established “parallel structures” of media accountability which are only partially accepted by local journalists – also due to the restrictions they work in.

Jacek Mikucki: What role do journalistic associations play in modern times? Do you see specific solutions or good practices here?

Susanne Fengler and Marcus Kreutler: Let’s take it the other way round: In countries where the profession of journalists is disunited, and several competing journalists’ associations exist, there is little room for effective – and non-partisan – media self-regulation. Also, well-established professional communities are better able to cooperate with other stakeholders – publishers, researchers, active members of the public – enabling more complex media-accountability instruments such as multilateral press or media councils.

Jacek Mikucki: How can journalists, specifically using which journalistic tools or methods, improve media accountability and the quality of media self-regulation?

Susanne Fengler and Marcus Kreutler: This highly depends on the local context. Accountability instruments on a company level such as ombudspersons can be a powerful tool, but they depend on economic factors as well as the owners’ willingness to enter a dialogue on questions of journalistic conduct and quality. When media companies lack openness for such activities, and there is no well-organized journalistic profession, journalists may rely on outside actors for support: In Latin America, journalism observatories run by universities have emerged as relevant institutions pushing for media accountability. In other, very fragile and restricted contexts, like Russia before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, even a discussion about candidates for a journalism award can become a relevant instrument of media accountability, because it opens a platform for debate about standards.

Jacek Mikucki: How can media organizations take care of media self-regulation standards? Do you think they are effective in their actions?

Susanne Fengler and Marcus Kreutler: Anglo-Saxon countries have a strong tradition of organizational self-regulation. News outlets in the US have ethic codes and ombudspersons, but don't support a press council. In the UK, after the collapse of the press council system, several respected media have withdrawn from the discredited council system, and address accountability issues on an organizational level. The MediaACT survey we conducted some years ago shows that journalists across countries consider organizational standards to be among the most effective accountability tools. But again – there might be different contexts, where this model is even rather dangerous. In several CEE countries, media oligarchs have established their own rules of professional conduct, which deviate from the profession's standards.

Jacek Mikucki: How do you see the future of media accountability and media self-regulation? What actions or what aspects could improve their quality?

Susanne Fengler and Marcus Kreutler: The European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) has put media accountability and media self-regulation high on the agenda. Even countries with dysfunctional media accountability systems have to react – in one way or the other. Furthermore, EMFA might encourage local media initiatives striving for media self-regulation. Many transnational initiatives have been created in the recent years to promote accountability in EU member countries. Building cross-border networks, and sharing best practices across international borders, might be the most effective way to promote media accountability at least in the short run. And mass communication and journalism scholars play a very relevant role here!

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KATARZYNA KONARSKA (2021). *MEDIA PUBLICZNE A DEMOKRACJA: TEORIA I PRAKTYKA. MEDIA PUBLICZNE EUROPY ŚRODKOWO--WSCHODNIEJ* [PUBLIC MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY: THEORY AND PRACTICE. PUBLIC MEDIA IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE]. WROCŁAW: WYDAWNICTWO UNIWERSYTETU WROCŁAWSKIEGO, 524 PP., ISBN: 978-83-229-3764-8

The reviewed monograph is devoted to the functioning of public media in Europe, with a particular focus on Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. In order to outline the changes taking place in the media systems of these countries, Katarzyna Konarska has analysed the basis of media operation in selected countries. The publication is the result of the author's long research into the issues raised, culminating in her achieving habilitation in the discipline of social communication and media sciences.

The monograph is divided evenly into four parts. In the opening sentences of the *Introduction* the author emphasizes the importance of a functioning, free and pluralistic media system for strengthening civil society and the democratic state organism. The author understands this multidimensionally „as institutional and normative diversity, reflecting the differentiations existing in the society" (p. 7). Among the main hypotheses posed at the outset, the first assumes that there is a link between media freedom and democratic order. The next two concern the special role of public media in a pluralistic media system and the lack of universal model solutions that would allow the implementation of specific regulatory and structural patterns. However, the author does assume there are some general and basic conditions for the proper functioning of public media institutions in democratic systems. The latter hypothesis refers specifically to CEE countries: the media in countries with shorter democratic traditions are subjected to greater pressures due to the instability of the systems, especially political ones.

The first chapter delivers mostly theoretical considerations. Based on the extended literature on the subject, the author introduces the concept of democracy, discusses its most important models and the role and place of the media in democratic systems and then analyses whatever are the essence of democracy the freedom of the press. Later in the chapter, Konarska focuses on the idea of the public sphere and civil society. She also devotes a little more space to the democratic role of the media in traditional and alternative terms. The first chapter concludes with a discussion of selected typologies of media systems, including authors such as Siebert, Peterson and Schramm; Wiio, Hallin and Mancini; and Blum.

The second chapter is a gradual narrowing of the subject matter to the axis of the monograph, namely public media. The researcher, drawing on an extensive bibliography, analyses what public media is in relation to the public sphere of civil society in a democracy. She devotes due attention to the widely commented phrase – „public mission." The author subsequently discusses the various models of public media and their tasks, starting with the normative approach and ending with empirical concepts. The chapter concludes with the observation, which is a direct reference to one of the research hypotheses, that there is no one pattern of a public media model that is ideal for all times and conditions. Therefore, following S. Cushion, the author cites the opinion that there are many unique hybrid models in the world, which—based on systemic, financial, political and technological conditions—offer program contents that meet the needs of many audiences (p. 168).

In the third chapter, the author moves away from strictly theoretical considerations to descriptive-analytical ones. The main purpose of this part of the monograph is to introduce the systems of organization and functioning of public media in Europe. At the outset, the Konarska presents a summary of the countries belonging to the European Union plus the United Kingdom along with basic data on their television markets (including the number of channels run by private and public broadcasters and the latter's audience share). Further information cited relates to the financing of public media and the systems for regulating their activities. Clearly presented data in tabular form are a starting point for further analysis and consideration, such as the dominant mechanisms in the sphere of public media regulation in Europe (parliamentary, corporate and professional supervision). Based on indicators of media freedom and independence of public media funding management, Konarska analyses the situation of individual European countries, noting the high risk of political interference in some countries, including Poland and Hungary (but surprisingly also Finland). In the remainder of the chapter, the author focuses on European media policy toward public broadcasters. She concludes her general considerations on the subject by saying that in the absence of a consensus around specific regulations, „the question of media independence, including public media, will depend solely on the political culture and level of democratic development of individual countries" (p. 216). In the remaining pages of the chapter, Konarska describes in extenso the media policies of nine Western European countries with regard to public media: Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The choice is not accidental and is based on the representativeness of each media system. The author analyses both structural relations and systems of financing, management or control of public media, and in the final section of the chapter also issues of mission, values and task fulfilment. In the conclusion, Konarska states that: „neither the structural regulations nor the content presented determine unequivocally the autonomy and independence of the public media. For their situation is a resultant of many variables, such as the aforementioned tradition and political culture…" (p. 277).

The fourth chapter is entirely devoted to public media in eight CEE countries and is essentially a repetition of the analyses that the author conducted on the nine Western European countries in the previous chapter. However, early in the chapter, Konarska along with other authors, recognizes that these countries (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) are characterized by great cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious or historical-geopolitical differences. Nevertheless, in recent years, deteriorating indicators of democracy have been noticed in this group, a trend that according to the authors of the cited data, is the result of growing right-wing populism and affects the level of media freedom and pluralism in these countries. Among other disturbing phenomena, the author also mentions the instability of political systems, the oligarchization of socio-political life and its appropriation by political parties. Konarska briefly reports on the systemic transformation of the countries discussed in this chapter, concluding not very optimistically that: „Thirty years after the beginning of the systemic transformation in the former communist bloc countries, the situation of the mass media does not seem to be much better than at the beginning of this period" (p. 301). In ensuing subsections, the author analyses the media policies of individual countries, often referring to the systemic solutions used in Western European countries (discussed in the previous chapter). In doing so, Konarska considers not only the institutional basis and structural solutions but also control and management bodies. With the collected data, Konarska attempts to assign individual countries to the system models devised by Hallin and Mancini and Hanretty. Another aspect of the analysis is the sources of funding, and the goals and programmatic tasks carried out by public media in the discussed countries. On the sidelines of these treatments falls the formulation of unsuccessful attempts to recreate public broadcasting systems in the Western European style (J. Juzefovičs). Symptomatic seems to be the observation that the more broadly the mission and tasks are described by public broadcasters, the worse they are fulfilled. In the chapter's conclusion, Konarska emphasizes that „the independence of the media is guaranteed not so much by the adopted procedures for the selection of members [of control and supervisory bodies – AS] and the scope of their competence, but rather by the political culture and the attitude of the political elite, which seeks consensus" (p. 430).

In the *Conclusions*, the Konarska acknowledges that her analysis has shown a link between the degree of independence of public media and the level of involvement of political elites in the processes of organization, management, supervision and control of these entities. She also confirmed the validity of her theses, including the existence of an inextricable link between media freedom and the democratic order. Furthermore, Konarska acknowledges the higher realization of the public mission in countries assessed as full democracies, and that in countries with shorter democratic traditions, public media are more often exposed to pressure from political elites who seek to subordinate their activities to party interests.

Katarzyna Konarska's monograph is a carefully edited compendium of knowledge on the functioning of public media in Europe, proving that: „Properly organized and defined public media can still be an important and necessary element of the public life of democratic societies" (p. 278).

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BOOK REVIEW

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ANITA ZAWISZA (2023). *PRZEZ OBIEKTYW KAMERY. POSTACIE OSÓB DUCHOWNYCH I ZAKONNIC W POLSKIM FILMIE FABULARNYM*. [THROUGH THE CAMERA LENS. CHARACTERS OF CLERGYMEN AND NUNS IN POLISH FEATURE FILMS]. WARSAW: SBP; 352 PP., ISBN: 978-83-65741-98-1

Religious issues, especially those related to the institutional work of the Catholic Church, are becoming more and more attractive in Poland, both for filmmakers and researchers. Film messages presenting the profiles of the clergy have recently become a kind of social manifesto of cultural people. At the same time, the public discourse related to this type of artistic statements engages not only film critics, viewers, representatives of the Church, but also experts in various fields of research.

Anita Zawisza's monograph „Przez obiektyw kamery. Postacie osób duchownych i zakonnic w polskim filmie fabularnym," [Through the Camera Lens. Characters of clergymen and nuns in Polish feature films] based on the author's research, is an interesting addition to the academic discussion in the field of religious film research in Poland. The author, in her introduction, listing research works in this field, stresses that she has created a monograph that „meticulously and extensively [approaches] the study of the spiritual ministry of priests and nuns, and at the same time is [above all] devoted to the analysis of the characters of clergymen and nuns in films … examined with the help of the categorization key – the main tool used in media studies."

The book consists of four chapters divided into theoretical and analytical sections. The author decided to create descriptions of the protagonists of Polish feature films based on selected cinematographic works from 1961 to 2018. Thus, this is quite a wide period covering transformations not only in film production and film art, but also in socio-cultural areas. Anita Zawisza tries to show how the image of the clergy and, as she stresses, „the entire institution of the Catholic Church in Polish cinematography" has changed over the decades.

The theoretical part introduces the reader to the historical context and tools for creating films. Chapter 1: „The Catholic Church and Film In 1961-1989 – History and Characteristics of Mutual Relations" describes the situation of Polish cinematography in the context of the relationship with the Catholic Church in Poland, whose caesura is the pontificate of John Paul II. Thus, we get synthesized information about the „Polish film school" in relation to religious cinema and the Polish religious film during the pontificate of John Paul II overall. The author cross-examines the historical events with official Church documents and statements by the Pope relating to this sphere of art and the cinematographic industry itself. Chapter 2: „Film Message – Power, Components, Function" offers a systematized description of selected audiovisual elements relating to the perception of the film artwork and its interpretation. It outlines categories such as: sign, signal, word, image, sound in film and audiovisual-film message.

The next two chapters are research sections, presenting the results of the analysis. Chapter 3: „The Image of Clergymen, Nuns and the Catholic Church in the Polish Film – Analysis based on the Categorization Key" outlines the methodology of the research presenting the objectives of the analysis of selected film works. The author explains the issues related to the concept of „religious film", deciding on the classification of the analyzed films as „parareligious" or „transcendent". As she rightly points out: „The chosen (…) terms seem to be the most appropriate and legitimate in regard to seemingly vague works on the borderline of religious, moral, psychological, etc.". Thanks to the method of anthropological-morphological analysis and the categorization key drawn up, the author has created an extensive research apparatus. The concept of the „image" became the starting point and an element of the eventual description of the analyzed film characters. The research material consists of 12 feature films (18 fictional characters of clergy persons: 12 priests and 6 nuns). The selection of films is divided into three historical periods: 1st period 1961-1989: "Matka Joanna od Aniołów" [„Mother Joan of the Angels"] (1961), "Drewniany różaniec" ["The Wooden Rosary"] (1964), "Przypadek" ["Blind Chance"] (1981), "Ryś" ["Lynx"] (1981); 2nd period 1990-2000: "Cudowne miejsce" ["Miraculous Place"] (1994), "Pokuszenie" ["The Temptation"] (1995), "U Pana Boga za piecem" ["In Heaven as It Is on Earth"] (1998); 3 rd period 2000–2018: "Kto nigdy nie żył" ["Who Never Lived"] (2006), "W imieniu diabła" ["In the Name of the Devil"] (2011), "W imię…" ["In the Name of"] (2013), "Ida" ["Ida"] (2013), "Kler" ["Clergy"] (2018). Each of the three time periods is historically, ideologically, politically and culturally different, so the results of the analysis are thought-provoking, showing the diversity of clergymen characters created in those films. The author analyzed the profiles of the protagonists through the way they function in their environments i.e.: the attitude towards colleagues, the performed activities and motivation for their actions. Thereby, the author tries to answer an interesting question: are the selected film characters passive individuals or involved in their environments? Chapter 4: „The Analysis of Film Characters of Clergymen and Nuns in the Context of the Documents of the Catholic Church – The Influence on the Formation of Religious and Social Attitudes of Polish Film Viewers" is an interpretation of pastoral ministry in relation to the documents of the Catholic Church. The degree of concurrence and compliance of the portrayal of fictional characters of priests and nuns with the legal regulations in force at a given historical time was compared. The author divides the analysis into subcategories: the dress of the clergy, pastoral service (preparation for the spiritual service of priests, spiritual formation of nuns, the meaning of the vocation – the model of priesthood, spiritual direction of nuns, penitential practices, commitment to society and democracy, charitable and social activities), the celebration of the liturgy (celebration of Mass, the sacrament of penance, prayer), and celibacy. The picture of the clergy's activities that emerges from the analysis is heterogeneous, and the interpretation is subordinated to two indicators: consistency or inconsistency with the Church documents. On this basis, the author evaluates selected film characters and their attitudes as positive or negative.

The book by Anita Zawisza is neither a theologian's nor a film scholar's look at religion in film, which results in a somewhat unique scientific and research perspective on this issue. As the author points out, her intention was not to study the context of the film genre, the conventions of the work of art, the director's intention, or to cover the entire context of political, societal or theological perspectives. Above all, she analyzes the characters created for selected films in the Polish cinematography to evaluate the types of clergymen and nuns and the role of the Catholic Church. She describes in detail the image of priests and nuns as people who constitute the religious institution and presents an interpretation of their attitudes in confrontation with the documents of the Catholic Church. The author sees the film worlds as related to real problems, crises that existed in the Church over the analyzed historical period (1961-2018). Leaving out some of the interpretive and aesthetic-axiological issues, the author describes the researched characters as representatives of the real church community. Thus, she offers an interesting venue for confrontation of assorted interpretations. The book is a noteworthy voice in the discussion about the broadly considered religious cinema sheltering under the convention of „parareligious" or „transcendent" cinema. It is also an interesting statement on the ever-present social impact of cinematography.

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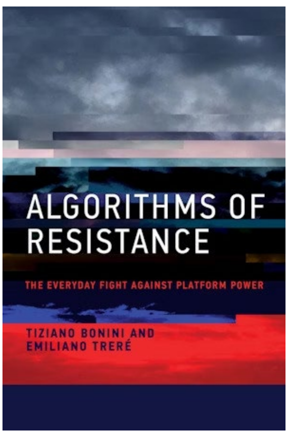
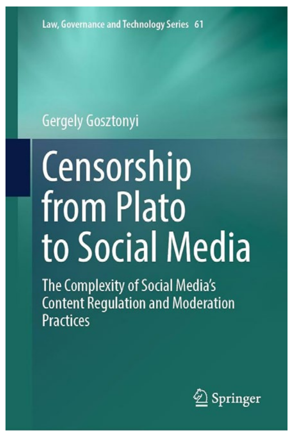
THREE PUBLICATIONS COMPETING FOR THE MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY KAROL JAKUBOWICZ AWARD 2024

Three publications focused on democracy and media have been nominated for this year's edition of the Media and Democracy Karol Jakubowicz Award.





On April 4, 2024, the Selection Committee reviewed proposals submitted for the 7th edition of the Media and Democracy Karol Jakubowicz Award – a mark of acknowledgment and support of significant publications in media systems, policies, ethics, and public service media. Scholarly contributions to the research and practice of media and democracy in 2023 and 2024 were submitted by members of the Leadership team of the International Association of Public Service Media Researchers (IAPMR), the Editors and Associate Editors of "Central European Journal of Communication" (CEJC), previous Award winners and the Selection Committee.

Through evaluation of three tightly interwoven criteria: 1) methodological correctness; 2) contributions to media knowledge; and 3) impacts on democratic society, the following scholarly works and authors have been nominated for the Award:

- Tiziano Bonini & Emiliano Treré (2024). Algorithms of Resistance. The Everyday Fight against Platform Power. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
    - Nominated for the originality of its theme and message, consisting of showing – contrary to the dominant narrative – the empowerment and agency of individuals in the struggle for democracy and justice.

- Gergely Gosztonyi (2023). Censorship from Plato to Social Media. The Complexity of Social Media's Content Regulation and Moderation Practices. Cham: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-46529-1.
  - Nominated for its timeless analysis of various cases of censorship and constructive solutions to regulate the Internet, supporting the idea of a democratic society.

- Ewa Nowak-Teter (2023). Opinia publiczna online [Public Opinion Online]. Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS.
  - Nominated for a comprehensive and multidimensional coverage of public opinion in the real world and the virtual sphere, which translated into the identification of key problems of its functioning in democratic systems. These issues are important for policy makers and experts due to the increasing social conflicts and the growing trend toward polarization.

The Media and Democracy Karol Jakubowicz Award was established in 2018 by Małgorzata Semil-Jakubowicz and the Polish Communication Association. The Winner of the Award along with the justification are announced publicly on April 28th, the day of the passing of Karol Jakubowicz. More information about the Award can be found on the PCA's website: https://www.ptks.pl/en/awards/the-media-and-democracy-karol-jakubowicz-award.

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IN MEMORIAM

AINĀRS DIMANTS (1966 – 2024)

Ainārs Dimants, among the few researchers of media studies and journalism in Latvia, was a bright and irreplaceable light. Those who knew Ainars will remember his passion, energy, loud voice and good laugh. However, his contribution to journalism and media studies research will be what has already become an important part of Latvian social sciences for many.

Although communication sciences at the end of the 20th century and the start of the 21st century developed in various exciting directions, Ainar Dimant's focus was always on the development of Latvian journalism and professional media. This interest and many research works were based on his values – belief in the role of professional and responsible media, in the importance of quality and diverse journalism in the development of democracy.

A review of his publications and books, shows that each work was a new path, a turning point. Starting with his doctoral dissertation "Die Entwicklung der Massenmedien in Lettland nach der zweiten Unabhängigkeit" [Development of mass media in Latvia after the second independence] defended at the Free University of Berlin in 2003, he showed the ability to connect the analysis of historical events with current processes. Ainārs Dimants was the first to analyze self-censorship in Latvian media science. He was the only Latvian researcher who evaluated in detail the internal and external processes that affect journalism, editorial work, professional values of journalists and their impact on society.

His focus was also on the development of media systems. Ainārs viewed the transformation of the Latvian media environment in the European context. His research on the influence of Scandinavian media corporations on the development of Latvian media is important. He constantly introduced innovative ways of thinking in his studies. For example, following the development of European media, he began to study the social corporate responsibility approach of Latvian media. This led him to study public media and media management, as well as media regulation.

Professor Ainārs Dimants was born on May 6, 1966, in Auce, Latvia, which was then part of the USSR. He had a profound interest in journalism from an early age, started his journalism studies at the University of Latvia in 1984, attained his diploma *cum laude* from Lomonosov State University in Moscow in 1990 and his master's degree from the University of Latvia in 1996.

During his period of study in the late 1980s and 1990s, Dimants not only started parallel work as a journalist in the newly developing free press of Latvia (he was a reporter in Moscow for the national daily *Diena* (1990-1992), worked for influential *Lauku Avīze* (later *Latvijas Avīze*, of which he was a deputy editor-in-chief for a while) and Latvian Television). Dimants was also active in social and political life taking part as a student in two congresses of The Latvian People's Front (1988-1989) and later being one of the founders and leaders of the European Movement Latvia.

Throughout the formative years of Latvia's re-established democracy, Ainārs Dimants emerged as a public intellectual advocating for democratic values and freedom of expression. He argued for socially responsible media standards, editorial autonomy, and the prevention of political interference and over-commercialization in media. Over the subsequent decades, he assumed several prominent positions in professional institutions, including Chairman of the Board of the Latvian Union of Journalists (2007) and involvement with the Latvian Association of Journalists (from 2010). He not only ardently defended the democratic media, but also promoted their development by becoming the Chairman of the National Electronic Media Council. During this period, the internet news portal of public media was established, and the concept of PSM's development was created. Professor Dimants introduced ideas concerning media literacy and media education long before they were included in Latvian media policy.

However, the most important part of his life was devoted to academic study of communication, journalism and media and the development of the media and communication study field in Latvia. His academic endeavors spanned various Latvian and international universities, including the University of Latvia, Riga Stradins University, Vidzeme University College in Valmiera, and the Higher Education School for Business „Turība." He co-founded the Media Institute in Riga in 2004 and served as its Chairman of the Board until 2012. Additionally, he assumed editorial responsibilities for the journal „*Akadēmiskā dzīve*" (*Academic Life*) from 2006 onwards and held the status of expert in communication science at the Latvian Academy of Science and was a leading researcher at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the University of Latvia.

Ainārs Dimants played a pivotal role in establishing media studies centers at several Latvian universities. Most notably at Riga Stradins University, where he led the Department of Communication Studies, and the Higher

Education School for Business „Turība". He contributed to the development of Riga Stradins Univiersity's first doctoral study program in communication science, encouraging his students to study complex communication issues. Ainārs Dimants openly and critically analyzed both the media environment and the performance of his colleagues in academia. At the same time, he was one of those representatives of the academic environment who gave development opportunities to others.

Ainārs Dimants was active in attracting foreign researchers. He translated and supplemented the book „Journalism. Teaching and Manual" by Stefan Russ-Mohl, which has been an important teaching tool for several generations of young journalists. In 2021, he translated and published Klaus Beck's book „Media and Communication Sciences". His last book *Latvijas prese 200 gados no "Latviešu Avīzēm" līdz digitālo mediju laikmetam* [The Latvian press in 200 years from „Latvians' Newspapers" to the age of digital media][1], which was published at the end of 2022, is a huge work that covers two centuries of Latvian media development. The book analyzes many media aspects, including Latvian media policy, media research, professional media organizations and their activities. The book is the most important source of documental and theoretically embedded discussion of Latvia's media system ever published in Latvia or abroad.

It is not possible in this space to provide the full list of activities performed by Ainārs Dimants in the field of media study. Dimants started with practical journalistic activity, proceeded to management, then regulation. He researched, taught and published about journalism and media. The most recent interest of this distinguished scholar was the language used to discuss media and journalism. Professor Dimants was a driving force behind the terminological discussion between linguists and media scholars in Latvia in order to create the terminological base that would allow further successful study and development of media and communication discourse in academia, industry, policy and society in general.

Professor Ainārs Dimants' multifaceted contributions to journalism, academia, and societal discourse have left an indelible mark on Latvia's media landscape and academic community, reflecting his unwavering commitment to democratic principles and scholarly excellence.

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1 Dimants, A. (2022). Latvijas prese 200 gados: no" Latviešu Avīzēm" līdz digitālo mediju laikmetam: Latvijas plaššazinas mediju sistēmas vēsture no pirmsākumiem līdz mūsdienām. Latvijas Mediji.

PROFESSOR STANISŁAW MICHALCZYK (1956-2024)

Professor Stanisław Michalczyk, a scholar in local and regional media, theory of mass communication, and political communication passed away on April 5, 2024, leaving behind the academic community of the Institute of Journalism and Media Communication and the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Silesia in Katowice. He was a well-known and highly respected educator of several generations of journalists and experts in communication and media and served as a member of the scientific board of the Central European Journal of Communication.

Professor Stanisław Michalczyk was born on August 8, 1956, in Czerwionka (later Czerwionka-Leszczyny), Silesia, Poland. In 1980, he graduated from political science with a major in journalism at the Faculty of Social Sciences, the University of Silesia in Katowice. After two years of work as an active journalist in the local press in Silesia and the military press, he started his academic activities in the Department of Journalism at the Institute of Political Science and Journalism, University of Silesia, where he progressed through various career positions until achieving full (titular) professorship. In 2004, he established and led the Department of Social Communication until the university's reorganization in 2019. This role enabled him not only to advise his younger colleagues and supervise six PhD theses and more than two hundred master's theses but also to serve as an external reviewer in dozens of committees for doctoral, habilitation, and professorship advancement.

Professor Stanisław Michalczyk obtained his doctoral degree in 1987 from the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Silesia under the supervision of Professor Jerzy Mikułowski Pomorski. In 2001, he was granted the degree of Doctor of Sciences (Habilitation) in Political Science based on a monograph entitled "The Local Media in Communication System: Contemporary Tendencies and Developmental Conditions". In 2012, he was awarded the title of Professor of Humanities.

In the almost 40 years of his academic career, Professor Stanisław Michalczyk wrote 6 authored and 8 edited monographs, more than 90 articles and chapters, as well as 2 textbooks for students on the theory of mass communication and political communication. He wrote: “Prasa samorządowa. Szkice prasoznawcze” [The Local Government Press: Press Studies Exerpts] 1996; “Media lokalne w systemie komunikowania. Współczesne tendencje i uwarunkowania rozwojowe” [The Local Media in Communication System: Contemporary Tendencies and Developmental Conditions] 2000; “Komunikowanie polityczne. Teoretyczne aspekty procesu” [Political Communication: Theoretical Aspects of the Process] 2005; “Społeczeństwo medialne. Studia z teorii komunikowania masowego” [The Media Society: Studies in Mass Communication Theory] 2008; “Demokracja medialna. Teoretyczna analiza problemu” [Media Democracy: A Theoretical Analysis] 2010; ”Ednostka i społeczeństwo w świecie mediów. Klasyczne i współczesne idee w teoriach średniego zasięgu” [The Individual and Society in the Media World. Classical and Contemporary Ideas in the Middle-Range Theories] 2015; “Media lokalne w systemie komunikowania. Współczesne tendencje i uwarunkowania rozwojowe” [The Local Mass Media in Communication System: The Contemporary Tendencies and Developmental Conditions] 2020;

His hard work, modesty and helpfulness, along with deep admiration and respect for Silesian media and the culture of the written word, earned him wide recognition among Polish media scholars. His passion for chess developed from an early age and brought him national and international recognition in chess tournaments. His love of playing chess made him a thorough reader of chess magazines and a passionate chess promoter.

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