EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF NEW MEDIA ON THE NEWS MEDIA FROM THE INTEGRATED VIEWPOINT OF MEDIA ECOLOGY AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation combines the methodologies of media ecology and the political economy of communication to explore the dramatic decline in the news industry, accompanied by the growing public distrust in the news media.

The internet introduced more advanced platforms for news consumption and ad delivery, thereby depriving the news media of their former monopoly over news and advertising. The dissertation research identified a significant shift in the print media business model worldwide in the early 2010s: advertising revenue fell below the level of reader revenue (subscriptions and copy sales) for the first time in a century. Concurrently, all news media outlets transitioned online in efforts to establish digital modes of operation and revenue generation.

In transitioning from the advertising-funded model that was predominant throughout the 20^{th} century, the print media, the primary focus of this dissertation, shifted towards prioritizing digital subscriptions. This led them to become increasingly dependent on digital audiences. Given that textual media (the press) have historically been the primary drivers of discourse in the public sphere, the significant changes in the press and the digital challenges faced by other forms of news media have had a profound impact on professional standards of journalism and the principles of discourse formation in society overall.

Connecting media ecology and the political economy of communication is an interdisciplinary approach that provides new angles for analyzing changes in the news media and journalism in the digital era. To advance this novelty, the dissertation employs a variety of methods from both media ecology and the political economy of communication.

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Information and communications technology (ICT) has dramatically changed people's interactions with information and each other. The internet has liberated access to information for individuals, thus disrupting the previously established "monopolies of knowledge" (Innis, 1950). Even more disruptive has become the newly acquired capacity of users to generate content: the internet has granted all individuals with digital devices the ability to inform one another and express their unchecked opinions on any subject matter.

In 2010, Google CEO Eric Schmidt stated that every two days humankind creates as much information as had been created since the dawn of civilization up until 2003.[1] As of December 2022, there were 5.54 billion active internet users worldwide – 69 percent of the global population.[2] They all turned out to be technically capable of bypassing the filtering guard of the public discourse gatekeepers – the news media and other old publishing institutions, owned and controlled by the elites.

Virtually all indicators have been showing the distress in the media industry since the internet's rise. Globally, advertising revenue in traditional media dropped from $77 billion in 2011 to $57 billion in 2020, while circulation revenue remained stagnant at around $62–63 billion.[3] According to PWC, "the economics of newspaper publishing passed a milestone in 2015, when global newspaper circulation revenue exceeded global advertising revenue for the

[1] Siegler, MG. (2010, August 4). "Eric Schmidt: Every 2 days we create as much information as we did up to 2003." *Techcrunch*. https://techcrunch.com/2010/08/04/schmidt-data/

[2] Internet Growth Statistics, https://www.internetworldstats.com/emarketing.htm

[3] PWC. (2020). "Newspapers & Magazines." *Global Entertainment & Media Outlook 2016-2020.* https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/entertainment-media/pdf/newspapers-and-magazines-outlook-article.pdf

first time."[1] The flip happened not because of the growth in revenue generated from the readers but because of the sharp decline in advertising. (The data of the World Association of News Publishers WAN-IFRA confirm that this global flip from advertising to reader revenue occurred in 2014.[2]) Digital growth, whether in advertising or subscription revenue, could not compensate for print losses. Overall revenue in the global newspaper industry steadily declined over the second decade of the 21st century by an average of 3% year-on-year.[3]

The internet has affected the habits of news consumption. News consumers worldwide admit they now have less interest in news. According to 2023 Reuters Institute global research, "fewer than half (48%) of our aggregate sample now say they are very or extremely interested in news, down from 63% in 2017."[4] Moreover, amid the oversupply of triggering news and all kinds of content in general, the phenomenon of "news avoidance" has emerged.[5] News avoidance reached its peak in 2022, totaling 38% of all markets globally and 42% in the USA, as detected in the Digital News Report by Reuters Institute.[6]

According to UNESCO, growing numbers of media outlets worldwide have been "forced to cut down on staff or close their doors permanently."[7] In the USA, the largest and wealthiest

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[1] Ibid.

[2] WAN-IFRA. (2015). World Press Trends 2015. https://www.slideshare.net/WAN-IFRA/250515-wpt-2015-final

[3] WAN-INFRA. (2020). "World Press Trends 2019." https://anri.org.ru/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/WAN-IFRA_WPT_2019.pdf.

[4] Newman, Nic. (2023, June 14). "Overview and key findings of the 2023 Digital News Report." *Reuters Institute.* https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2023/dnr-executive-summary.

[5] Mir, Andrey. (2023, December 14). "Blissful Ignorance. News avoidance is healthy for you, but bad for democracy and the media." *Discourse*. https://www.discoursemagazine.com/p/blissful-ignorance.

[6] Newman, Nic. (2023, June 14). "Overview and key findings of the 2023 Digital News Report." *Reuters Institute.* https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2023/dnr-executive-summary. And: Newman, Nic. (2022, June 15). "Overview and key findings of the 2022 Digital News Report." *Reuters Institute.* https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2022/dnr-executive-summary.

[7] UNESCO. (2020). "World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Global Report 2021/2022." https://www.unesco.org/reports/world-media-trends/2021/en.

news market (accounting for up to 38% of global news revenue[1]), daily newspaper circulation plummeted from 62 million in 1990 to 20 million in 2020, accompanied by a decline in digital traffic to newspapers' websites, according to Pew Research Center.[2] The U.S. Census Bureau's Service Annual Survey reported that newspaper publishers' revenue dropped by 52% between 2002 and 2020.[3] The number of newspaper employees in the U.S. fell from 71,000 in 2008 to 35,000 in 2019.[4] Since 2005, 2,500 newspapers in the United States have closed. One-third of US newspapers as of 2005 are expected to be gone by 2024,[5] prompting experts to discuss the growing phenomenon of "news deserts"[6] – communities and territories lacking any news media coverage of their current events and public life.

In Canada, news consumption across all channels has decreased, as reported by the Reuters Institute Digital Report (2016–2023): online – from 75% to 69%, on TV – from 71% to 49%, on social media – from 48% to 45%, and in print – from 36% to 14%.[7] The decline in news consumption has been accompanied by media shutdowns and layoffs, mirroring the global trends.

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[1] Media – Worldwide. *Statista*. https://www.statista.com/outlook/amo/media/worldwide

[2] Lipka, Michael, and Shearer, Elisa. (2023, November 28). "Audiences are declining for traditional news media in the U.S. – with some exceptions." *Pew Research Center*. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/11/28/audiences-are-declining-for-traditional-news-media-in-the-us-with-some-exceptions/.

[3] Grundy, Adam. (2022, June 07). "Service Annual Survey Shows Continuing Decline in Print Publishing Revenue." *The U.S. Census Bureau*. https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/06/internet-crushes-traditional-media.html.

[4] Gitnux Marketdata Report. (2023, December 20). "Must-Know Newspaper Decline Statistics." https://gitnux.org/newspaper-decline-statistics/.

[5] Fischer, Sara. (2023, November 16). "One-third of U.S. newspapers as of 2005 will be gone by 2024." Axios. https://www.axios.com/2023/11/16/newspapers-decline-hedge-funds-research.

[6] Local news deserts: Definition briefing. *International Media Support*. https://www.mediasupport.org/publication/local-news-deserts-definition-briefing/.

[7] Reuters Institute Digital Report 2023. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-06/Digital_News_Report_2023.pdf.

While *quantitative* data on the explosive growth of information and the decline of the news media are readily accessible for analysis, interpreting the *qualitative* aspects of these changes and their societal impact remains a challenge. Brexit (2016) and especially Donald Trump's presidency (2017–2021) brought into focus the role that both new and traditional media play in reshaping the political landscape and practices.

A considerable body of studies, literature, and even official investigations has been dedicated to examining the political effects of social media's use by politicians and political manipulators (Baezner and Robin, 2017; Benkler, Faris, and Roberts, 2018; Bogle, 2019; Busvine, 2018; Enli, 2017; Keller and Klinger, 2019; Kozinets, 2017; Manjoo, 2017; Muller, 2019; Narayanan, Kollanyi, Bence, et al., 2019; Neudert, Kollany, and Howard, 2017; Owen, 2019; Serrano, Shahrezaye, Papakyriakopoulos, and Hegelich, 2019; Soares, Recuero, and Zago, 2019; Usher, Holcomb, and Littman, 2018). Some new "political technologies," enabled by new media, have been unveiled and delineated, such as the use of fake accounts, the dissemination of fake news, hacking, electoral meddling, psychographic profiling for customized political messaging on social media, and others.

In parallel, the role of traditional media in the new conditions has begun to be reassessed both from outside and within the media industry. Some observers and experts have questioned the ability of journalism in the mainstream media to maintain objectivity and impartiality (blog posts and articles in 2018–2022 by Glenn Greenwald, Bari Weiss, Ben Smith, Martin Gurri, and others), while others have questioned the standards of objectivity and impartiality, calling to end the practice of "both-sides" journalism as harmful for democracy, when it's under assault (blog posts and articles in 2018–2022 by Jay Rosen, Jeff Jarvis, Dan Gillmor, and others). All these disruptions in the art and craft of journalism occurred amid the declining business of the news media industry (blog posts and articles in 2018–2022 by Ken Doctor, Mathew Ingram, Emily Bell, and others).

The interplay of media effects and political upheavals amidst the economic decline of the news media industry coincided with the decline of people's trust in public institutions. By 2021, a decline in trust in public information and traditional institutions, including the news media, had been observed in numerous countries, as reported by the Edelman annual Trust Barometer.[1] In the US, trust in traditional media had reached an all-time low, plummeting to 46% (Figure 1).

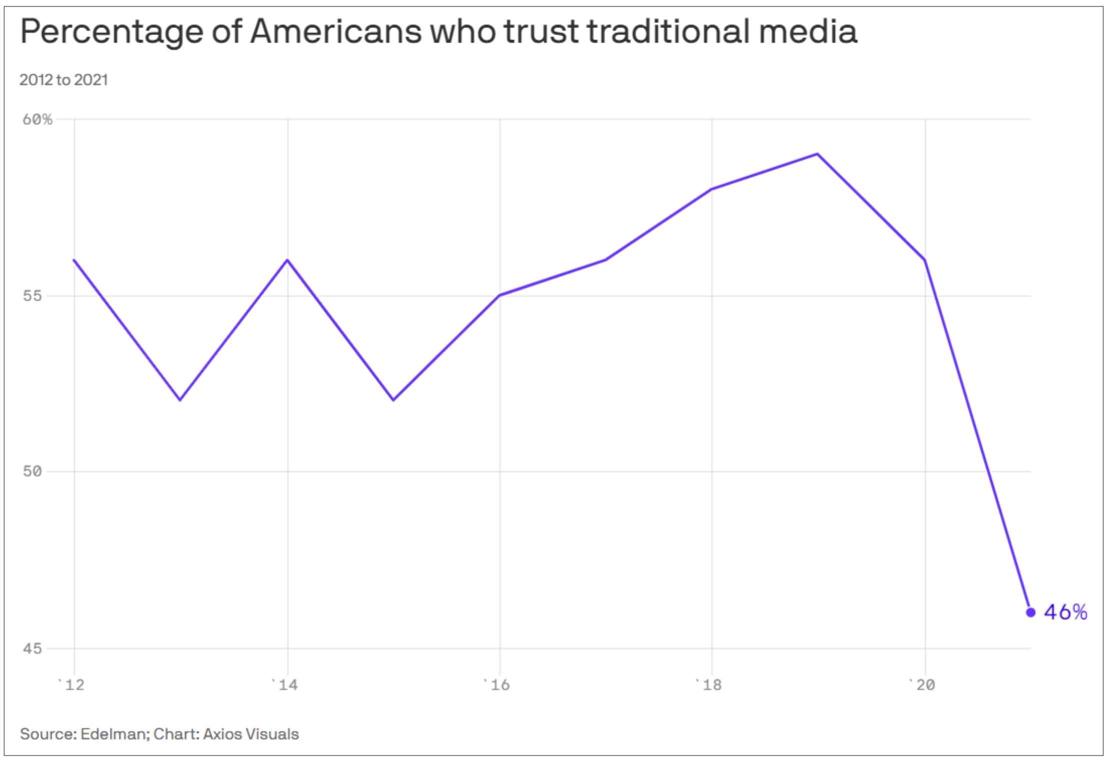

Figure 1. Percentage of Americans who trust traditional media. Source: Edelman, Axios.[2]

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[1] 2021 Edelman trust barometer. https://www.edelman.com/trust/2021-trust-barometer.

[2] Salmon, Felix. (2021, January 21). "Media trust hits new low." *Axios*. https://www.axios.com/media-trust-crisis-2bf0ec1c-00c0-4901-9069-e26b21c283a9.html

Similar processes were observed in many countries. For instance, in Canada, after a short rise in the spring of 2020 (the beginning of the pandemic), public trust in the media declined from 58% in May 2020 to 54% in January 2021. [1]

The decline of trust in the media unfolded amidst another widely discussed phenomenon of the late 2010s – the rise of post-truth. In 2016, Oxford Dictionary selected "post-truth" as the Word of the Year[2]. The dictionary explains the adjective "post-truth" as related to "circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief."

The term "post-truth" evoked associations with other "post-" phenomena, such as postmodernism, post-structuralism, or post-industrial society, that could be deemed highbrow. Shortly thereafter, the more intuitively comprehensible and direct term "fake news" gained popularity. The Collins Dictionary announced that "fake news" was its Word of the Year in 2017[3]. According to the dictionary, "fake news" refers to "false, often sensational, information disseminated under the guise of news reporting."

The dictionaries' selections of "the word of the year" are nothing short of attempts to capture the Zeitgeist. Clearly, the transformations in mass communication technologies, spurred by the emergence of the internet and social media, have impacted politics, social dynamics, and even language – in general, the entire culture. All observable manifestations of these phenomena

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[1] Naylor, Dave. (2021, February 22). "Survey shows Canadians' trust in mainstream media continues to drop." *Western Standard*. https://westernstandardonline.com/2021/02/survey-shows-canadians-trust-in-mainstream-media-continues-to-drop/

[2] "Word of the Year 2016 is..." *Oxford Dictionaries.* https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2016.

[3] "The Collins Word of the Year 2017 is... fake news." *The Collins Dictionary.* https://www.collinsdictionary.com/woty.

suggest that understanding their underlying forces requires investigations at the nexus of communication and culture.

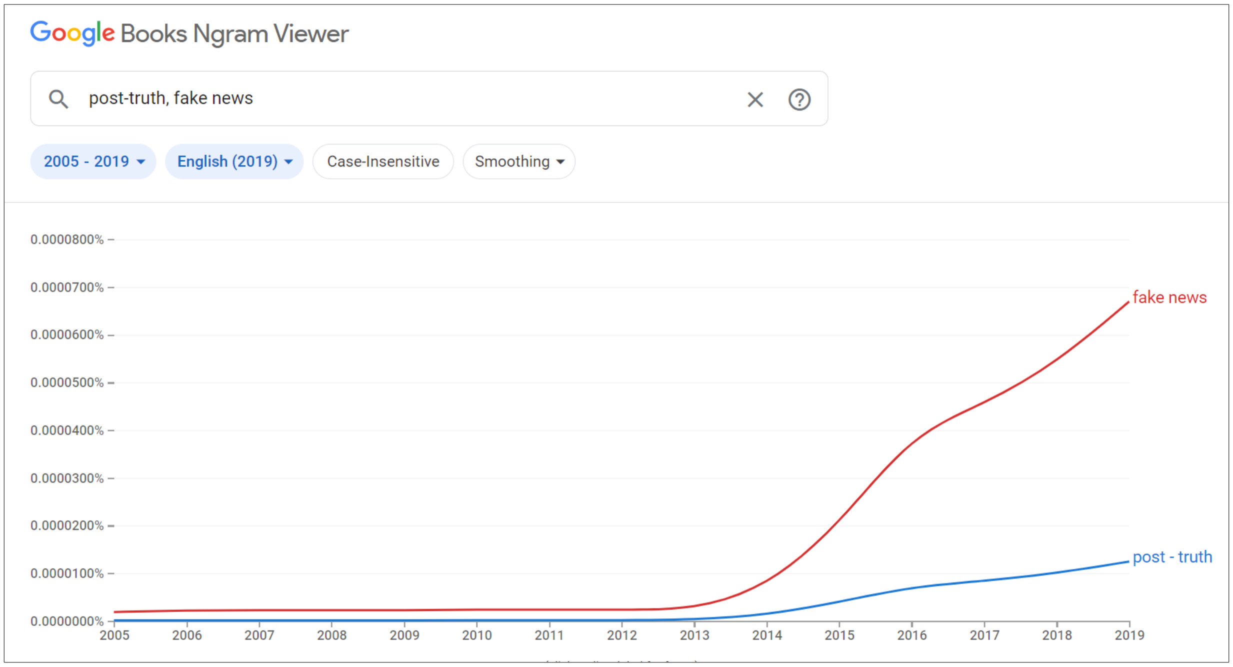

Figure 2. The historic use of the words "post-truth" and "fake news" as registered by Google Ngram Viewer.

The correlations between changes in the news media, cultural shifts, and political disturbances yield abundant factual data that have attracted the attention of researchers in politics and mass communication. However, beneath these data lie systemic cultural, political, and economic processes intertwined with shifts in the media environment. This is the domain of media ecology: media ecology emphasizes attention to overarching environmental patterns (Strate, 2018), which can offer profound insights into underlying processes.

One of the most significant patterns that encapsulates and reflects numerous other changes is the shift in media consumption from traditional to digital media, which occurred in the mid-2010s (Figure 3).

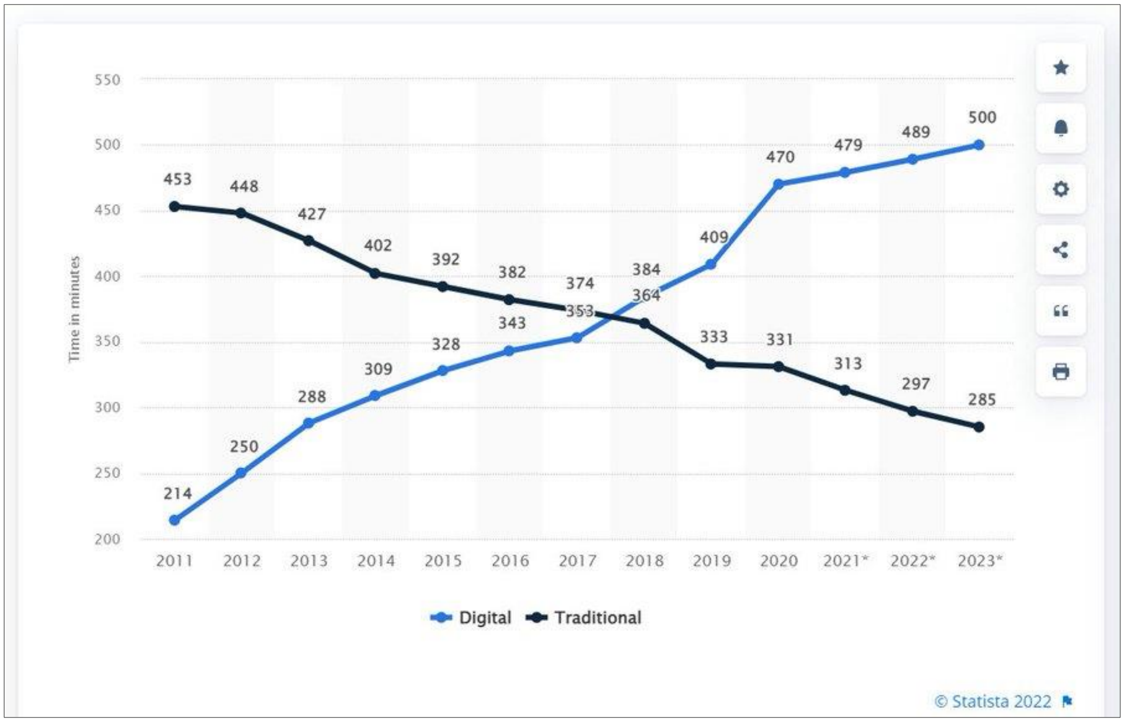

Figure 3. Time spent per day with digital versus traditional media in the United States from 2011 to 2023. Source - Statista[1]

Many processes related to digital media unfolded simultaneously around the world, making digital media the great historical equalizer. A similar flip from traditional to online media consumption happened in the mid-2010s everywhere. According to a massive

[1] Statista. (2022). Time spent per day with digital versus traditional media in the United States from 2011 to 2023. https://www.statista.com/statistics/565628/time-spent-digital-traditional-media-usa/

international study by GlobalWebIndex, by 2017, "there were just 5 of our 34 markets where consumers continue to spend longer on traditional rather than digital forms of media."[1]

This pattern of the switch in media use from traditional to digital media sets up the general context for this dissertation research.

Hypothesis

The decline in the news media and the concurrent decline of trust in the media clearly reflect the distress in the news industry, both in terms of its economic sustainability and social credibility. The dissertation aims to integrate environmental (media-ecological) and political-economic approaches to describe the structural processes underlying this media distress.

The hypothesis of the dissertation is that with the *environmental* flip from traditional to digital media in news consumption came the "*political-economic*" flip in the business model of the news media from profiting on advertising to seeking reader revenue. In its turn, as the dissertation research suggests, the flip in the business model from advertising to seeking reader revenue changed the principle of news coverage and discourse formation in the media.

Beginning with the global transition from traditional to digital media consumption, the hypothesis then delves into business and social practices (the news media and journalism, respectively) and further analyzes the changes in journalistic standards and engagement with the audiences, including case studies (the *New York Times*, the *Guardian* and others). It is essential to note that the realignment of journalist standards is an ongoing process, along with many other

[1] "Digital vs. Traditional Media Consumption. Analyzing time devoted to online and traditional forms of media at a global level, as well as by age and across countries." *Insight Report | Q1 2017*. GlobalWebIndex. https://www.gwi.com/hubfs/Digital_vs_Traditional_Media_Consumption.pdf.

processes hypothesized upon in this dissertation. Therefore, the primary objective is not to depict a "static" or "final" situation but to test a toolbox comprising media-ecological and political-economic tools. The premise is that such a combination of tools will offer fresh insights and enhance understanding of changes in the media environment, the news media, and journalism.

The hypothesis forms respective research questions, objectives and methods.

Research questions

1. After the emergence of digital media, how have new information and communication technologies changed the supply and consumption of news?

2. What political-economic conditions for news production and consumption have been shaped by these changes?

3. What business models of the news media have emerged under these political-economic conditions and how have these business models affected journalism and discourse formation in general?

Dissertation objectives

1. To combine media-ecological and political-economic analyses to identify the principles of discourse formation in the news media in the digital media environment.

2. To advance the hypothesis that the predominant dependence of the news media on either advertising or audience-based revenue creates different business models that influence discourse formation in distinct ways.

3. To explore the transition of the news media from ad-based to reader-based business models under the impact of the internet and examine how this transition has contributed to changes in journalism and the decline of trust in the media.

The object of the dissertation

The material object of the dissertation is journalism and its “hardware” – the news media, viewed through their history, theory, and practice. The dissertation examines the historical connection between business models (advertising revenue, reader revenue, the membership model) and discourse formation (including such aspects as the professional standards of journalism and engagement with the audience).

The benefit of this focus is expected to be twofold – it will advance both the methodology of inquiry and the knowledge about the subject. First, the use of journalism and the media as the object of research allows for the exploration of the compatibility of the methods of media ecology and the political economy of communication (PEC) on concrete material. Second, the novel combination of media-ecological and political-economic perspectives and methods brings a new understanding the underlying processes that shape news media and journalism.

The dissertation does not aim to study specific national media markets or types of news media. Instead, it focuses on identifying patterns representing the relations between the funding of journalism, the production of news, and the principles of discourse formation. The concrete historical and business cases employed in the dissertation include a wide range of news media, mostly print, spanning from early Venetian *avvisi* and European newssheets and *gazettes* to the American penny press and contemporary outlets such as the *Guardian, de Correspondent*, the *Washington Post,* and the *New York Times*. Some of the most exemplary media cases represent American journalism of the 2010s, as the USA was a primary supplier of digital technologies and the American news media were among the first to experience their impact. Along with their receptiveness to membership-model innovations introduced by the British *Guardian* and the Dutch *de Correspondent*, this made the leading American newspapers litmus test cases for recognizing the patterns of environmental and political-economic effects of the internet on news production and discourse formation. Additionally, the American news market was and remains the largest in the world (up to 38% of the revenue of the global traditional media market[1]) with a respective large intellectual infrastructure providing industrial and professional analysis. The business challenges introduced there by digital technologies were widely discussed and reflected upon in journalism and media studies. Finally, the disturbances brought to the media industry and news production by the presidency of Donald Trump ignited a multitude of vivid expert and public discussions regarding the role of the news media and journalism. This period provided rich material for researching the changes caused by shifts in media business models and media environmental conditions.

As for types of news media, the dissertation primarily focuses on the original, textual forms of journalism. This approach aligns with McLuhan's and Postman's views of media effects. In terms of sensory perception, television and radio replicate the "acoustic space" inherent to orality, immersing users into a spherical (from all sides) and simultaneous perception, favourable for impulsive and emotional reactions. Text, on the contrary, created the "visual space" of perception inherent to literacy, wherein the sense of vision is isolated while other senses are numbed. This mode of perception necessitates the linear and sequential organization of data and favours delayed, rational, and deliberate information production and consumption. This is why newspapers, as textual mediums, have traditionally been the primary discourse producers, while radio and TV, later additions to news channelling, emphasize "presence" and immersion – an emotional and panoramic perception of reality. To quote Neil Postman, "You

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[1] Media - Worldwide. *Statista*. https://www.statista.com/outlook/amo/media/worldwide

cannot use smoke to do philosophy. Its form excludes the content... You cannot do political philosophy on television. Its form works against the content" (Postman, 2006 [1985], p. 7). Radio and TV may influence attitudes and even initiate discourse, but for discourse to be fully formed and sustained in the public sphere, a textual medium is essential. Journalism, by its nature, is originally and inherently a textual activity. This is why newspapers and magazines, despite their increasingly insignificant market share in news delivery, remain the essential, if not the primary, sources of reference in public discourse.

The selection of research materials allowed for the recognition of historical, technological, and environmental patterns. Pattern recognition, a fundamental epistemological principle of media ecology, facilitates the identification of tendencies and regularities. However, when applying the suggested research methods and identified patterns to other markets or types of media, their specific characteristics must be considered.

Methods

This research is interdisciplinary and informed by three main areas of knowledge:

1) Media ecology

2) The political economy of communication

3) The history, theory, and practice of journalism

While journalism/the media provides the "material" object for the dissertation research, media ecology and the political economy of communication form its methodological framework. This dissertation aims to bring together media ecology and the political economy of communication to create a new approach to analyzing the past, present and, most importantly, future of the news media.

Media ecology and the PEC regularly addressed the processes in the mass media as one of their subjects. Political economists do sometimes refer to the technological changes in communications, which are in the focus of media ecology, but rather in the context of technological impacts on power formation. For example, the invention of the rotary press (1843) and pulp-based paper (1844) made newspaper production much cheaper and faster and thus engendered a new business model based on selling papers on the street to a wider audience. In turn, these technological and economic conditions secured the newspapers' independence from political sponsorship and entailed the emergence of the so-called penny press with a completely different type of journalism (Kaplan, 2013). This example shows that the PEC was not blind to the cultural impact of media technologies, which is one of the focuses of media ecology.

But, despite the proximity of their subjects, media ecology and the PEC operated with different tools and within different logics. They developed different and sometimes opposing traditions and rarely overlapped in terms of scholars or concepts (except for, maybe, Harold Innis, who, however, left political economy for the environmental study of communications and, additionally, did not delve into the news media). With much potential to complement and enrich each other, media ecology and the political economy of communication could cooperate and inform one another.

To my knowledge, there have been no attempts to combine media ecology and the political economy of communication for examining the news media and journalism. The two have their differences. As an academic discipline, media ecology is "younger" and encounters some objections from the PEC, particularly on the issue of media/techno-determinism. The "deterministic debate" will be covered in a separate section of the first, theoretical, chapter with the purpose of showing that media ecology and the political economy of communication, in fact, can compensate for "deterministic flaws" of each other.

Among the concepts of media ecology, the most relevant for this research are "transformation vs. transportation" views of communication studies (McLuhan, 1974); the idea of media as a human extensions (McLuhan, 1964); the ecological approach to media (Postman, McLuhan, and others); "time vs. space" media bias (Innis); "instrumental vs. environmental" views of media effects; the differentiation between the oral, literate/print and electric historical periods; and some others. Special attention is given to the theory of affordances, developed by James Gibson, and the concept of "figure-ground" analysis, employed by Marshall McLuhan.

Among the concepts of the political economy of communication, the most relevant for this research are the concepts of "commodification, spatialization and structuration" (Mosco), mass communications as the culture industry (Adorno and Horkheimer), the capitalist mechanism of discourse formation (Golding and Murdock), the audience as commodity (Smythe), platform capitalism, digital labour, and some others. Special focus is given to the principle of allocative control, advanced by Murdock, and the development of Herman and Chomsky's concept of the Propaganda Model in the conditions of digital communications. The concept of the public sphere, developed by Jürgen Habermas, is also of great significance for exploration of the ties between the news media and societal structures.

The dissertation also delves into a retrospective and contemporary analysis of the news media and journalism.

The structure of the dissertation

Chapter 1, “Theoretical framework and related literature”, covers the development and main concepts of the two disciplines that laid the methodological foundation for this dissertation – media ecology and the PEC. Both disciplines are comparatively young: they emerged in the second half of the 20th century, with some precursors in the 19th – early 20th centuries.

In addition to the basic concepts of media ecology developed by Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, Neil Postman, and others, this chapter focuses on the concept of environmental affordances (Gibson) and figure/ground dichotomy (McLuhan), as they are particularly useful tools for this research.

In addition to the basic concepts of the PEC developed by Dallas Walker Smythe, Peter Golding, Graham Murdock, Herbert Schiller, Vincent Mosco, Robert W. McChesney, Christian Fuchs, Nicholas Garnham, and others, this chapter specifically focuses on Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky’s Propaganda Model (1988). Despite having its share of criticism, the Propaganda Model represents a valuable methodological tool that is compatible with the ecological approach: it considers the seemingly “coordinated” stances of the mainstream media not as a result of some elite conspiracy or liberal bias but as an outcome of purely environmental (political and economic) factors. This approach creates an important link connecting the PEC and media ecology.

Chapter 2, “A historical review of the technological and political-economic conditions of news production,” is focused on the history of journalism and the news media. Following the media ecology approach, the historical review centers on the conditions for news supply and demand, starting with the invention of the printing press in Germany circa 1445.

Following the exploration of the transformative power of print by Elizabeth Eisenstein (1979), the chapter observes the interplay of journalism, power, and society since Venetian *avvisi* (the early 16th century).

The chapter offers a specific view of social demand for journalism in historical retrospective, according to which journalism was paid either from *below*, for supplying news to readers, or from *above*, for supplying agendas to readers on behalf of the elites/patrons.

When journalism is paid from *below*, the payers are readers (whoever they might be, including the members of elites), and their motive is *receiving* real news about the world to make adequate decisions (in business, politics, everyday life). When journalism is paid from *above*, the payer wants to *deliver* a certain picture of the world to readers to advance the payer's agenda.

These were two opposite modes of funding journalism, and they created different types of journalism. In different periods of journalism's history, one of them prevailed over the other or they were combined in different ratios. Newspapers and journalism in general were paid for by readers, political patrons (princes, bishops), political parties, and advertisers. More sophisticated forms emerged in the course of history, such as formal or informal licensing newspapers by authority or public funding through a form of taxation. But any business model of the news media carried the characteristics of these two ultimate modes of funding underlying the specificity of discourse formation: paid from *below* and paid from *above.* When applied to the contemporary media market, these two modes could be described as reader-driven (copy sales and subscription) and ad-driven (corporate business) models.

Conducted in retrospective, this analysis of the interplay between the technological and socio-economic conditions allows detection of the regularities in the evolution of journalism and the news business until the present. Thus, this chapter contributes to the analysis of the media business models in the 21st century, as covered in the third chapter.

Chapter 3, "Business models of the news production and their effect on discourse formation," covers two main business models of the news industry before the internet, the destructive effects of the internet on those models, and the subsequent transformation of journalism.

Throughout the entire 20th century, the news media were paid predominantly by advertising. This business model was formed in parallel with the emergence of the mass market stage of industrial capitalism. The media attracted mass or affluent audiences by respective content and then sold these audiences to advertisers. Advertising brought in up to 70–80% of the news media's revenue in free-market countries (Kaplan, 2013; WAN-IFRA, 2015). Respectively, under the pressure of advertising money's "allocative control" (Murdock, 1982), the news media needed to adjust their content, coverage, and agenda-setting to best suit ad placement. As Herman and Chomsky showed (1988), this led to the forming of the Propaganda Model, which circumstantially catered to not only advertisers but also the interests of the financial and political elites. Thus, predominant funding by advertising pushed the news media to "manufacture consent," the metaphor that Herman and Chomsky borrowed from Walter Lippmann (1929 [1922]).

The readership-generated revenue was of secondary significance in the 20th century's media. This chapter also explores how readers' money (payment from *below*) impacts news coverage. When readers themselves buy the news (and do not receive the news paid for *from above*), they prefer news about disturbing and potentially disruptive developments. This chapter offers an original explanation of the so-called “negativity bias” in the news media through behavioral economics and the prospect theory of Kahneman and Tversky (1979).

Thus, the contribution of this chapter into the political economy of the news media consists of revealing how advertising-generated and reader-generated revenue affect discourse formation in the news media. Generally, ad money incentivizes the news media to beautify the picture of the world, while reader money incentivizes the news media to exaggerate triggering news.

The chapter lays the ground for examining how the changes in the funding of the news media under the pressure of digitalization modify discourse formation and relations with the audience in today’s journalism.

Chapter 4, “Digital challenges and business issues of the news media as factors of the changes in discourse formation,” describes the environmental and economic forces behind the collapse of the traditional business models of the news media after the advent of the internet. The internet has offered incomparably better advertising technologies and a free supply of news. With these environmental changes that impacted ad delivery and news supply, the economic foundation of the traditional media was destroyed. Both advertising and readers have fled to better platforms on the internet. The industry is now struggling to replace the vanished sources of revenue and is looking for new business models.

This chapter observes this search and evaluates the potential of tested models: foundation funding, “philanthropy journalism,” the support of billionaires, and others. Among those attempts, the most significant result was shown under the so-called membership model. This chapter explores the origins and development of this model (*The Guardian*, *De Correspondent*) and its impact on discourse formation.

The essence of the membership model is the declaration of a noble cause and then soliciting donations for coverage aimed at advocating for this cause. Using the concept of "allocative control" (Murdock), the chapter explores how pursuing "members'" money affects journalism.

As the membership model has become the most talked about approach (Sweney, 2014; Schmidt, 2018; Benton, 2018; Rosen and Peon, 2017; see also: The Membership Puzzle Project[1]), many media outlet started employing the elements of membership in their business practices, marrying, in different formats, membership with traditional subscription. As an outcome, a surrogate membership-subscription model emerged, the essence of which is, basically, selling the cause to an audience willing to pay for the coverage of this cause.

In this chapter, the dissertation advances a hypothesis that the elements of the donation motive penetrate the formerly transactional business model of subscription, mixing the motives of payment *from above* with payment *from below*. This confusion manifests in the news media mixing fundraising or donation pitches with selling news. As a result, the media are economically incentivized to look for the most "donatable" issues and to agitate the audience for the better soliciting of donations-subscriptions.

If the news media based on ad revenue manufactured consent and produced happy customers, the news media based on soliciting donations for a cause in the form of subscriptions to their content manufacture polarization and produce angry citizens.

The chapter explores the economic regularities that change news media practices and the standards of journalism.

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[1] The Membership Puzzle Project. About. https://membershippuzzle.org/about.

Chapter 5, “Structural, professional, and ideological changes in the media under new environmental and business conditions,” examines the ongoing changes in journalism caused by the digital transition and the emergence of new business models.

The environmental and political changes described in the previous chapters forced the media to switch from news supply to news validation. This changed the principles of news coverage: the media started looking into the most triggering events whose validation/evaluation within certain value systems could be commodified – pitched to the audiences willing to pay for a cause.

This new business model made the media dependent on the digital audiences, whose subscriptions the news media seek, as no others significant sources of revenue have remained. Thus, a flip happened from the “advertising license” (Herman & Chomsky) to a sort of “audience license” for news coverage. This chapter revises some of the filters from Herman & Chomsky’s original Propaganda Model to describe the newly emerged conditions of discourse production. In particular, the chapter offers case studies on “grassroots digital flak” to illustrate its acting mechanisms in affecting discourse formation. The chapter also investigates changes in the professional standards of journalism.

Disclosure

In no small part, this dissertation research is informed by my professional experience. Trained in journalism and linguistics, I worked in the print media from 1990 to 2010 as a journalist, chief editor, and news publisher. I am familiar with the professional and business challenges in the news media precisely in the period of their transition from print to digital.

In parallel, I developed and delivered academic courses and practical seminars on journalism and mass communications in different universities, as well as for corporations and NGOs, from 1996 to 2014. After writing the book *When newspapers die* (2010, in Russian), I left the media business and transitioned to studying media and consulting with a focus on the digital transformations in the media environment. As a member of the Media Ecology Association (since 2015), I have had opportunities to test my observations at international conferences, seminars, and guest lectures and in publications (*Explorations in Media Ecology* and *New Explorations: Studies in Culture and Communication*, both peer reviewed).

This dissertation develops and systematizes the observations and ideas accumulated and refined during my 20 years in journalism and the subsequent 10 years in media studies. Some of these ideas underwent examination and received feedback through a number of published books, book chapters, academic papers, conference talks, and expert articles in the media.

Those previous works and publications informed the development of the novel approach in this dissertation. In particular, historical observations and findings from my textbooks *Encyclopedia of communications* (2006, in Russian: «Энциклопедия коммуникаций и делового общения») are used in Chapter 2. The notion of users' involvement in content production from my book *Human as media. The emancipation of authorship* (2014) is employed to analyze the news media in Chapters 3 and 4.

While working on this dissertation research, I wrote and published the book *Postjournalism and the death of newspapers. The media after Trump: manufacturing anger and polarization* (2020, self-published) in which I articulated and tested some hypotheses conceived for this dissertation. After receiving feedback and revising those hypotheses, I employ them in this dissertation as they were a part of this dissertation research. Specifically, ideas about the environmental role of news production in the history of forming the public sphere are drawn on in Chapters 2 and 3. Some business observations regarding the switch from ad-based to reader-based business models of the media are used to analyze the transformations in the news media and journalism in Chapters 4 and 5. Wherever it is relevant, I put references to my past books and articles that informed and tested the ideas represented in this research.

CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RELATED LITERATURE

Media ecology: the environmental effect of communication technologies

Within a broader field of communication studies, media ecology as a discipline and an area of enquiry emerged from the works of two founding figures – Marshall McLuhan (1911–1980) and Neil Postman (1931–2003).

In *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) and *Understanding Media* (1964), Marshall McLuhan established an approach to studying the effects of media on the human sensorium and society that related not to the content of media but to the capacity of media themselves to extend human mental or physical faculties in time and space.

Neil Postman was the first scholar who used the term media ecology at an academic event and gave it its first definition. This happened on November 29, 1968, at the 58th annual convention of the National Council of Teachers of English in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where Postman delivered his address and, basically, claimed the field for a new discipline. Here is his definition from this address:

> Media ecology looks into the matter of how media of communication affect human perception, understanding, feeling, and value; and how our interaction with media facilitates or impedes our chances of survival.
>
> The word "ecology" implies the study of environments: their structure, content, and impact on people. <…>
>
> Media ecology is the study of media as environments. (Postman, 1970, p. 161)

Media ecology has offered three important epistemological shifts in studying media and communication.

The first epistemological shift related to reversing the focus of enquiry from what people do with media to what media "do" to people.

The classical studies of media and communications originated from the theory of propaganda and PR (Walter Lippmann), cybernetics (the Shannon-Weaver model of information transmission), and the theory of communication (with Laswell's formula of "Who? Says what? In what channel? To whom? With what effect?"). All those theories saw media as a means of delivering signals (data, messages, intents, propaganda, etc.). Respectively, those data, intents, and messages, as well as the technical parameters of transmission and the impact of their content, were their true focuses.

Marshall McLuhan made an important epistemological distinction between the *transportation* function of media and the *transformational* effect of media. In his 1974 lecture at the University of South Florida, he stated that,

> My kind of study in communication is really a study of transformation, whereas information theory and all the existing theories of communication that I know of are theories of transportation. All the official theories of communication studied in the schools of North America are theories of how you move data from point A to point B to point C with minimal distortion… <This> is a theory of transportation, and it has nothing to do with the effects which these forms have on us. <…>
>
> I don't have much interest in that theory. My theory or concern is what these media do to the people who use them. What did writing do to the people who invented it and used it? What do the other media of our time do to the people who use them? Mine is a transformation theory, how people are changed by the instruments they employ. (McLuhan, 1974)

The second epistemological shift related to the change of the subject of study from the *content* to the *medium*. Most of the classical theories and schools of thought that involved media looked at how something else was reflected in media. They were generally blind to the effects of media themselves. Their enquiries related to communication, anthropology, culture, political economy, or critical theory but generally represented the different facets of the same subject: social relations, more specifically, power dynamics. Marshall McLuhan put the medium itself at the front and centre of media studies, hence his most famous one-liner “the medium is the message.”

The third epistemological shift derived from the first two and related to the switch from the *instrumental* to the *environmental* view of media. Media can serve humans to achieve some other goals, but the essential – transformational – feature of media comes from the capacity of a medium to turn the use of a tool into an environmental force (Miroshnichenko, 2021). The use of media affects the environment and its inhabitants – hence the idea of ecology, introduced in media studies by Neil Postman.

These three epistemological shifts changed the way media are understood and divorced media ecology from other media and communication studies. A focus 1) on the transformational function instead of the transportation function of media, 2) on the medium instead of its content, and 3) on the environmental effect instead of the instrumental use defines the essence of media ecology.

These epistemological shifts became possible in no small part due to McLuhan’s focus on perception as opposed to conception. In seeing media as environments, McLuhan emphasized percepts (direct sensory experiences) over concepts (abstract ideas). As he put it, “Concepts always follow percepts. In fact, they are a kind of ossification of percepts…” (McLuhan and Nevitt, 1973, p. 16). Experiencing media is a form of perception; but the intellectual tradition, especially in the West, taught people to engage with the content – the conceptions delivered by or abstracted from media use.

It is worth noting that media ecology does not reject the significance of conception; rather, it suggests considering the dynamic interplay between perceptions and conceptions when analyzing media effects. “Effects are perceived whereas causes are conceived,” McLuhan wrote (1973, p. 11), arguing that, in media use, effects come before causes, thus reversing the traditional logic of epistemology (especially as applied to communication and cultural studies).

Interestingly, the prerequisites for media ecology emerged in the fields of political economy, specifically in the study of the staple economies by Harold Innis (1894–1952). In *The Fur Trade in Canada* (1930) and *The Cod Fisheries* (1940), Innis explored how certain dominant industries could affect social, demographic, and political developments. In his economic observations of the North Atlantic and Canada, Innis scrutinized the circulation of staple commodities and saw changes in transportation technologies “as recurring causes of disturbance” (Bonnett, 2013, p. 138). Thus, through the importance of transportation systems for commodity circulation and economic development, Innis came to an understanding of the importance of the information system in enabling commodity circulation. Both commodities and information circulated along transportation arteries. As John Bonnett put it, in his account of the history of the West from Rome to the present, Innis “brings a narrative of circulating information, and points to a second source of disturbance: new communication technology” (Ibid., p. 138). Such a parallelism in Innis’s narratives, suggests Bonnett, contains an “implicit message: the dynamics governing the acquisition and distribution of commodities are the same as those governing the circulation of information” (Ibid., p. 138).

According to this view, in the same way as the use of available transportation connections enabled trade and affected markets and industries, the use of available communication technologies defined, not just economy, but socio-political development in general. Having departed from studying staple economies with their reliance on transportation, Harold Innis arrived at communication studies, developing some media-ecological ideas in his *Empire and Communications* (1950) and *The Bias of Communication* (1951). The most important of them was the notion of time- and space-biased media, which became one of the fundamental media-ecological concepts almost 20 years before the discipline of media ecology itself was even inaugurated. As Innis put it,

> The concepts of time and space reflect the significance of media to civilization. Media which emphasize time are those which are durable in character such as parchment, clay, and stone. The heavy materials are suited to the development of architecture and sculpture. Media which emphasize space are apt to be less durable and light in character such as papyrus and paper. The latter are suited to wide areas in administration and trade. The conquest of Egypt by Rome gave access to supplies of papyrus which became the basis of a large administrative empire. Materials which emphasize time favour decentralization and hierarchical types of institutions, while those which emphasize space favour centralization and systems of government less hierarchical in character. (Innis, 1950, p. 7)

"Harold Innis was the first person to hit upon the process of change as implicit in the forms of media technology," wrote McLuhan in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (McLuhan, 1962, p. 50). McLuhan even admitted that his book was a "footnote to Innis's work."

For McLuhan and media ecology, media are any technologies and innovations that mediate (which is a literal and often omitted meaning of the word "media") and facilitate the interaction of people with their surroundings. As McLuhan (1961) said, "Media are means of extending and enlarging our organic sense lives into our environment." "The extensions of man" was the subtitle of McLuhan's 1964 book *Understanding media*. As he specified in *The Medium is the Massage*, "All media are extensions of some human faculty – psychic or physical" (1967, p. 26).

The idea of media (tools, technologies) as human extensions had had some history before McLuhan. As Robert Logan, McLuhan's colleague and co-author, observed,

> The idea that our tools are extensions of our body dates back to the latter half of the 19th century. Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1870 wrote, "All the tools and engines on earth are only extensions of man's limbs and senses." And Henry Ward Beecher in 1887 wrote, "A tool is but the extension of a man's hand and a machine is but a complex tool." This idea was then picked up in 1923 by C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards in their book *The Meaning of Meaning*, where they wrote, "But language, though often spoken of as a medium of communication is best regarded as an instrument; and all instruments are extensions or refinements of our sense organs." Lewis Mumford also dealt with this theme in *Technics and Civilization*: "The tools and utensils used during the greater part of man's history were, in the main, extensions of his own organism." (Logan, 2019, p. 304)

The extension of human "psychic or physical" faculties by a certain medium enhances these faculties but also is limited and directed by the functionalities and capacities of the said medium. In other words, as means of operating, media predefine the opportunities and limits of operating. Based on this view, media ecology studies how the use of media shapes the human perception, human actions, and the human environment and hence affects humans themselves. This idea is best expressed in John Culkin's aphorism, "We shape our tools, and thereafter our tools shape us." The phrase is so McLuhanesque that it is often mistakenly attributed to McLuhan himself[1]. Culkin clarified: "Since our tools are extensions of our senses, they shape the way we experience reality" (Culkin, 1967, p. 52).

Lance Strate, Postman's student and one of the founders of the Media Ecology Association, put it in an even more concrete way: "Whatever comes between us and our world,

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[1] See an exploration on this matter in: McLuhan Galaxy blog. (2013, April 1). "We shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us." https://mcluhangalaxy.wordpress.com/2013/04/01/we-shape-our-tools-and-thereafter-our-tools-shape-us/

that is, whatever mediates between us and our world, becomes our world. Our mediations are what we know. They are all we know. They become our environment" (Strate, 2020, p. 10). Strate quotes Max Frisch's 1959 novel *Homo Faber*: "Technology is the art of never having to experience the world" (Strate, 2017, p. 110).

Since McLuhan did not care about "theorizing" his ideas into a wholistic teaching, the main corpus of methodological and theoretical reflection on media ecology as a discipline belongs to Postman and his disciples. In 1971, Postman founded the PhD Media Ecology Program at New York University, where he was the chair of the Department of Culture and Communication. He participated in creating an international academic society of media ecologists – the Media Ecology Association[1] – founded in 1998 by his former students (Susan B. Barnes, Thomas F. Gencarelli, Paul Levinson, Casey Man Kong Lum, and Lance Strate[2]).

In his opening keynote address at the first MEA convention in 2000, Postman compared technologies to a Petri dish and offered yet another thesis essential for understanding media ecology:

> A medium is a technology within which a culture grows; that is to say, it gives form to a culture's politics, social organization, and habitual ways of thinking. <…>
>
> We put the word "media" in the front of the word "ecology" to suggest that we were not simply interested in media, but in the ways in which the interaction between media and human beings give a culture its character and, one might say, help a culture to maintain symbolic balance. (Postman, 2000)

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[1] The website of the Media Ecology Association. https://www.media-ecology.org/

[2] "Goals of the MEA." Media Ecology Association web page. https://www.media-ecology.org/Goals-of-the-MEA

Another concentrated reflection of the essence of media ecology as an epistemological method is presented in Postman's *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (1992). In particular, he wrote:

> Technological change is neither additive nor subtractive. It is ecological. I mean "ecological" in the same sense as the word is used by environmental scientists. One significant change generates total change. If you remove the caterpillars from a given habitat, you are not left with the same environment minus caterpillars: you have a new environment. …
>
> This is how the ecology of media works as well. A new technology does not add or subtract something. It changes everything. In the year 1500, fifty years after the printing press was invented, we did not have old Europe plus the printing press. We had a different Europe. After television, the United States was not America plus television; television gave a new coloration to every political campaign, to every home, to every school, to every church, to every industry. (Postman, 1992, ch. 1, kl 285)

Additionally, and sometimes alternatively to McLuhan–Postman tradition, media ecology was extended by a new branch of critical theory that interprets social crises as environmental crises in a broader term. Interestingly, this kind of media ecology, usually defined in plural as "media ecologies," came from the area related not to media or communication but to anthropology and psychoanalysis. The idea of the epistemological wrong as a foundation of the environmental crisis (which also encompasses, or is related to, the social-economic crisis attributed to capitalism) is central to the media-ecological enquiries of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972, 1982), who explored the formation (singularization) of subjectivity. Through their theory of schizoanalysis, they explored the mechanisms of homogenization by the State through shaping macropolitical consensus and the opposing processes of the singularization of subjectivity in the form of micropolitical dissensus.

In *The Three Ecologies* (2000 [1989]), Guattari highlighted the role of the mass media in producing “collective subjectivity.” In criticizing “Integrated World Capitalism” (IWC) for destroying the natural environment and social coherence – the human environments in a broader sense – Guattari pointed out that the mass media helped capitalism neutralize the political activity of the working class by disseminating the standards of “pseudo-participation” in political debate as “consumers.” “Media ecologies” provide a space for epistemological and artistic-aesthetic practices as well as for “ecosophy” activism – an environmental struggle against capitalism aimed at replacing the class struggle dampened by consumerism and improved standards of living (Guattari, 2000 [1989]; Taffel, 2019). The view of media and particularly the mass media as a means of homogenization, serialism, and capitalist suppression clearly inherits the tradition of industrial-capitalism criticism from the Frankfurt School. Exploring how capitalism “uses” mass media to shape society extends the fundamental concept of media ecology (“what media do to people”) into the area adjacent to the political economy of communication.

Both media ecology and “media ecologies” offer an extensive apparatus for the exploration of the materiality, environmental socio-forming power, and political-economic effects of media, including the news media. This apparatus calls for integration with the apparatus of the PEC to explore the past, present, and future of the media environment.

Additionally, Robert E. Park (1864–1944) of the Chicago School of Sociology should be mentioned as the scholar who coined the term “human ecology” that encompassed not only the natural environment but also the social and “built” environment of humans. This places Park among the predecessors of media ecology. Most importantly (for this dissertation), while studying urban ecology in the 1920s, Robert Park was the first to apply ecological perspectives specifically to the news media. In his 1923 article “The natural history of the newspaper,” Park stated that “The natural history of the press is a history of a surviving species” (Park, 1923, p, 273). He recognized newspapers as a significant element of the urban environment and even anticipated McLuhan’s figure/ground approach and the Herman-Chomsky environmental approach in their Propaganda Model by stating that discourse formation in newspapers is influenced by multiple factors and not solely determined by individual will. As he put it:

> On the contrary, it is the outcome of an historic process in which many individuals participated without foreseeing what the ultimate product of their labors was to be. The newspaper, like the modern city, is not wholly a rational product. No one sought to make it just what it is. (Park, 1923, p. 273)

Park also linked the business models of newspapers with their discourse practices, emphasizing that newspapers sell the commodity of news and therefore function as “the truth shop” while also serving as a vehicle for advertising akin to “a common carrier, similar to the railway or the post office” (Park, 1923, p. 275-276).

Delving into the role of newspapers in forming American cities out of migrant communities, Park wrote in 1923: “As a matter of fact we do not know much about the newspaper. It has never been studied” (Park, 1923, p. 276). This revelation was made exactly 100 years ago, and yet it was a part of a larger urban study, the primary interest of Park and others in the Chicago School. It would take another 50 years until Smythe, Murdock, Herman, Chomsky, McChesney, and others made communication media the direct subject of political-economic study.

Environmental affordances (Gibson)

The materiality of the environment dictates the ways of interacting with it. Based on the verb “afford,” in the late 1960s, psychologist James Gibson coined a new word, “affordance,” which became a term signifying the types of interactions the environment allows its inhabitants to engage in. For example, a lake affords diving and swimming, but not walking; a rock affords climbing but not running, and so on (Gibson, 1986 [1979]).

The concept was further developed and applied to artificial design, including computer and virtual design, by Donald Norman (1988, 1999). He expanded the hypothesis of affordances by introducing the idea of constraints. For instance, a door with a metal plate only allows for pushing and restricts any other form of operation, whereas a door with a vertical bar creates ambiguity in the way it can be operated (such an ambiguous design is referred to as the “Norman door”).

In a sense, the idea of constraints is already embedded in the concept of affordance. Affordance defines the capacities for interaction with the environment, and therefore affordance both invites but also limits the ways of operating within the environment.

The theory of affordances and constraints highlights ecological and, in a certain sense, “obliging” aspects of environments and allows to see the formative power of media since humans interact with environments through tools, interfaces, and technologies – media. The convenience and efficiency of a successful medium allow and constrain the spectrum of people’s actions and therefore impact ways of seeing, sensing, and interacting with the world. “‘The medium is the message’ because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action,” wrote McLuhan in *Understanding media* (1964, p. 9).

The idea that media allow us to do things in a certain way but also compel us to do things in this way is central to Postman's understanding of the effect media have on users. In his first public presentation of the concept of media ecology in 1968, Postman put it that way:

> An environment is, after all, a complex message system which imposes on human beings certain ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving. It structures what we can see, and say, and, therefore, do. It assigns roles to us and insists on our playing them. It specifies what we are permitted to do and what we are not. (Postman, 1970, p. 161)

The concept of affordances is used in this research to describe how certain features of media (such as business models) afford and thus define their specific use and result in specific effects. The concept of affordances is also essential for dealing with the issue of media-determinism, one of the main challenges in the field of media ecology. The problem of media-determinism will be covered in the last section of this chapter.

Figure/ground analysis (McLuhan)

According to Strate, "McLuhan stressed pattern recognition as a basic method for media-ecological investigation" (Strate, 2017, p. 167). Strate posits that "pattern recognition is closely related to formal cause, as pattern is synonymous with form" (Ibid., p. 168). Distinguishing forms from materiality is essential for recognizing patterns from/out of data. In Western culture, with its focus on concept and not percept (McLuhan, 1988, p. 43), the material is seen as an embodiment of the ideal, while the form (formal cause, or formative cause – the Aristotelian shaper of things) is often omitted. Unlike the traditional communication theories seeking to decode the concept/content/idea of a message behind the materiality/perception of a medium, media ecology focuses on the formal cause/formative power of a medium itself, inquiring about its affordances/perceptual biases to detect the patterns of media effects.

One of the key concepts of McLuhan's focus on media effects and not on the content of the message was the dichotomy of figure/ground. The figure/ground concept was borrowed from the visual arts and Gestalt psychology. As Marshal and Eric McLuhan put it,

> All situations comprise an area of attention (figure) and a very much larger area of unattention (ground). The two continually coerce and play with each other across a common outline or boundary or interval that serves to define both simultaneously... Figures rise out of, and recede back into, ground, which is con-figurational and comprises all other available figures at once… In the order of things, ground comes first and the figures emerge later." (McLuhan & McLuhan, 1988, p. 5)

As Robert Logan stated, "He [McLuhan] believed that to understand the meaning of a figure one must take into account the ground in which it operates and in which it is situated. The true meaning of any 'figure,' whether it is a person, a social movement, a technology, an institution, a communication event, a text, or a body of ideas, cannot be determined if one does not take into account the ground or environment in which that figure operates" (Logan, 2011, p. 2). "The figure is what appears and the ground is always subliminal. Changes occur in the ground before they occur in the figure," wrote McLuhan[1]. Logan specified: "The ground provides the context from which the full meaning or significance of a figure emerges" (Logan, 2011, p. 2).

Distinguishing between figure and ground in studying communication media is particularly important because communication media always carry a message – a content/concept that becomes a powerful figure that overshadows the ground of media effects. It is tempting to bring the analysis of the news media down to discourse analysis or content analysis. McLuhan compared content to a "juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract

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[1] A letter to Tom Stepp on 26 March 1973, the McLuhan file at the Canadian National Archive in Ottawa.

the watchdog of the mind" (McLuhan, 1994 [1964], p. 18). For instance, it is seductive to look at the polarising effect of the news media through their coverage of the salient figure of Trump. But these are the consequences, not reasons for the changes in the media and journalism. Behind Trump as a media phenomenon, there are environmental changes that made the news media (and society in general) susceptible to Trump addiction. The ground came first; the figure appeared in the favourable ground.

This example illustrates one of the central insights of this research. However attractive is the figure/content, the real formative power of the news media's effect lies in their ground, in the principles of discourse formation, defined by environmental forces and political-economic conditions of news production. The real, profound, and primary effect of the news media can be revealed not through discourse analysis but through the analysis of discourse formation, since it is the medium itself that is the true message. Discourse formation is to discourse what ground is to figure – an environment that makes the figure possible (affords and invites it). The figure/ground distinction forms the environmental optic of this research – the imperative of seeing the ground behind the figure.

Judging by the literature, conference activity, and scholars' engagement in their respective fields, media ecology and the political economy of communication remain blind spots for each other. While the political economy of communication occasionally addresses technological changes in the media (a key focus of media ecology), mostly through the lens of economic models and regulation, media ecology generally shows little interest in power relations or the connections between economy and ideology (which are in the focus of the political economy of communication).

This 'neglect' on the part of media ecology can be explained by McLuhan's famous one-liner: 'The medium is the message.' For media ecology, power relations and, even more so, ideology, are merely content—the message. According to another well-known McLuhanism, content is 'a juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind' (McLuhan, 1994 [1964], p. 18). Ideologies, business models, or power relations may be media effects, but they do not explain how media function; whereas, from the perspective of media ecology, the operation of media might explain how ideologies, business models, and power relations form and evolve.

The dynamic between media ecology and the political economy of communication can be described through the figure/ground relationship. What is figure for media ecology (the media themselves) is ground for the political economy of communication. Similarly, what is figure for the political economy of communication (the economic and power relations behind discourse formation) is ground for media ecology. At the same time, this misalignment between disciplines that study different aspects of the same object (media and communication) presents promising opportunities for new insights and discoveries.

The political economy of communication and the mass media

The contemporary political economy of communication (PEC) is built on political economy, which, in turn, distantly descends from Adam Smith's theory of market and directly inherits Karl Marx's theory of capitalism. Marx saw the system of communication as part of the superstructure that provided reproduction and proliferation of the dominant ideology. Cultural and communication institutions were thus seen to be subsidized by and submitted to economic relations.

The Marxist take on mass communication underwent significant transformations in the Western Marxist school of thought. Adorno and Horkheimer noticed that, in the industrial society, mass culture itself worked as an industry, producing a mass product that was standardized and therefore capable of homogenizing the masses for the needs of sales of the industrial, meaning serial, products. “The culture industry as a whole has moulded men as a type unfailingly reproduced in every product,” as Adorno and Horkheimer put it (1972 [1944], p. 127). Therefore, mass culture produced mass consumers in the same way industrial capitalism produced mass products – industrial capitalism “needed” the culture industry for the seriality of consumption to match the seriality of production.

Thus, the Frankfurt School (associated with Adorno and Horkheimer) revisited the Marxist view of the role of communications as a direct tool of ideology and emphasized mass communication’s morphological similarity to the industrial mode of production. Later, this view of mass communication allowed scholars to develop the understanding of mass communication as a fully-fledged industry in its own right. This shift eventually prepared PEC for the advent of information and communication technologies, which made communication industries, spanning from telecommunications to social media, the leading sectors in the digital economy.

On the “economic side” of the political economy and beyond the Marxist influence, Harold Innis must be mentioned as the earliest predecessor of not only media ecology but the PEC as well. When studying national economies based on staples, Innis noticed that the ways commodity price information circulated impacted the ways communication and social structures took shape. From this observation, he came up with the idea that the communication structure itself can be a staple and, therefore, may define the social and economic structures in the territory where information circulates. In its turn, the structure of information circulation, i.e. the communication system, depends on the materiality of an information carrier or, in other words, on the materiality of a medium. These observations enabled Innis' transition from economic studies to communication studies in the 1940s.

Such were some of the milestones along the path that led to the development of the PEC in the last third of the 20th century. Among the founding figures and the most prominent contributors, Dallas Walker Smythe, Peter Golding, Graham Murdock, Edward Herman, Noam Chomsky, Herbert Schiller, Vincent Mosco, Robert W. McChesney, Christian Fuchs, Nicholas Garnham, and some others can be listed.

The discipline traces its origin from Dallas Smythe's 1977 article "Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism," in which he "argued that Western Marxism had not given enough attention to the complex role of communications in capitalism" (Fuchs, 2012, p. 522). This article triggered "an important foundational debate of media sociology that came to be known as the Blindspot Debate" (Ibid. p. 522). The debate attracted political economists with an interest in communication and helped identify the field, goals, and apparatus of the PEC.

Vincent Mosco stated that "the PEC responds to challenges from disciplines on its borders, specifically from cultural studies and public choice theory by building bridge" (Mosco, 2009, p. 12). Admitting that the PEC lies somewhere on the border between political economy and cultural studies, Mosco warned about the risks of "the essentialism of either economics (e. g. money alone drives the media) or culture (e. g. people's values drive the media)" (Ibid., p.11). Thus, the PEC needed to deal with a sort of determinism, too. This fact confirms that any discipline that focuses on media is at risk of explaining social processes through the impact that media have on them.

While isolating the specific subject of PEC in studying communications, Mosco distinguished three processes “that make up the main starting points for a PEC”– *commodification*, *spatialization* and *structuration* (Mosco, 2009, p. 12). These processes intertwine: commodification leads to business expansion and “overcoming the constraints of geographical space with, among other things, mass media and communication technologies” (Ibid., p. 11), which is spatialization. Spatialization, in turn, contributes to structuration. As Mosco put it, “Spatialization encompasses the process of globalization, the worldwide restructuring of industries, companies, and other institutions” (Ibid., p. 23).

Peter Golding and Graham Murdock provided a definition of media that was particularly compelling for comprehending communication media both as an industry and as a mechanism of discourse formation. As they pointed out, “Media organizations are both similar to and different from other areas of production” (1996, p. 60). On the one hand, communications are “integrated into the general industrial infrastructure in three key ways.” Firstly, they provide infrastructure for other businesses. Secondly, as “the major arena for advertising,” media “play a pivotal role in matching consumer demands to production.” Thirdly, communications themselves became an industry. On the other hand, the product of public communications systems is unique as they create “the images and discourses through which people make sense of the world” (Golding and Murdock, 1996, p. 60).

Under the pressure of this duality, many communication scholars are inclined to focus either on economic conditions of media or on discourse making; in Murdock and Golding’s definition – either on economic or symbolic dimensions of public communications. Thus, Murdock and Golding identified the same problem that Mosco called "essentialism," i.e. reducing the study of media to either economic or cultural factors of mass communications. To address this collision, Golding and Murdock introduced the concept of critical political economy. They saw critical political economy (of communication) as truly "holistic," "historical" and "concerned with the balance between capitalist enterprise and public intervention" (Ibid., p. 61). Golding and Murdock stated that, "Critical political economy is interested in the general interplay between economic organization and political, social and cultural life" (Ibid., p. 62). Their critical political economy "goes beyond technical issues of efficiency to engage with basic moral questions of justice, equity and the public goods" (Ibid., p. 61).

Contributing to this search for the discipline's self-identification, Nicholas Garnham stated in "Contribution to a Political Economy of Mass Communication" (1986) that the traditional PEC that was built on Marxism and the Frankfurt School was mostly focused on the industrial production of culture and therefore deserved to be called "the political economy of culture." However, in his later work, "The Political Economy of Communication Revisited" (2011), Garnham reached the conclusion that the term "political economy of culture" inadequately captures the reality of the field. He argued that it tends to emphasize the consumption of cultural goods by people in their leisure time and sees culture separately "from the rest of the economy rather than as a special case within a wider set of developments and problems." Garnham emphasized the immaterial character of goods, labor and commodity in communication and suggested that they are "better captured by the terms information, information economy, and information society." Therefore, he suggested calling the area of inquiry the "political economy of information" (Garnham, 2011, p. 41).

Along with Mosco's notions of commodification, spatialization and structuration, the PEC created a set of concepts – its apparatus – that is specific to this discipline. The most important are the concepts of media ownership, the media business model (or support mechanisms), media concentration, media convergence, media policies and regulations, the Propaganda Model, and some others.

Media ownership. Since "the production of meaning" is "the exercise of power," as Golding and Murdock (1996, p. 66) noticed echoing Marx, the question of media ownership is among the fundamental issues of PEC. Ownership represents two sets of concerns that PEC scholars usually focus on.

The first set relates to the organization of the mass media and communication infrastructure and includes the following concerns: legal forms of ownership (state, private, public, collective, non-profit, etc.); concentration (monopoly, oligopoly); vertical and horizontal integration; media convergence (technological and corporate); globalization; legislation and regulation (deregulation); the nature of labor in the mass media and communications in general.

The second set of ownership-related concerns is associated with content policy and the social or political effect of the mass media and communication infrastructure. These concerns include newsroom practices, editorial and any content-regulating policies (in the media organization and now social media); censorship, freedom of speech and diversity of opinions; the ethics and quality of journalism; agenda setting; advertising and propaganda; the division between an organization's business goals and serving public interests; net neutrality (for platforms and telecom providers); social justice and diversity of representation.

Vincent Mosco analyzed the issues of media ownership within his concept of spatialization. For Mosco, ownership represents agency in the process of spatial business expansion. In terms of organization control (ownership), expansion turns into concentration. Mosco called "a primary focus on ownership" "the central measure of concentration" (2009, p. 161).

Nicholas Garnham, with his critical attitude toward the traditional PEC, acknowledged that the PEC offered tools for the analysis of "the vertical and horizontal processes of integration and the resulting concentrations of corporate ownership" (2011, p.46) and therefore the growing monopolization of control over discourse formation. However, Garnham criticized, as a sort of ideological reductionism, the tendency to see media ownership as a predefining factor in reproduction of the dominant ideology.

Moreover, Garnham advanced an interesting argument that the "concepts of ownership, control, and ideological domination are not useful in understanding the processes and stakes involved" (2011, p. 60). Amid dramatic change in the modes of media production and consumption, when the audience got the right to participate in the production and distribution of content, media ownership itself does not define who runs the agenda, at least not at the scale that it did in the past. Garnham even came up with the radical idea that,

> We have to accept, I think, that the processes of development of capitalist modernity are complex and their outcomes always uncertain. As the current conjuncture shows, no one is "in control" and there is no totalizing explanation. (2011, p. 60)

Media concentration. Traditionally, the effect of the media's control over agenda setting was explored through the analysis of who owns the media. This analysis was mostly focused on whose interests are represented on the boards of directors. Mosco's "spatial" approach to ownership extended this type of analysis. A single media corporation might not be sufficiently big to control a niche or a market. It would be difficult to detect the signs of concentration and monopolization solely via analysis of the ownership structure of such a company. But cross-media ownership, in forms of vertical integration (as exemplified by Time Warner – Warner Bros. – Turner Broadcasting System – CNN, TNT, TBS) or horizontal integration (as exemplified by Murdoch's News Corp), creates "dense networks of connections" and exposes "the growth of network hierarchies" (2009, p. 167) in the media industry, which are hidden but efficient, adaptive, and powerful forms of concentration. By tracing "corporate linkages," as Mosco suggested, it is possible to see "spatial agglomeration" and therefore to explore the real distribution or, rather, concentration of power in the media. The method of analyzing the cross-representation of big corporations on the boards of directors became one of the classical tools for the analysis of media concentration.

Being conducted on a regular basis, such analysis of media ownership also shows the dynamic of media concentration and the share of the biggest vertical and horizontal media agglomerates in the national and global markets. For Canada, for example, such analysis is regularly conducted by Dwayne Winseck from Carleton University. The Canadian Media Concentration Research project, led by him, "addresses this question through its data-driven analysis of media concentration in more than a dozen sectors of the telecom-media-internet (TMI) industries in Canada."[1]

Media convergence. Adjacent to the issue of concentration is the issue of corporate and technological convergence, a trend that has become particularly impactful in the contemporary media environment. Corporate and technological convergence allows "once-distinct news organizations to work together, to harmonize their efforts in both the journalistic and the

[1] The Canadian Media Concentration Research (CMCR) project - http://www.cmcrp.org/

business realms, in different media markets, even across distinct media (especially newspapers, TV, and Internet)" (Skinner, Compton, & Gasher, 2005, p. 8).

Media convergence, indeed, has become one of the central topics in PEC after the internet introduced the concept and the platform of multimedia communications. "Digitization set the conditions for convergence; corporate conglomerates created its imperative," stated Henry Jenkins (Jenkins, 2006, p. 11), reiterating Gibson's concept of environmental affordances. Jenkins defines media convergence as "the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 2). In observing the relations between media convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence, Jenkins elaborates on the concept of convergence culture, in which "old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways" (Ibid. p. 2).

Commodification. According to Mosco, commodification is "the process of transforming things valued for their use into marketable products that are valued for what they can bring in exchange" (Mosco, 2009, p. 12). On one hand, this reflects a classical view of political economy; however, the nature of commodification in communications is very specific. Nicholas Garnham consistently emphasized the unique nature of communication, information, and cultural goods as immaterial entities, which distinguishes them from "typical commodities." He stated that,

> Because the value of cultural products and services is largely immaterial, they are not worn out by use. There is thus no scarcity and no inherent incentive to repeat purchase; in

> information and culture, economic reproduction and growth depends on the constant production of novelty. (Garnham, 2011, p. 49)

The transformation of communications in the digital era has diversified the types of "use value" that can be turned into "exchange value" in the process of commodification. Not only can news or influence now be commodified but also the participation of users themselves.

The fact that media consumers themselves can be commodified was first reflected upon by Walter Lippmann in 1922, who wrote that, "The real problem is that the readers of a newspaper, unaccustomed to paying the cost of newsgathering, can be capitalized only by turning them into circulation that can be sold to manufacturers and merchants" (Lippmann, 1929 [1922], p. 324). Essentially, Lippmann was the first who expressed the idea of the audience as a commodity.

The idea was developed into the theory of "audience commodity" by Dallas Smythe in 1981. In his words,

> Because audience power is produced, sold, purchased and consumed, it commands a price and is a commodity. … You audience members contribute your unpaid work time and in exchange you receive the program material and the explicit advertisements. (Smythe, 2012, p. 199)

Smythe's ideas were received by many as questionable. For example, Mosco criticized them for their "reductionism." However, he admitted that,

> Commodification applies to audiences as well as to content. Political economy has paid some attention to audiences, particularly in the effort to understand the common practice whereby advertisers pay for the size and quality (propensity to consume) of an audience… The debate was useful because it broadened the discussion of commodification beyond content and because it meant that communication research would have to examine all businesses that advertise and not just media companies. (Mosco, 2009, p. 22)

In addition, new forms of commodities have emerged in digital communications. Platformization has created conditions in which the aggregated personal data of millions has become a commodity. This phenomenon partially relates to Smythe's notion of the audience's power as a commodity but in a different manner. Personal data acquire exchange value (become commodified) only when they are extracted, collected, and categorized within and by the platforms. Also different is the way of selling. If, in the old media market, audience power was sold in segments (social-demographic groups), platform audience power can be sold both by segments and "by piece" – by person, with the ability of a buyer to reach each member of the audience personally. The principles of media commodification are also central to forming the business models of the news media and, as such, inform a significant part of the methodological apparatus of this dissertation.

Policies and regulations. Besides academic and exploratory interest, the analysis of media ownership, media concentration, and media convergence has another significant application that relates to shaping policies and regulations in the area of media and communications. Policies and regulations are aimed at maintaining a "healthy" media environment and protecting democracy. With such a mandate, policies and regulations address the issues of monopolistic control, fake news, hate speech, privacy protection, data protection, abusive activities, etc. In this area, the PEC closely interacts with jurisprudence, politics, and legislation.

Golding and Murdock stated that critical political economists "point to the distortion and inequalities of market systems and argue that these deficiencies can only be rectified by public intervention, though they disagree on the form that this should take." They emphasized that,

> The history of modern communications media is not only an economic history of their grown incorporation into a capitalist economic system, but also a political history of their increasing centrality to the exercise of citizenship. (Golding & Murdock, 1996, p. 65)

Mosco also emphasized the applied, meaning the regulatory, value of PEC. He stated that,

> The political economy of communication has been notable for its emphasis on examining the significance of institutions, especially those businesses and governments responsible for the production, distribution, and exchange of communication commodities and for the regulation of the communication marketplace. (Mosco, 2009, p. 21)

Nicholas Garnham pointed out that regulation is required to protect not only society, but also markets themselves. Developing the idea of Adam Smith, he noted that markets are the "institutions which disciplined socially destructive, private, and predatory acquisitive instincts for the general public good by making the interactions public and transparent" (Garnham, 2011, p. 43), and therefore legal regulation was required to support and protect markets.

Interestingly, this "market-protective" view of regulation is in demand again nowadays, but because of a different reason – to defend some communication industries, the news media first of all, from the impact of the internet. Thus, policy and regulation debates now consist of two trends, depending on who debates. One trend, "public-protective," is about the protection of society from the capitalist communication industries; the other, "market-protective," is about the protection of communication industries as a supplier of a public good. In Canada, due to its geographic and cultural proximity to the US, the protective regulation of the media and communication market is also a factor in preserving national identity; within Canada, this function of national-identity protection of the media industry is also separately applied to francophone mass media. Recently, "market-protective" tendencies in Canada intensified with the Canadian government trying to protect the national media from global digital platforms by introducing legislation that requires digital platforms to pay news producers for the news links that appear on those digital platforms.

Garnham denied the ideological justification of state regulatory control over communications. He stated that classical PEC was often reduced to a view according to which "capitalist societies produced, and could only tolerate, regulation that furthered and supported corporate interests." This simplification neglected, according to Garnham, "the diverse and conflicting interests of different corporate actors and sectors vis-à-vis regulation" and also "different regulatory problems of different market sectors" (Garnham, 2011, p. 46). He insisted that the capitalist economy is not necessarily based on "capitalist" ideology, as is proved by China, for example.

Garnham, however, admitted the necessity of the "public-protective" type of regulation, too. As he put it,

> Political economy, even in its liberal guises, has recognized since Adam Smith, the special case of communication networks. As public goods with natural monopoly characteristics, they require, and have always required, either direct state provision or close state regulation. (Garnham, 2011, p. 53)

These observations of the main political-economic concepts of communication inform the political-economic framework of this dissertation. It is worth noting, however, that the dissertation research deals with a subject (journalism and the media) that is itself subjected to ongoing changes in their social role and their very materiality. And so is the PEC. From its very beginning, the PEC struggled to define its subject and even its title – hence the multiple attempts to refine or revolutionize the name: "critical political economy" of communications (Golding and Murdock), "political economy of culture" (Garnham), "political economy of information"

(Garnham), “political economy of mass media” (Prat and Strömberg, 2011), and so on. Each iteration offered its own tweak in defining the subject of the enquiry.

Aside from reflecting an issue common for any new discipline with self-identification, this search also represented the challenges PEC faced because of the latest development of ICTs. The classical PEC was forming in an era when communications were dominated by print and electronic media, while the mass media were dominated by what is now called old, or traditional, media: the press, radio, and TV. The internet, however, changed the material nature of communications, moving the emphasis from electric means to digital protocols and platforms of communications and from old, or legacy, media to new media. Not only did this change in the materiality of communications transform communications and their role in society, but it also put communications into the focus of general political economy, as all politics and all economy are now dependent on the development of digital communication technologies.

It even can be stated that the impacts of ICT have become an unavoidable factor in any political-economic analysis. It is not accidental that political economy came up with such concepts as “digital economy,” “digital capitalism,” and “platform capitalism.” It demonstrates that the characteristic of a medium (“digital”) has become a defining characteristic of political economy in general. The global process of digitizing made the entire discipline of political economy the PEC. The PEC’s typical concepts of media ownership, the media business model, media concentration, media commodification, and media regulations have permeated into the language of many studies focused on political, economic, or social issues.

PEC started by arguing that communications has grown into a full-fledged industry in its own right, with the peculiar tasks of making profit for owners *and* making sense of the world for users. Now, PEC faces the transformation of communications into the material base not only for culture, but also for politics, the economy, and many other human practices. The economy and politics now exist, to a significant extent, within a medium of a new type, the internet. This transformation of the subject of the PEC from communications as a channel or an industry to media as an environment brings PEC closer to media ecology, which always saw media as environments. The PEC, particularly with the latest development of its subject, offers a productive complementary apparatus and methodology to join efforts with media ecology. However, recognition of this development is still pending in media studies, and this dissertation aims to contribute to acknowledging the compatibility of media ecology and the PEC – along with the applicability of this combined approach to the analysis of changes in the news media.

Allocative control (Murdock)

In analyzing corporate control over the communications industries, Graham Murdock distinguished two basic levels of control: the allocative and the operational.

1) Allocative control relates to the power to define goals and determine the priorities of resource commitments.

2) Operational control "works at a lower level and is confined to decisions about the effective use of resources already allocated and the implementation of policies already decided upon at the allocative level" (Murdock, 1982, p. 118).

Allocative control represents the environmental effect of resources expended. It assumes that, through selective funding, the system develops structures and practices that are funded while neglecting those deprived of resource replenishment. Paid-for structures and practices are incentivized, and unpaid ones get suppressed. Therefore, the goal of analysis is to identify those incentives and suppressors, understand why they prevail over others, and detect what they incentivize and suppress. To put it in terms of agency, operational control rests on the feasibility of intentions while allocative control rests on the viability of incentives.

Graham Murdock gave an example of how the allocative control of ad money forced an entire culture industry to completely alter the tone in which it depicted the world. In the post-WWII period, American television drama was “dominated by anthologies of single plays, many of which dealt with working-class life,” wrote Murdock. These dramas, obviously covering “pressing social issues,” were popular with audiences and regularly attracted high ratings; however, advertisers were not pleased with the lower-class characters in these dramas, which were seen “as damaging to the images of mobility and affluence they wanted to build up around their products” (Murdock, 1982, p. 143).

Around the mid-1950s, advertisers started to redirect their budgets toward “the action-adventure series that were beginning to emerge from the old Hollywood studios.” There were multiple business advantages of this genre. Adventures were put into extravagant and glamorous settings, and handsome heroes and heroines set the tone, within which the consumption of advertised goods became more desirable. Adventure and action dramas also contained the minimum of dialogue and the maximum of action, which made them ideal for export overseas. Thus, allocative control of ad money changed the focus and tone of TV series. This shift, in its turn, defined the prevalent depiction of the world in mass TV and movie dramas in order to make it more ad suitable. Ad money encouraged consumerism and suppressed political and social issues in discourse formation. The media and other mass culture industries were responsive. They created the culture of consumerism, which is essential for industrial capitalism.

This is how allocative control works in practical conditions of advertising: not only do advertisers give money to the media that offer a proper context for the brand to be placed in, but the media producers themselves compete for this money and adjust content in a way they think advertisers would like. The media system funded by ad money drifts towards content and formats that would by no means have repelled this money but rather attracted it.

Another example of ad money's allocative control, this time specifically in the news media market, was given by Christopher R. Martin in his 2019 book *No Longer Newsworthy: How the Mainstream Media Abandoned the Working Class.* He came to a similar conclusion regarding the time when culture industries switched from covering ordinary people's lives to chasing the affluent audience for the sake of better ad sales. Martin wrote that,

> By the late 1960s and early 1970s, newspaper companies, then becoming publicly traded, bigger chains, moved to a new business trajectory that changed the target news audience from mass to upscale, and altered the actual news narratives about the working class in US journalism.[1]

As advertising became a significant source of revenue, ad money incentivized the development of the press of general interest that covered national or local news, business, sport and lifestyle and was aimed at the mid-class audience. The workers' press traditionally relied on copy sales and could not count on advertising money due to the very character of its content and its audience. It found itself in a disadvantageous position amid the growing prosperity of newspapers receiving ad revenue. This eventually led to the nearly full extinction of newspapers for workers, which were quite powerful in the first half of the 20th century.

While Herman and Chomsky did not use the notion of allocative control, their analysis implied the same regulative force that Murdock called allocative control. For example, a section

[1] Martin, Christopher R. (2019, August 27). "How writing off the working class has hurt the mainstream media." *NiemanLab*. https://niemanreports.org/articles/how-writing-off-the-working-class-has-hurt-the-mainstream-media/

of their *Manufacturing consent* about the second filter of the Propaganda Model, advertising, was called "The advertising license to do business." They observed that advertising money was directed – allocated – to those media that offered content favorable for commercial messages. As they stated, "Advertisers don't like the public sphere, where audiences are relatively small, upsetting controversy takes place, and the settings are not ideal for selling goods" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002 [1988], p. 18). According to them,

> With the rise in the price of advertising spots, the forgone revenue increases; and with increasing market pressure for financial performance and the diminishing constraints from regulation, an advertising-based media system will gradually increase advertising time and marginalize or eliminate altogether programming that has significant public-affairs content.
>
> Advertisers will want, more generally, to avoid programs with serious complexities and disturbing controversies that interfere with the "buying mood." They seek programs that will lightly entertain and thus fit in with the spirit of the primary purpose of program purchases—the dissemination of a selling message. (Herman & Chomsky, 2002 [1988], p. 108)

In their critical pursuit, Herman and Chomsky reduced the allocative-control effect of ad money to incentivizing entertaining content in the news media. For example, as they suggested, viewers would prefer TV programs about how Americans eat when they dine out over programs investigating the Pentagon's affairs. Therefore, advertising money would go to the programs and TV channels covering the dining habits of Americans and not investigations into Pentagon spending. In such conditions, TV managers would rather hire content producers focused on dining habits than on military spending. Thus, in the view of Herman and Chomsky, ad money directs allocative control over discourse formation.

Murdock implied the structural effect of resource allocation on market positions and content of the news media. Herman and Chomsky additionally emphasized the effect of the "advertising licence to do business" (their analog of "allocative control") on the choices made by newsrooms. They analyzed how the structural factors affected people's choices. For example, when *BBC* journalist Andrew Marr, in a 1996 interview with Chomsky, stated that he had never censored himself, Chomsky's replied:

> I don't say you're self-censoring – I'm sure you believe everything you're saying; but what I'm saying is, if you believed something different, you wouldn't be sitting where you're sitting.[1]

The mechanism of allocative control is essential for understanding the "depersonalized" agency of environmental conditions in discourse formation. While traditional discourse analysis often focuses on the interests behind the discourses (Lasswellian "who says what to whom on what channel with what effect?"), the concept of allocative control aligns closely with the principles of media ecology. It directs attention to conditions rather than intentions, emphasizes the ground rather than the figure, and ultimately focuses on what media do to people rather than what people do with media. Allocative control is, generally, a political-economic reading of the media-ecological concept of environmental affordance.

The Propaganda Model (Herman and Chomsky)

In *Manufacturing consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1988), Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky developed their idea of the Propaganda Model (PM). The PM became one of the most prominent concepts of the PEC that was specifically focused on the political economy of the mass media.

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[1] Chomsky, Noam. (1996, February 14). "Noam Chomsky on Propaganda." The Big Idea. Interview with Andrew Marr. *BBC*. Transcript. http://scratchindog.blogspot.com/2015/07/transcript-of-interview-between-noam.html

Because of its structural simplicity based on a definite set of notions, which also gave a new metaphorical language for media study, the concept was received with much enthusiasm but also a noticeable share of criticism. Criticism often came in the form of accusations of economic determinism, reductionism, and neglecting the human factor. However, as often happens to viable concepts, the criticisms did not repudiate them but became a part of their scope and application, facilitating further developments and revisions.

The Herman-Chomsky model is based on a critical reassessment of Lippmann's metaphor of "manufacturing consent" from his 1922 book *Public Opinion*. Lippmann was the first to describe the relations in the triangle of the elites, the news media, and the masses under the condition of the developed capitalist economy with the industrial news media already relying heavily on advertising revenue. Lippmann's view, often criticized for its "elitism," nevertheless, shaped the background for the understanding of public communication and the media for a century ahead and was also one of the precursors of the political economy of the mass media.

Lippmann drew a line between "realism and romanticism" in understanding democracy. According to him, the romantic concept of democracy posits that the proper procedure of representation creates a government of the people, by the people, for the people. This view implies that people are "omnicompetent" and know what they want, what decisions are to be made, and who can make these decisions. In fact, as Lippmann insists, people rarely know anything beyond their daily routine. A picture of the world is available to people only in the form of the subjective judgment of a "self-centered man." Left to their own devices, people with segmented and disparate views are not capable of elaborating a competent opinion regarding the optimal strategies of governance over common interests (hence the title of his next book – *The Phantom Public*, 1927).

Because public opinion is impacted by so many distorting factors but is "supposed to be the prime mover in democracies," the common interests "can be managed only by a specialized class whose personal interests reach beyond the locality" (Lippmann, 1929 [1922], p. 253). This class, the class of administrators and politicians – the decision-making elites – needs to both receive adequate information about social reality and spread useful information to the public. This task can be accomplished by a special cohort of educated and independent experts who know "how to create and operate public opinion" (Ibid., p. 255) and can consult the leadership competently and without bias.

Thus, Lippmann described, in a positive way, a model of a deep state apparatus, with an expert machine aimed at mitigating the distortions of personal and public information. No democratic procedure or institutions per se could refine common interests of so differently, short-sighted, and biasedly informed people without special knowledge of how to forge public opinion and social coherence. And "wise leaders," Lippmann stated, always "seek a certain measure of consent" from the public (Ibid., p. 245). Clearly a fan of Machiavelli, whom he often referred to, Lippmann underlined not just pragmatism but also the morality of pursuing public consent for political and administrative actions. "Coercion is the surd in almost all social theory, except the Machiavellian," he wrote (Ibid., p. 295). This thought implies that the manufacturing of consent is a desirable substitute to the otherwise inevitable, oftentimes violent, suppression of dissent.

What was aimed at better governing in Lippmann's theory became seen as a means of preserving the elites' control over the population in Herman and Chomsky's view. "Clearly, the manufacture of consent by a 'specialized class' that can override the short-sighted perspectives of the masses must entail media control by that class," clarified Herman (2000, p. 101). Lippmann thought that consent can be managed by the efforts of experts in mass communications and public relations. Herman and Chomsky revealed that these are the news media that play a propaganda role of manufacturing consent, and they do it under the influence of structural political-economic forces. The news media became a manufacturer of consent by their economic design. Herman and Chomsky called the Propaganda Model a "guided market system" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002 [1988], p. lx). They wrote:

> In fact, our treatment is much closer to a "free market" analysis, with the results largely an outcome of the workings of market forces. Most biased choices in the media arise from the preselection of right-thinking people, internalized preconceptions, and the adaptation of personnel to the constraints of ownership, organization, market, and political power. Censorship is largely self-censorship, by reporters and commentators who adjust to the realities of source and media organizational requirements, and by people at higher levels within media organizations who are chosen to implement, and have usually internalized, the constraints imposed by proprietary and other market and governmental centers of power. (Herman & Chomsky, 2002 [1988], p. lx)

The PM explores "the interplay between economic power and communicative power," as characterized by Mullen and Klaehn (2010, p. 217). As Herman recalled in 2000,

> We had long been impressed by the regularity with which the media operate on the basis of a set of ideological premises, depend heavily and uncritically on elite information sources and participate in propaganda campaigns helpful to elite interests. (Herman, 2000, p. 101)

Herman and Chomsky introduced a model that "traces the routes by which money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002 [1988], p. 2). They singled out five filters that "interact with and reinforce one another" (I split these filters into different paragraphs for visual clarity – A.M.):

> The essential ingredients of our Propaganda Model, or set of news "filters," fall under the following headings:

> (1) the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms;
>
> (2) advertising as the primary income source of the mass media;
>
> (3) the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and "experts" funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power;
>
> (4) "flak" as a means of disciplining the media; and
>
> (5) "anticommunism" as a national religion and control mechanism. These elements interact with and reinforce one another. (Herman & Chomsky, 2002 [1988], p. 2)

The PM worked particularly well when used to analyze the conjoined stances of the American mainstream news media regarding American foreign policy. Herman and Chomsky used their filters to show, with meticulously calculated numbers of mentions and profound discourse analysis, how differently (but jointly) the media in the 1970s–80s framed seemingly similar events, such as wars, elections, or political assassinations, depending on whether the American ruling elites were friendly to the regimes or proprietors responsible for those events (or allegedly responsible).

The significance of Herman and Chomsky's findings was not in pointing out the existence of distortions in the coverage but in unveiling the structural regularities behind those distortions. Certain events would produce certain types of coverage with a high level of predictability, which made the PM a tool of almost scientific precision. Even today, in a completely different media environment, the basic methodological idea of the PM – to examine the regularities of the media filters designed by the business of media – can be productively applied.

In the meantime, the advent of the internet has changed both economic and professional conditions of journalism. The PM scholars (O. Boyd-Barrett, D. Broudy, C. Fuchs, Y. Godler, B. Goss, J. Klaehn, A. Mullen, T. Mills, J. Pedro-Carañana, F. Zollmann, and others) have been trying to adapt or "reboot" (Goss, 2013) Herman-Chomsky's theory according to the changes, but mostly by seeking new evidence to affirm that the old PM's filters still work or can be applied in the new digital media environment. This dissertation approaches the "digital" revision of the PM from a different angle. The new environment does not need to comply with the old PM; it is much more interesting to explore how the PM's filters have transformed (or not) in the new economic and technological conditions.

First, the very function of the mass media has obviously changed since Herman and Chomsky described it. Their definition of the media, with which they opened their *Manufacturing Consent*, goes as the following:

> The mass media serve as a system for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace. It is their function to amuse, entertain, and inform, and to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behavior that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society. (Herman & Chomsky, 2002 [1988], p. 1)

It is noteworthy that they started their list of the mass media's functions with "amuse" and "entertain" before "inform." This, of course, exposes a critical political economy approach to the media. But now, new and "better" sources of amusement and entertainment have emerged in digital media. New platforms and devices that deliver digital amusement and entertainment are much more attractive than boring old media. The metaphor of *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Neil Postman's 1985 book's title, which characterized the interaction of users with television, now applies to digital media. The mainstream news media do not amuse and entertain anymore. Criticizing the news media for being entertaining instead of informative is no longer relevant. The entertaining function has been stolen from the news media (along with advertising money, as will be shown in Chapter 4) by the internet. At the same time, the business of selling news is vanishing, too. The news is already always known from social media, which have become for many the main or even exclusive deliverer of socially significant content and news. As will be shown in Chapters 4 and 5, after the changes in the business model, the media have switched from news supply to news validation, and therefore they focus mostly on disturbing news that requires validation.

This completely changes the main assumption of the classical Propaganda Model. “Market-driven” factors still define the principles of discourse formation in a way that can be described through the concept of the PM, but its principles began to work differently after the media switched from receiving plentiful ad revenue to chasing scarce digital subscriptions. Respectively, the PM’s filters, described for the ad-driven news business, such as ownership, ad-oriented profit-seeking, sourcing, flak, and anticommunism, need to be revised, too. Nevertheless, these filters, in their modified contemporary version, still present a viable tool of political-economic analysis of the news media, as this dissertation will endeavour to show.

The challenge of media determinism

This section focuses on the techno-deterministic debate regarding media ecology and specifically the works of Marshall McLuhan. The section proposes a framework for dealing with the issue of techno-determinism in this dissertation research.

Technological determinism, or media determinism as its specific variation, is a term that paradoxically rejects its own referent. As Lance Strate put it,

> For the most part, it is a label applied by critics, rather than a term used, let alone embraced, within the field. As there is no doctrine of technological determinism, or arguments that explicitly state such a position within our field, its use amounts to a straw

man argument used to dismiss media ecological scholarship, rather than subject it to serious consideration. (Strate, 2017, p. 34).

Most often, techno-determinism is condemned for two main reasons:

1. Techno-determinism neglects human agency, in general, and therefore ideology, in particular, as insignificant factors in social and historical processes.

2. Techno-determinism reduces the complexity of social processes to a single factor or cause.

The accusations of some social or economic theories of techno-determinism have a century-long tradition. In a review of the academic history of technological determinism, John Durham Peters points out that the term originated in the "buttles with the ghost of Marx in the social sciences" (Peters, 2017, p. 14). According to Peters, economic sociologist Thorstein Veblen (1857–1929) adapted the German concept of *technik* with its "semantic richness" signifying not only machinery itself but also the area of arts and knowledge application. In both building on and criticizing Marx, Veblen suggested that "the engine of social change was not solely economic production but also the scientific and technological know-how that guided and accelerated it." Therefore, "Engineers more than the proletariat were his <Veblen's> revolutionary vanguard party," summarized Peters (Ibid., p. 14).

This was the context in which the modern notion of technology as a social force and not just an array of technical devices was born. The first use of the term "technological determinism" was registered in the American Historical Association 1919's conference proceedings. As quoted by Peters, it went as the following: "We are not, of course, arguing here for a theory of scientific and technological determinism, such as Marx contended for. This would be an over-simplification of the historical process" (Ibid., p. 14).

In the beginning, the critique of technological determinism signified a "defense of human agency against overweening science" (Peters, 2017, p. 16) and, more broadly, against the exclusive causality of material or economic forces. Technological determinism was seen as an unacceptable answer to the question, "Is history being made by humans or by technologies?"

It was not a coincidence that the notion of techno-determinism emerged in the wake of Marxism. Marx himself can be seen as a determinist. Some of his thoughts sound classically techno-deterministic, for example: "The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill society with the industrial capitalist" (Marx, 1847, Chapter 2.1, Second Observation, Para 2). Not just techno-determinism but media determinism can be detected in the following Marx passage, written one century before Innis and McLuhan:

> Is Achilles possible when powder and shot have been invented? And is the *Iliad* possible at all when the printing press and even printing machines exist? Is it not inevitable that with the emergence of the press bar the singing and the telling and the muse cease, that is the conditions necessary for epic poetry disappear? (Marx, 1859, Appendix 1)

As a matter of fact, Marx had a number of intersections with McLuhan's main ideas. For example, the idea of media as extensions of human bodily faculties can be found in one of Marx's footnotes to the chapter "Machinery and Modern Industry" in *Capital*:

> Darwin has interested us in the history of Nature's Technology, i.e., in the formation of the organs of plants and animals, which organs serve as instruments of production for sustaining life. Does not the history of the productive organs of man, of organs that are the material basis of all social organisation, deserve equal attention? (Marx, 1867, V. 1, Ch. 15)

"The productive organs of man" in the quote can be interpreted as McLuhan's media – the "extensions of man." Stating that these organs (media) "are the material basis of all social organization" can be seen as a media-deterministic statement.

The parallels between Marxism and media ecology were reflected upon by media ecologist and Postman's student Paul Levinson in his *Human Replay*. He wrote that Marx's idea of money, commodities, land, and machinery as "'transformations' or extensions of a fundamental human productive force, or 'labor', precedes by nearly a century the explanation of communication technologies as extensions of human systems" (Levinson, 1978, p. 48).

Thus, the sensitivity towards techno-determinism emerged first as a reaction to the Marxist tradition but was later employed within the Marxist tradition to discern a "social" reading of Marxism from it's "technological" (Veblenian) interpretations. Throughout the 20th century, the academic perception of technological determinism evolved into labelling it automatically as a fallacy. According to British Marxist and activist for nuclear disarmament Edward Thompson, "As for the Bomb, that is a Thing, and a Thing cannot be a historical agent" (Thompson, 1980, p. 3). For a media ecologist, however, the Bomb certainly possesses a formative power of a global scale: people created the Bomb, and the Bomb created a new world order. A similar idea was presented in McLuhan's friend and colleague John Culkin's famous formula "We shape our tools, and thereafter our tools shape us" (Culkin, 1967, p. 52).

With McLuhan's rise to fame in the 1960s, as Peters wrote, "McLuhan rather than Veblen became its <techno-determinism> epitome" (Peters, 2017, p. 17). McLuhan's critics often condemned him for focusing on the technical aspects of media while disregarding the social factors behind media use. As Jill Lepore put it:

> To be fair, it's difficult not to be susceptible to technological determinism. We measure the very moments of our lives by computer-driven clocks and calendars that we keep in our pockets. I get why people think this way. Still, it's a pernicious fallacy. To believe that

> change is driven by technology, when technology is driven by humans, renders force and power invisible.[1]

Raymond Williams, one of the founders of cultural studies and also a renowned British Marxist, wrote that McLuhan "desocialised" all media operations. At the same time, he accused McLuhan of an ideological cover-up, suggesting that such concepts as retribalization or the global village projected images of society "welcomed by the 'media-men' of the existing institutions" (Williams, 1975 [1974], p. 127). Williams eventually even came to the conclusion that McLuhan's analysis *was* an ideology: "The initial formulation – 'the medium is the message' – was a simple formalism. The subsequent formulation – 'the medium is the massage'[2] – is a direct and functioning ideology" (Williams, 1975 [1974], p. 127).

Such criticism, implying that McLuhan's techno-determinism deliberately neglected ideological factors or even created an ideological screen in the guise of ideological agnosticism, was similar to the reception of McLuhan in the Soviet Union. For instance, Aleksandr Kukarkin in his 1978 *Bourgeois Mass Culture* (which delivered, perhaps, the first review of McLuhan's ideas to Soviet readers) wrote:

> The views of "electronic era oracle" M. McLuhan regarding various means of mass cultural communication exhibit an extreme and even extravagant approach in their efforts to define the driving forces of bourgeois mass culture entirely within the realm of technical means of information and through the differences on their impact on human senses. However, precisely because of their extremes and extravagance, these views serve well as a cumulative sample of the general bourgeois-idealistic tendency to de-ideologize the phenomenon of mass culture and deprive it of its true class nature. (Kukarkin, 1985 [1978], p. 49, the translation is mine)

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[1] Cohen, Benjamin R. (2017, 24 April). "Jill Lepore on the Challenge of Explaining Things," interview. *Public Books*. http://www.publicbooks.org/jill-lepore-on-the-challenge-of-explaining-things/.

[2] The title of Marshall McLuhan and graphic artist Quentin Fiore's experimentally designed 1967 book.

In the chapter titled “The theology of Technocratia,” Kukarkin formulates his verdict:

> The secret of McLuhan’s popularity is simple: McLuhan pleased the powerful, for all the spirit of his “works” is defined by the desire to prove by all means, even the most preposterous ones, that the famous thesis from the Communist Manifesto – “The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle!” – should be replaced by the thesis “The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of the struggle of mass media of communication.” (Kukarkin, 1985 [1978], p. 54, the translation is mine)

The morphological similarity between McLuhan’s view and Marxist historical determinism seemed to have been accurately captured. By linking socio-economic history to the development of the modes of production, which were based on the respective development of productive forces (with their respective technologies) and the relations of production, Marx and Marxists built up the logic of “historical materialism.” The same logic can be traced in the works of Innis and McLuhan – their views of history can also be described as “historical materialism.” If, for Marx, the development of technologies underlay the development of modes of production and therefore societal forms, for McLuhan, the development of technologies (McLuhan’s “media”) underlay the sensory and cultural patterns of human activities and, therefore, societal forms.

“The general charge against technological determinism is that it denies the fact of human agency, and suggests that technology is wrongly accorded agentic status,” writes Strate. “What is often ignored is that there are limits to human agency. There are biological limits to our freedom of action, and environmental constraints. It has long been understood that human beings cannot survive without the help of tools and methods of communication that allow for cooperation” (Strate, 2017, p. 36). As humans become increasingly dependent on technologies for survival and success, technologies more and more define both modes of perception and ways of action. Strate highlights that, technically, an individual can preserve agency over technology by choosing not to use it, for example. However, personal choice does not negate the environmental effect of technology, which is shaped by collective use. “I can choose not to own or use a gun, but I cannot live in a world without firearms, or nuclear weapons for that matter. I can choose not to own a car or fly on an airplane, but I cannot choose to live in a world without automobiles or jets flying overhead,” Strate writes (2017, pp. 36-37).

Thus, the question of agency shifts from individual to collective choice: some societies or cultures may reject certain innovations, but “competitive pressure among societies will generally work against any decision to avoid new technologies” (Strate, 2017, p. 37).

Another line of criticism of techno-determinism as a fallacy implies that techno-determinism is reductionism. It reduces complex historic and social processes to a single cause – the development of media. This monocausality can be described in the words of Northrop Frye, who defined determinism as a fallacy, “where a scholar with a special interest in geography or economics expresses that interest by the rhetorical device of putting his favorite subject into a causal relationship with whatever interests him less” (Frye, 1957, p. 6).

Deterministic bias may have been indeed intrinsic to media ecology, as this discipline sees everything through the media effects and looks for a media effect in everything. This rationalization and sometimes even justification of media determinism in media ecology brought a sort of “deterministic awareness” that became a part of media-ecological thinking. For example, Peters highlights the possible usefulness of the deterministic optic:

> Looking at the world’s complexity through a single variable — air, fire, water, God, ideas, money, sex, genes, media - can be immensely illuminating... A less single-minded Marx or Freud would not have been Marx or Freud. Intellectuals can be richly rewarded for their cultivated contortions. (Peters, 2017, p. 12)

Media ecologists developed a range of methodological and conceptual devices to deal both with the accusations of techno-determinism and the risks of techno-determinism itself. For example, Lance Strate (2017) points out that the issues of techno-determinism and reductionism can be dealt with through the system theory, in which single factors are considered capable of changing the system's equilibrium. The idea of system equilibrium provides an argument for dealing with "reductionism." In ecology, a single factor can disturb the equilibrium and cause significant changes in the entire system. After all, the main contemporary ecological narrative, global warming, is "techno-deterministic" – the global environmental change is caused by carbon dioxide, which is consistently released into the atmosphere because of human activity. In a sense, this illustrates the intertwining of technological factors and human activities in Culkin's way: "We shape our tools, and thereafter our tools shape us."

Within media-ecological reflection (see, for example: Strate, 2017), varying degrees of techno-determinism can be discerned based on the consideration of the human factor.

Soft techno-determinism accepts the socio-shaping power of media but recognizes human agency as a sufficiently powerful factor in media evolution. Neil Postman's position was rather soft-deterministic. Postman called for attenuating negative media effects and believed it was possible through education (See, for example, Postman's 1999 book *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century. How the Past Can Improve Our Future*.) Among contemporary media-ecological thinkers, Douglas Rushkoff with his project *Team Human*[1] represents this approach the best. In

[1] *Team Human* is the 2019 book by Rushkoff – https://rushkoff.com/books/team-human-book/ – and also the title of his podcast: https://www.teamhuman.fm/

an escalating confrontation between machines and humans, as Rushkoff implies, we are obviously on Team Human and therefore have to act accordingly.

Hard techno-determinism either sees no room for or has no interest in considering humans as capable of effectively resisting media. Humans can adjust themselves to but cannot reverse or overtake the environmental forces of media. The best available strategy is cooperation with the inevitable, as illustrated in McLuhan's "sailor metaphor," borrowed from Poe's short story *A Descent into the Maelstrom* (1841), in which sailors in a boat, captured by the Maelstrom, all died, except for one, who was awed by "a manifestation of God's power" but "became possessed with the keenest curiosity about the whirl itself." Descending along the whirling walls of water, the sailor noticed that some debris were remaining afloat. He abandoned the boat, grabbed hold of a floating barrel, and thus saved himself. As McLuhan put it,

> The sailor saved himself by studying the action of the whirlpool and by co-operating with it. <…> It was this amusement born of his rational detachment as a spectator of his own situation that gave him the thread which led him out of the Labyrinth. (McLuhan, 2005 [1951], p. 18)

In McLuhan's interpretation, Poe's sailor metaphor assigns respective powers to media and humans in their interaction. No one can overtake or reverse the Maelstrom. But emotional detachment, understanding, cooperation with the inevitable, and adapting to its pattern might help humans to adjust and survive.

Paradoxically, the necessity to deal with media determinism highlights the integrative role of media in social dynamics. Clay Shirky called media "the connective tissue of society" (Shirky, 2010, p. 51). They permeate, format, and connect other human activities. Many other social, political, and economic forces reveal themselves in or through media.

Moreover, with the growing role of communication technologies, the "explanatory" power of techno-determinism also grows. More and more social processes are becoming heavily reliant on media or even occur on media platforms and in the form of media activities. In these conditions, Peters, for example, even challenges the common academic disdain towards techno-determinism. He writes:

> In a moment when the meaning of technics is indisputably one of the most essential questions facing our species, do we really want to make it an intellectual misdemeanor to ask big questions about ''technology'' and its historical role, however ill-defined the category is? (Peters, 2017, p. 13.)

Peters particularly emphasizes how important the concept of techno-determinism can be to media studies, "whose task is to show that form, delivery, and control, as well as storage, transmission, and processing, all matter profoundly." In Peters' words, "If explanations attentive to the shaping role of technological mediation are ruled out, the raison d'être of the field is jeopardized" (Ibid., p. 13).

For this dissertation, the question of techno-determinism is not the end of the discussion but rather one of its frames. If media are "the connective tissue of society," then a focus on changes in media – and in the news media – helps to explore and explain changes in society. This research considers media determinism as environmental determinism, in which environmental factors, single or not, can be the environmental forces that define or disturb the environmental equilibrium.

Moreover, this dissertation research can contribute to the debate of media determinism by combining the methods of media ecology with the methods of the PEC. If, due to its media determinism, media ecology lacks consideration of human factors, power dynamics, and the interrelations of power and economy, then the PEC will provide these perspectives, as it has a different deterministic (economic) bias resulting in different blind spots, which media ecology, in turn, can cover (the effects of technologies).

CHAPTER 2: A HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE TECHNOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF NEWS PRODUCTION

This chapter briefly reviews the history of news production and news media from the perspectives of media ecology and the political economy of communication (PEC). The chapter argues that technological affordances, social demands, and political-economic conditions shaped two main modes of maintaining news production and discourse formation in the news media: payment *from below* and payment *from above*. The dominance of one of the modes predefines the basic principles of news production and discourse formation in the news media. Consequently, the shift in the balance of these two modes resulted in a change in the principles of news production and discourse formation, impacting social development in certain periods of history.

The press: inception. From *avvisi* to *gazettes*

The emergence of newspapers was technically predefined by the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in the 1440s. The printing press accelerated the production of old text forms, such as books, and led to the invention of new ones, such as newspapers, which emerged from other early forms of printed products, such as pamphlets and leaflets.

It is widely acknowledged among journalism scholars that the first newspaper appeared in the 1600s. *Relation aller Fürnemmen und gedenckwürdigen Historien* began to be printed in Strasbourg, in German, in 1605. The earliest preserved examples of the *Relation* are dated 1609.

That same year, another newspaper considered to be the first, *Avisa Relation oder Zeitung*, started being published.[1]

Some scholars, however, debate which publication should be considered the first newspaper. For example, Stanley Morison pointed out that those first German papers were rather newsbooks or pamphlets, while *Courante uyt Italien, Duytslandt, &c.*, which began circulating in Amsterdam in 1618, set the specific newspaper standards of format and news delivery used in the press ever since. *Courante* was printed in broadsheet format (a single *folio* sheet), while most other early newspapers were pamphlets printed in *quarto* format (Morison, 1980 [1954]). Therefore, *Courante* was the first real newspaper. For the industry, however, there is greater honour in being older, so the World Association of Newspapers counts newspaper history from Strasbourg's *Relation* (1605).[2]

Interestingly, however, forerunners of newspapers appeared almost a century before printed newspapers. Technically, the history of journalism and the news media could be traced back to the Venetian *avvisi*, which were known as early as the 1520s–30s. Despite being handwritten, *avvisi* owed their origin to the printing press, too. From a media-ecological standpoint, the new medium, the printing press, created the conditions for news production, even though the first news was not printed but written by hand. This environmental effect of the printing press, resulting in the emergence of handwritten news production, is evident in Elizabeth Eisenstein's analysis. In *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (1979), Eisenstein wrote that,

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[1] Norman, Jeremy. "Johan Carolus's 'Relation,' the First Printed European Newspaper or Newsbook." *HistoryofInformation.com*. https://www.historyofinformation.com/detail.php?id=34

[2] World Association of Newspapers. "Newspapers: 400 Years Young!" https://web.archive.org/web/20100310235015/http://www.wan-press.org/article6476.html

before printing, the copying of manuscripts kept scholars in early Medieval Europe extremely busy. She further noted that,

> This point is especially important when considering technical literature. The difficulty of making even one 'identical' copy of a significant technical work was such that the task could not be trusted to any hired hands. Men of learning had to engage in 'slavish copying' of tables, diagrams and unfamiliar terms. (Eisenstein, 1979, kl 1315).

There was nothing unusual about the fact that manuscript copying kept educated people busy. But then the printing press liberated them from this meaningless job, "producing a new situation which released time for observation and research" (Ibid., kl 1315). The release of tens of thousands of literati workhours created a new affordance: scholars started recording their thoughts and observations instead of copying old texts. They also started to share their observations with each other. This led to the formation of the so-called *Respublica literaria*, the Republic of Letters, the international network of scholars who looked for something 'noteworthy' to observe, record and report.

Since many scholars at the time were patronized by the monasteries and noble houses, *Respublica literaria* became a network of correspondents that supplied not only scholarly treatises but also religious, political, local, and global news to each other and to the noble houses and the clergy. "Noteworthy" turned in "newsworthy." The literati became the correspondents for the princes and archbishops (Mir, 2020). The correspondence among the literati led to the circulation of political and business newsletters. The political and commercial elites grew accustomed to reading news from other lands, liked it, and wanted more. To use the language of political economy, it was the initial supply of the newsletters that created the demand, not the other way around.

Such was the media and cultural environment in which the first commercial news production, Venetian *avvisi*, appeared. Being a central maritime and commercial hub in Medieval Europe, Venice was the source of a vast amount of commercial, naval, and political news that arrived with the captains of ships and the mail delivered by ships. Regular handwritten newsletters, *avvisi*, combined merchants' and captains' accounts of what they witnessed overseas with the literati's correspondence from foreign houses and abbeys, thereby creating valuable reports about affairs that could affect trade and politics. According to English bibliophile and publisher John Camden Hotten,

> To Venice is generally accredited the earliest newspaper. Its commercial position, in the early part of the sixteen century <...> rendered the dissemination of news necessary for the trade of the city. The ships of Venice then covered all the seas <...> The arrival of the ship in the Adriatic, the content of its cargo, the price of commodities, together with some account of the new island, its wonderful people and marvelous products, would form the staple of the news-sheet of the hour. This document was in manuscript, written in a legible hand, and copies were affixed here and there at different points of the city - the news-rooms - for the immediate perusal of those merchants who chose to pay a gazzetta[1] for the reading. (Hotten, 1874, p. 7-8)

Avvisi were composed and copied by scribes and sold in coffee shops, ports, or squares. In Venice, the *scrittorie*, initially the scribes' workshops, became the first news agencies sometime in the early 16th century. Historian Andreas Würgler (2012) even used the notion of "news dealers" when describing this early journalism. This is how Würgler described the sources of news and the proliferation of news business:

> Thanks to cheaper paper the news slips could not only be enclosed in diplomatic, but also in business and scholarly correspondence. Around 1530, Italian news dealers began to assemble the news sources from the diverse circulation streams and send them to others

[1] A Venetian low-valued coin of that time.

> on a regular basis for a fee. These *Avvisi* have been characterized as a kind of outsourcing of diplomatic news traffic, yet they were also interesting for wider audiences because they collected news from other sources, including business, intellectual, religious or private circles. Whoever had connections to the *Avvisi* writers or news dealers could have relevant weekly news sent to them for a set price.
>
> The *Avvisi* marked the transition to the commercialization of news distribution. In the 1550s, they also began to circulate among princes and the city elites of the old German Empire, and from the 1570s onwards they reached large parts of Europe. (Würgler, 2012)

Avvisi became a generic form of the new product in this format but soon gave way to the *gazette* – a word still used in many European countries today.

German historian of newspapers Ludwig Salomon in his *Allgemeine Geschichte des Zeitungswesens* (*General History of the Press*, 1907) pointed out that the noble houses, trade companies and municipalities paid significant honoraria to the authors of newsletters. As honoraria were most often paid on a regular basis, annually, this may be considered the first case of news subscription. The earnings of some authors were so significant that writing these newsletters became their profession.

Later on, such professionals created the bureaus, the first news agencies, in Nuremberg, Strasbourg and other political and trade hubs. The richest European merchant family at the time, the Fuggers, established their own news agency that covered international trade activity and all the events that could impact the family business. By the 17th century, the Fuggers' newsletters were so reputable that many politicians and businessmen subscribed to them. In addition, as Würgler pointed out, the professional approach of the Fuggers facilitated "the cultural transfer from Italian *Avvisi* to German newspapers" (Würgler, 2012).

The crucial feature of journalism at the time was that those who paid for the news were truly consumers of the news. In the very moment of its emergence, journalism was paid solely by readers. The first newssheets supplied nothing but news on a commercial basis. This was news paid *from below* – by the end user.

The emergence of early, pre-print journalism clearly illustrates the connection of media-ecological and political-economic factors. The freeing of scholars and scribes' time from copying by the printing press created the environmental affordance for news recording. News recording found a new form – a form of a new medium. In its turn, the supply of the news created an environment with growing political and economic demand for this new medium. This way, journalism as a profession and the news media as a product were born.

Journalism and the public sphere

However, early journalism did not last long as a purely commercial "news-retail" enterprise. The political power of the news was revealed almost immediately. According to Hotten,

> In 1536 the Venetian possessions and factories in the East were attacked by the Turks <...>. As may be imagined, the people of Venice were extremely anxious to hear the news from fleet; so the first regular monthly journal was established by the government to supply this information, and men were paid to read the particulars at the principal points of the city. But the heads of the Republic were fearful of the spread of the false news and opinions dangerous to their position, so they ordained that no sheets should be issued but such as were sanctioned by the Doge and his Council. (Hotten, 1874, p. 8-9)

It is notable that an account from 1874 regarding events of 1536 mirrors the issues of 2017, when "fake news" was named the "word of the year" by Collins Dictionary[1]. The network of alternative news was considered to supply "false news" that endangered the control of the

[1] "The Collins Word of the Year 2017 is... fake news." *The Collins Dictionary.* https://www.collinsdictionary.com/woty.

established institutions over the public discourse. The ruling class discussed (and applied) measures to regulate this alternative news environment by introducing mechanisms of content filtering and restricting “false news.”

Soon after the political influence of the new medium became evident, the noble houses took control over publishing and either funded newspapers directly or gave them permission to do business on selling news, which was nevertheless strictly controlled. This was a time when the monarchs, dukes, and barons redefined their domains in the religious, political and ideological struggle with the papacy and each other. As Hotten wrote,

> Religious disputations were the principal topics in the early part of the sixteenth century, and therefore we find the pamphlets of time – for these were the first news-sheets - mostly occupied with the arguments and anathemas of the reformers of Northern Europe, and the Catholics of the South. (Hotten, 1874, p. 6-7)

The printing press armed leaders and preachers (of which Martin Luther, of course, is the best example) with a new, advanced tool for disseminating propaganda. The papacy and the ruling houses needed to withstand this new challenge. Along with practising restrictions and censorship, they joined the game of publishing pamphlets and newspapers. These publications were licensed by the authorities and were expected to represent their views. They might be directly sponsored by the princes or may have earned money from selling copies and later advertising, but their very existence was only possible because the rulers granted permission for their existence and closely supervised their content. In Germany (the 1600s), France (1631), and Russia (1702), the first newspapers did not emerge from the demands of readers but were created by the decrees or under the patronage of the ruling houses (Mir, 2020).

This type of mass media gave rise to a different kind of journalism – political journalism. Political journalism produced news coverage that reflected and guarded the interests of the patron and rested on the respective business model. It did not sell news *downwards*; it sold agendas *upwards*. Political journalism was directly licensed by the authority, implicitly sanctioned by a political patron, or in some other way affiliated with a powerful political actor. In return, political journalism either received direct funding or was granted permission to do news business and sell the news. News retail, however, in this case, was not an independent business; it was governed by a political license.

The primary example of purely political journalism and the politically licensed business model was provided by *La Gazette* in France (since 1631), which laid out the standard of political publication for centuries. The paper was printed under a royal license and was supervised by Cardinal Richelieu. It served first and foremost as a means of agenda-setting for the monarchy in the ideological fight against the rebellious aristocracy in a turbulent time of religious disputes. As Elizabeth Eisenstein put it,

> In France the regency of Louis XIII saw the last meeting of the Estates General before 1789; it also saw the founding of the first royally sponsored newspaper in Europe. The replacement of the volatile assembly by the controlled weekly Gazette is a concurrence symptomatic of the importance Cardinal Richelieu attached to print in his state-building objectives. (Eisenstein, 1979, kl 2728)

At the same time, *La Gazette* was also a capitalist enterprise that used the royal-granted privilege of agenda-setting for profit. Presenting the role of the newspaper, its editor, Théophraste Renaudot, emphasized its practical utility for the readers: “the merchant will no longer seek business in a besieged or ruined city, nor the soldier employment in countries where there is no war” (as quoted in: Blair & Fitzgerald, 2015, Chapter 9).

Thus, historically, newsletters and newssheets appeared as a business instrument. They provided valuable information for merchants and noble houses. However, the power of the news supply was instantly recognized by those in power. The technology of news production was quickly taken under their control. Originally being rather a side-effect of news supply, political influence became the primary function of the press in the 17th to 19th centuries.

However, the exchange of commercial and political information in newsletters and newspapers remained a source of news that was important for business success. The intensification of information exchange between lands, markets, and investors led to increased wealth and the formation of a new social class: merchants and craftsmen turned into the bourgeoisie. This class began seeking power by discussing taxes, charters, and other public issues, thereby initiating what Jürgen Habermas described as the “public sphere.”

Habermas understood the “public sphere” as “a sphere which mediates between society and state, in which the public organizes itself as the bearer of public opinion.” An important starting point for the public sphere to appear was a divorce between the private interests of individuals and power interests of rulers. Habermas linked the rise of the bourgeois public sphere to the “disintegration of the feudal authorities (church, princes and nobility).”

The church, for example, lost the monopoly over personal choice when individuals’ relationship with religion began to be thought of as a “private matter.” This individualization of religion was enabled by printing the vernacular Bibles: ordinary believers started to read the Scripture and question the alignment of church practices with the sacred doctrines. Similarly, princely authority became separated from community interests when the public budget of lands and cities was separated “from the private household expenses of a ruler” (Habermas, 1974 [1964], p. 51). The political and economic self-awareness of local communities and individuals emerged out of this context. As a result of the disintegration of the feudal authorities, the economic and social behavior of individuals became unshackled from the regulations of the princely households. Individuals earned the freedom of economic and religious choice. Power and private individuals became separate social entities.

With their divorce, mediation between them became necessary. As Habermas pointed out, before that, when people and lands still belonged to the princes or the church, the authorities represented "their power 'before' the people, instead of for the people" (Ibid., p. 51). After authorities became separated from the "private matters" of individuals, both sides began to require representation of their interests before each other. The bourgeois public sphere, essentially, was a public body representing the collective "private matters" of individuals, of the newly emerged class of the bourgeoisie, to the power and religious authorities.

Habermas directly linked the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere to journalism:

> The bourgeois public sphere could be understood as the sphere of private individuals assembled into a public body, which almost immediately laid claim to the officially regulated "intellectual newspapers" for use against the public authority itself. In those newspapers, and in moralistic and critical journals, they debated that public authority on the general rules of social intercourse in their fundamentally privatized yet publicly relevant sphere of labor and commodity exchange. (Habermas, 1974 [1964], p. 52)

The press, or at least a part of the press, became a deliverer of the new class's will. The simultaneous emerging and parallel development of the media and the bourgeois public sphere was mutually predefined. The evolution of the media as an instrument of commercial and political communication contributed to the conditions that led to the formation of modern capitalist society, both in its economic and political dimensions. Habermas pointed out that early newssheets that were "mere compilations of notices" turned into daily political newspapers in the second half of the 18th century. In other words, the early commercial newssheets shaped agendas only through the set of news, while the later political papers came with their own agendas. In his Encyclopedia Article on "Public Sphere," Habermas quoted Karl Bücher, a German economist:

> "Newspapers changed from mere institutions for the publication of news into bearers and leaders of public opinion – weapons of party politics. This transformed the newspaper business. A new element emerged between the gathering and the publication of news: the editorial staff. But for the newspaper publisher it meant that he changed from a vendor of recent news to a dealer in public opinion." (As quoted in: Habermas, 1974 [1964], p. 53)

The sequence of the bourgeois and then socialist revolutions was catered to by a vast number of political newspapers from the late 18th century through the 19th century. Each political faction mandated the establishment of a press organ to mobilize its followers and ensure the realization of its "true ideals." Habermas noted that in the revolutionary year of 1848, over 200 journals were established in Paris between February and May alone (Ibid., 53). As a result, political journalism took on its complete form, evolving alongside the party system, representative democracy, and the class struggle.

Technological advancements in printing and the emergence of modern journalism

In the course of the 19th century, in England, France, Germany, and the United States, the transformation began from "a journalism of conviction to one of commerce," as Habermas characterized it. He did not specify the reasons for this transformation – and this is the common blind spot of the economic bias of the PEC. The transformation was to a significant degree enabled by the technological developments of printing:

- 1814: the introduction of the cylinder press, which was powered by a steam engine that printed on both sides of the paper sheet and ran four times faster than the previous flatbed press;

- 1843: the introduction of the rotary press, which was able to print millions of copies in a single day;
- 1844: the introduction of pulp-based paper (instead of the more expensive cotton-based paper); and
- 1884: the introduction of the linotype machine, which allowed the casting of entire lines instead of letter-by-letter typesetting.

New technological opportunities created new affordances and "invited" new business models for news production and new formats of journalism. This series of inventions significantly reduced the production cost of books and newspapers and dramatically increased their speed of production. The advent of quickly printed, cheap newspapers made large-scale circulation not only possible but also inevitable. This spurred major structural changes in the production of the printed press, facilitating the emergence of the penny press and the labor press. With the proliferation of cheaper and more affordable newspapers, journalism, once again, attempted to sell news to the end user rather than agendas to the elites.

The penny press emerged in the USA in the 1830s. These papers were sold for only one cent, compared to six cents for regular old newspapers (Kaplan, 2013, p. 6). They represented a completely different business model. The cheaper production lowered the cost to enter the newspaper market. "Newspapers' prices were dropping, yet publishers did not require extensive capital to reach and hold a readership," as Kaplan wrote (Ibid., p. 7). Reader revenue drove the development of the mass newspapers, and the growing circulation started attracting advertisers.

The switch in the media's business model from dependence on political parties to dependence on the audience changed the nature of media coverage. Previously, newspapers had been partisan propaganda outlets funded by political parties or politicians or through fundraising among political activists (such was, for instance, Marx and Engels' *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in 1848). As journalism historian Barbara Friedman stated[1], "Political parties considered newspapers as extensions of what they did. They were tools. The point was to discredit and even savage the opponent with falsehoods." The penny press "revolutionized content by declaring their independence from political parties and concentrating on news rather than opinion" (Nerone, 1987, p. 378). As Robert Park put it in his "Natural history of newspapers," "Party loyalty ceased to be a virtue" (Park, 1923, p. 284).

Kaplan pointed out that the economic transformation of the daily paper from partisanship to appealing to the broader masses changed papers' political identity and rhetoric. Simply put, the new business model changed journalism. "No longer dependent upon party subsidies but instead driven by the profits to be gained from large circulation and advertising," wrote Kaplan, "<Papers> … embraced political independence, even objectivity. Papers ceased to address their audience in political terms – neither as citizens, nor as fellow partisans – but instead as consumers" (Kaplan, 2013, p.13).

Thus, the penny press introduced a new business model that was independent from political funding and political supervision and focused on the interests of the masses. Newspapers became the *mass* media. The tabloids and yellow press originated from this type of journalism. Furthermore, investigative journalism was also rooted in the penny press. Thanks to the penny press (and cheaper newspaper production), journalism, in general, learnt to pay more attention to the interests of the audience it served, not to patrons.

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[1] Seidenberg, Steven. (2017, July 1). "Fake news has long held a role in American history." *ABA Journal*. http://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/history_fake_news

Catering to the tastes of the crowd for better copy sales, the penny press directed much of its attention toward criminal stories. The increased interest in crime prompted journalists to acquire the methods and investigative mindset of the police and private detectives. The first investigative journalists were driven not so much by social consciousness but by market competition, which compelled them to dig deeper to uncover sensational cases and atrocities hidden from the public.

With the further growth of newsrooms' financial independence and urban-class demand for social justice, the principle of investigative journalism turned toward social issues and conflicts. Thus appeared the muckraking journalism of the Progressive Era, spearheaded by Ida Tarbell and her investigation of the most powerful tycoons, the Rockefellers, with their Standard Oil (1902–1904). Starting with appealing to the crowd, sensational journalism developed to expose the powerful and hold authorities accountable, giving birth to such phenomena as accountability journalism and watchdog journalism in the 20th century.

The penny press also marked the final transition of news production from a shop-based professional activity to an industrial business. The mass media became a 'culture industry', perhaps the first of its kind, precisely in the sense that Horkheimer and Adorno (1947) attributed to that concept: not merely an ideological service mechanism but a sustainable capitalist industry in its own right.

The cost reduction and increased affordability of production also altered the spectrum of the political affiliation of the press. No longer was the press solely serving the elites and professional politicians. The lower prices made it possible to produce newspapers for workers. The labour press emerged and flourished in the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century.

Thus, the development of journalism and the news media can be represented in large historical patterns combining media-ecological and political-economic views. Journalism first appeared in the form of handwritten Venetian *avvisi* as a byproduct of the printing press, even before the first newspapers were printed, because the printing press freed the workhours of the literati to be redistributed from manuscript copying to event recording, and therefore prepared the societal conditions needed for regular news to appear. The further development of the news media and journalism can be represented in the following three stages (Mir, 2020).

1. Early commercial journalism grew out of Venetian *avvisi* in the 16th to early 17th centuries. The funding model for this type of journalism was news retail: selling news to news consumers, initially nobles, clergy and merchants and then the general public. This stage signified the emergence of the profession; yet, this form of journalism was very short-lived, as the ruling elites immediately recognized the political power of news and seized control.

2. The political journalism of the religious, bourgeois and then labor struggle in the 17th to 19th centuries. Initially employed by princes and archbishops for improved governance, newspapers evolved into a tool of political struggle, playing a significant role in facilitating revolutions – whether religious, bourgeois, or proletarian. From this point forward, newspapers also began serving as a media platform for the public sphere in the Habermasian sense.

3. The market-driven news media from the second half of the 19th century until the internet. The technological innovations of the 19th century drastically reduced newspaper production costs, transforming them into a genuinely industrial mass product. Subsequently, their commercial success and political influence depended not solely on engagement with the privileged classes but also on their affordability to the masses. Different funding models became possible: not only political sponsorship but also mass copy sale, advertising, and different combinations of them. In addition to the elites' political newspapers, different types of news media emerged, such as the penny press, the labour press, the yellow press, the business press, and all possible types of press, defined by the social-demographic and consumerist characteristics of their audience.

Furthermore, the new technology of mass communication led to the emergence of new types of non-literary and therefore even 'more mass' mass media, such as radio and TV. In this period, the public service provided by journalism was based on its capacity to appeal to both the elites and the masses through attractive news content or direct political messaging. On a bigger scale, the emergence and development of journalism has been linked to a large and turbulent historical period, which is framed as the Modern Age in history, as capitalism in political economy, and as the Gutenberg era (or the print era) in culture.

Two types of journalism: paid *from below* and paid *from above*

This section provides an analysis of two main forms of funding journalism that emerged in the course of the development of news production.

Historically, commercial journalism sold news to readers, while political journalism sold agendas to patrons. Journalism was born to sell news *downward*, to the end user – a reader. However, when the political power of the news was recognized, journalism switched to selling agendas *upwards* (while selling news *downwards*, to readers, might remain a side business). The cycle of moving from selling news to the public to selling agenda to the elites repeated after each technological innovation that made news production and delivery more affordable.

For the purposes of further analysis, the models of funding journalism are grouped into two main types: **Journalism paid *from below* by those who want to read news or paid *from***

***above* by those who want others to read news.** These two opposing types, blended in various proportions, have guided discourse production in journalism over its 500-year history – they impacted the representation of reality in journalism. Serving its readers, commercial journalism sought to portray the *world-as-it-is*. Serving its patrons, political journalism sought to picture the *world-as-it-should-be*.

Even though news-selling journalism sold news *downwards* to the readers and agenda-selling journalism sold agendas *upwards* to the patrons, they both produced public discourses organized by some agenda. But agenda in news-selling journalism, such as the very first Venetian *avvisi*, was always a byproduct while the news was its primary commodity. The payer – the news consumer – paid for the news to receive guidance regarding business conditions and political risks. The fact that this news, through its selection and tone, influenced certain agendas, was an unintended consequence rather than the deliberate intention of the news producer.

On the contrary, agenda-selling journalism (i.e. paid *from above*) focused directly and deliberately on agenda as its primary product. The news was used to attract the audience. Herman called this effort of audience attraction a "supportive selling environment" (Herman, 2000, p. 102). However, Smythe showed that attracting audiences for selling them goods can also be seen as selling audiences to advertisers (Smythe, 2012 [1981]). Hence, the audience, not news, becomes a commodity for this business model. Therefore, agenda-selling journalism sold upward agendas *and/or* audiences. Whether those buyers were political patrons or advertisers, they all paid for journalism *from above*.

These two opposite models of funding also had different regulations in terms of discourse formation. On the one hand, as news-selling journalism produced news and was paid for news directly by the consumer of the news, *from below*, it was regulated by market forces driven by the invisible hand of the market (supply-demand) and the reputation of media brands. On the other hand, agenda-selling journalism was paid *from above* and was therefore regulated by the political needs of its patrons or the needs of advertisers for appropriate contexts.

Agenda-selling journalism is inevitably more complex. It can only succeed in selling agendas *upwards* if and when the readers engage with its product. This apparent restriction actually creates an additional business opportunity – it enables agenda-selling journalism to produce a commodity of the co called "double conversion": the product of agenda-selling journalism must be sold *upwards* to the sponsors (agenda, advertising) and can also be sold *downwards* to the readers (news, infotainment).

Generally, informing people has always been seen as the foundation, justification, and social mission of media business. According to this view, journalism is supposed to supply news; however, this has never occurred in its pure form. Even journalism that was intended to be paid *from below* historically always ended up being paid (or controlled otherwise) *from above*.

Identifying a purely *news* business, or the informing function of journalism, would seem straightforward. Such journalism would be primarily or exclusively funded *from below*, by readers who consume news to stay informed about current events for their needs or out of curiosity. The role of the payer is crucial for defining the function of journalism and the mechanisms of discourse formation.

News itself is a paradoxical commodity. It always 'needs' to be read; it is always in some kind of demand *from below*. But there is always someone *from above* who wants to pay for certain news to be delivered to the public. And those *from above* – those in power or advertisers – want to pay to deliver the right news much more than those *from below* are willing and able to pay to receive news. The value of news as a carrier for agendas and advertisements always turns out to be much higher than the value of news as a commodity in its own right. As a result, the audience always surrenders the right to pay for news to those *from above*. The elites and advertisers reorganize journalism into a subsidized news service in which news becomes an attraction for the audience to gather and consume intended political or commercial messages *from above*.

The pay *from above* takes over the pay *from below* also because of its higher economic efficiency for the media. Transaction costs in news retail are higher than those in selling agendas or audiences, given that the latter is a wholesaling business. Collecting a small fee from the widespread audience requires additional costly infrastructure, while the wholesaling of the audience and/or agenda to a smaller number of big payers is much more cost-efficient.

This business predisposition historically tended to corrupt journalism. There was always someone *from above* who came and forced or seduced the news media to sell the audience *upwards*, not news *downwards.* First, these were political patrons, then political parties, then advertisers. The physically dispersed nature of the audience, the high cost of retail money collection, the political and financial persuasiveness of the elites, and the organizational specificity of news business tended to turn journalism, throughout its history, into being predominantly paid *from above*.

By the end of the 19th century, the economy in general moved towards industrial capitalism with its serial production and mass-market consumerist society. The news media at the time supplied a serial product, too. With a lower cost of production, growing circulation, and expanding social-demographic reach, the news media, once again, almost turned into a news business selling news downwards; however, industrial capitalism needed advertising as an information service for the better marketing of serial products. The news media, once again, were “seduced” in being paid *from above* rather than *from below*. This time, there were advertisers who became this new payer *from above*. The affiliation of the news media with the elites was reengineered through advertising money.

In the American news media, gross advertising income between 1870–1880 increased from 40% to more than 50%, subsequently rising to 60–70% by the 1900s, a level at which it remained throughout the twentieth century (Kaplan, 2013, p. 12).

From the combined view of media ecology and the PEC, it can be said that technological development first created an ecological niche favourable for the news to be paid *from below*, by readers. But then the new opportunities for the mass delivery of news invariably prompted socio-economic factors that reshaped the market landscape, making it advantageous for news to be funded *from above* – as a conduit for delivering specific agendas or advertising to readers.

In the course of the 20th century, the model of news production paid *from below* was eventually suppressed or encompassed by the more complex model of payment *from above* by advertisers. The new, purely commercial form of the media’s dependence on the elites was formed, which was later described by Herman and Chomsky as the Propaganda Model (1988). The business of the news media based on advertising has proven to be both economically successful and politically efficient. By the end of the 20th century, the news media had attained prosperity on par with the wealthiest capitalist industries, and journalists collectively wielded influence akin to that of tycoons, corporations, political parties, and governments.

CHAPTER 3: BUSINESS MODELS OF NEWS PRODUCTION AND THEIR EFFECT ON DISCOURSE FORMATION

This chapter explores patterns in the relationships between discourse formation and the main types of funding journalism – payment *from above*, represented in the 20th century mostly by the advertising model, and payment *from below*, represented by revenue earned from the audience through newsstand sales and subscriptions.

News production: inducing demand, forming the audience

This section proceeds from the premise that news production, as a capitalist production of a commodity with predominantly symbolic value, induces demand for its consumption and, through this demand, shapes the audience. The media select certain topics presumed to be of interest to the audience, thereby attracting a specific audience and cultivating habits among them to read certain news and stories. Maintaining audience interest and loyalty is crucial for the news media as a business. Without it, they would not succeed, regardless of the product they really sell – whether it's news *downward* or agendas/audience *upward*.

The capitalist conditions, in which supply needs to induce demand, were first reflected upon by Jean Baudrillard in the 1970s. When capitalist production saturated the market with goods and services, the focus of production started shifting from material utility towards symbolic value. "For a long time, capital had only to produce goods; consumption ran by itself...," wrote Baudrillard in 1978. "Today it is necessary to produce consumers, to produce demand, and this production is infinitely more costly than that of goods." Baudrillard stated that this tendency also applied to the production of meaning. He wrote that, No longer is meaning in short supply, it is produced everywhere, in ever increasing quantities – it is demand which is weakening. And it is the production of this demand for meaning which has become crucial for the system. (Baudrillard, 1983 [1978], p. 27)

Smythe stated that “the Consciousness Industry” made “monopoly capitalism function through demand management (advertising, marketing, and mass media)” (Smythe, 2012 [1981], p. 185). Advertising and marketing serve as the tools of developed capitalism to induce demand for its products among consumers. What advertising and marketing do for “other” industries, journalism has been doing for itself since its inception. The news media have always induced the demand for their own product. Readers of the 16th century purchased the Venetian *avvisi* because they had read them and liked the idea of the news or benefitted from its practical utility in their business or political affairs. The uniqueness of journalism, and possibly of all cultural industries, is the capability of its product to induce the demand for the next round of consumption. Each act of news consumption is a promo sample for the next act of news consumption.

Unlike a personally shared business or political insight, news is fundamentally public and typically consumed with the understanding that others have either just learned or may learn the same information. Consuming news necessitates awareness of its significance to others, to the public at large. The symbolic value of news is always preconditioned by this awareness, which also reflects the collective experience of previous news consumption. If, as Elisabeth Eisenstein suggested, printing itself was a “forerunner” of the industrial mode of production (Eisenstein, 1979, p. 31) and printed newspapers historically were the first enterprises of industrial capitalism, then journalism epitomizes capitalism’s capacity to induce demand. There is no need in journalism for those who do not know what it is. The producers of the media aim at stimulating appetite, not satisfying it. Success in the media is measured not by informing the audience but by readers’ increasing return for the next supply.

The discursive effect of funding by readers

This section advances a thesis that funding news production through readers creates an affordance that pushes news coverage towards negativity.

"Real news is bad news – bad news about somebody, or bad news for somebody," wrote McLuhan in *Understanding Media* (McLuhan, 1994 [1964], p. 222). The tendency of the media, particularly popular media and tabloids, to exaggerate "doom and gloom" is well known and described by the term "negativity bias." An old reporter's saying states "It leads if it bleeds."

Sensationalism, along with a focus on scandals and criminal news, gained prominence in journalism during the era of the penny press and the yellow press in the latter half of the 19th century. This shift occurred as printing costs decreased, leading newspapers to transition from reliance on political funding to generating revenue through copy sales to readers. The invisible hand of street copy sales compelled newsrooms to prioritize content and coverage that would agitate readers. Thus, the nexus between reader funding and negative bias in the media first manifested.

The inclination of journalists to dramatize or darken reality can be examined through behavioral economics. In 1979, economists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky published their study "Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision under Risk," which shed light on the subliminal evaluation of risks in decision making. According to Kahneman and Tversky, people are not necessarily rational in their decision making, as was seen in the then-dominant "expected utility theory" (the 1960–70s). Kahneman & Tversky developed an alternative theory of choice according to which people irrationally weigh the probability of potential losses and potential gains. As they put it, "(T)he value function is defined on deviations from the reference point;

generally concave for gains and commonly convex for losses; steeper for losses than for gains" (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979, p. 279).

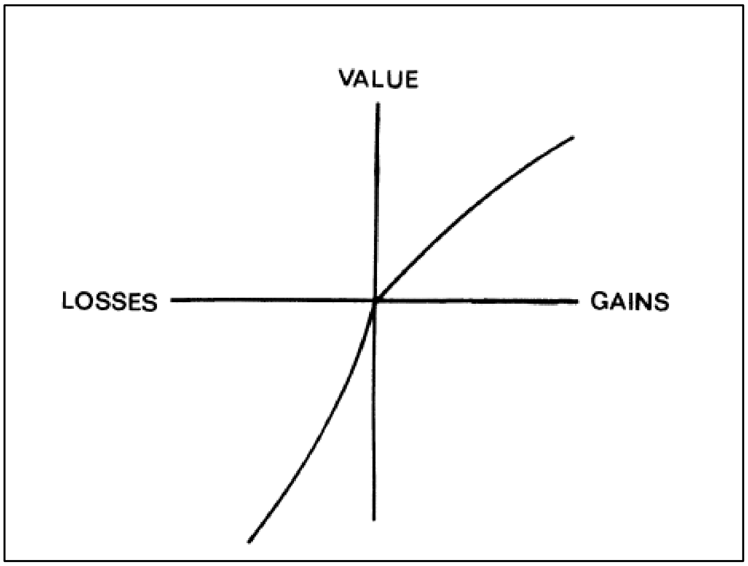

Figure 4. The value function on the scale of gains and losses, according to the Prospect Theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979, p. 279).

This value function (Figure 4) illustrates that people would prefer to avoid losses rather than acquire equivalent gains. To put it simply, it is better not to lose $5 than to find $5. Thus, the human attitude toward potential losses and potential gains is asymmetrical: losses outweigh gains. The probability of losses affects decision making (risk taking) more heavily than the same probability of gains. "A salient characteristic of attitudes to changes in welfare is that losses loom larger than gains," as Kahneman and Tversky put it (Ibid., p. 279).

This observation can have a corollary: in terms of survival (risk-taking), negative news is more valuable than positive news. Therefore, guided by the invisible hand of the market, the media learned to capitalize on people's inclination to pay more attention to negative news. In their pursuit of reader attention, the media are naturally inclined toward negativity. Balancing this "natural" predisposition requires some systemic counterweights or deliberate, artificial counter efforts. Advertising, which necessitates a favourable context for brands and goods, served as one of those natural counterweights. Another was reputational: an editor's ambition to build a respectable media brand might mitigate negativity bias.

Some people in the media industry did indeed attempt to resist the negativity bias by exerting control over the forces driving negativity and sensationalism in news reporting. For instance, there have been numerous attempts to consciously foster "constructiveness" as a countermeasure to negativity in journalism. The concept of "constructive journalism" has directly aimed to confront the negativity bias in the news media. "Constructive journalism" covers the utmost pressing social issues, but with a focus on solutions, progress, and positive tendencies. A special professional educational project, the Solutions Journalism Network, was launched in 2012. The project aimed to "train and connect journalists to cover what's missing in today's news: how people are responding to problems." It stated that "We're working to bring solutions journalism to every newsroom worldwide."[1]

British magazine *Positive News* (daily online and print quarterly) intended to focus on "good journalism about the good things that are happening." The magazine's manifesto declared that,

> When much of the media is full of doom and gloom, instead *Positive News* is the first media organization in the world that is dedicated to quality, independent reporting about what's going right.

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[1] The Solutions Journalism Network. https://www.solutionsjournalism.org/

We are pioneers of 'constructive journalism' – a new approach in the media, which is about rigorous and relevant journalism that is focused on progress, possibility, and solutions. [1]

In 2018, *Cornwall Live*, a local British news site, "invested in positive news" by launching the Happiness Project with a happiness correspondent.[2] *The Better India* started as a side-project blog in 2009 but turned into a foundation-funded full-size media outlet with 27 full-time staffers by 2018.[3]

The aim to counteract the inherent negative bias results in journalism with an added moral value – essentially, with an agenda. This means that this kind of journalism sells not news but agenda and therefore has to be paid *from above*. It needs support from those who share such a view of journalism. Deliberate positivity in journalism can exist, but only when paid *from above*, either by advertisers, unknowingly, or by sponsors and supporters of the cause. These are artificial, unnatural conditions for news production. If news supply is left to be driven by pure news demand, it will likely lean toward negativity.

A case from my personal professional connections can even assist in evaluating the added value of negativity in news production – and, consequently, the value that would be lost and would need to be compensated for if the negativity bias were eliminated through deliberate efforts. In 2014, the Russian local news website *City Reporter* from my native town Rostov-on-Don conducted an experiment. Journalists decided to publish only good news for one day. Even

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[1] *Positive News*. About. https://www.positive.news/about/

[2] Tobitt, Charlotte. (2018, March 13). "Cornwall Live invests in 'positive news' by introducing happiness correspondent." *PressGazette*. https://www.pressgazette.co.uk/cornwall-live-invests-in-positive-news-by-introducing-happiness-correspondent/

[3] Wang, Shan. (2018, March 7). "The Better India will show you all the positive news, on all the channels you might want it." *NiemanLab*. https://www.niemanlab.org/2018/03/the-better-india-will-show-you-all-the-positive-news-on-all-the-channels-you-might-want-it/

when they got a disturbing tip (such as an alert about a possible bomb at the local railroad station), they reworked it into calming news (the bomb was not confirmed) instead of scaring readers through clickbait about the bomb, as any “normal” news outlet would do.

According to deputy editor Victoria Nekrasova, “We looked at events, excluded homicides and catastrophes, and put positive headlines. Unfortunately, such news was not popular” (personal communication). As a result, their website traffic plummeted that day to 30% of its regular level.

Perhaps, with some constructive-journalism techniques of attention attraction, they would have performed better. But what the case shows is clear: the mechanically introduced filter of positivity momentarily ruined this website’s traffic. This 70% decline in traffic is an approximate price to pay for being deliberately positive in news supply. The numbers can be different, of course; also important is that this is the internet with its fluctuating traffic. But the pattern is illustrated rather correctly: the deliberate efforts of positivity tend to diminish the negativity value of the news, thus conflicting with Tversky-Kahneman’s revelation about the higher value of negativity (for which Kahneman was awarded the 2002 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences).

The only way to compensate for the natural environmental negativity bias of the media is to proclaim a mission and sell it or to give control over newsroom autonomy to an outside payer, such as advertisers, philanthropy foundations, or other sponsors. External efforts are needed to correct the natural predisposition of the news demand and supply towards negativity. Otherwise, the natural “behavior” of readership/traffic tends to steer away from a deliberately “socially constructed” positive agenda.

The discursive effect of ad-funding in the news media

This section advances the thesis that advertising funding tends to "beatify" news coverage and protect the established order of things in society.

In describing the relations between the media and advertisers at the end of the 20th century, Edward Herman wrote that the media "are funded largely by advertisers who are also profit-seeking entities, and who want their advertisements to appear in a supportive selling environment" (Herman, 2000, p. 102).

The capacity of advertising to influence the content of the carrier has long been recognized. The general public commonly believed that advertisers – corporations – dictated to journalists what to write. The media were even called the "corporate media," the media representing the interests of capitalist corporations. However, the direct control of newsroom policy from outside has never been the case in free-market and democratic countries, except for some anecdotal occasions. Other mechanisms were at work, and they were employed at the systemic level. The ideas of allocative control by Graham Murdock along with Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman's Propaganda Model are especially insightful in exploring the links between operational business modes of the news media and the news they produce.

As Murdock showed, the allocative control of ad money was capable of redirecting the development of entire cultural industries. The popular post-WWII genre of TV drama focusing on pressing social issues with working-class characters in the spotlight was effectively discontinued by TV producers because advertisers favoured action-adventure TV series featuring glamorous characters in luxurious settings, with minimal complex dialogue and a very "supportive selling environment" (Herman) for ads.

Another example, taken from Christopher R. Martin's 2019 book *No Longer Newsworthy: How the Mainstream Media Abandoned the Working Class*, mentioned in Chapter 1, shows an even more striking effect of ad money's allocative control at the scale of the entire segment of the news media market. Working-class newspapers inherited the tradition of the 19th-century political press and penny press – they focused on social issues of the political class and at the same time were paid by readers. They were popular and influential until the mid-20th century. But the development of mass market products, supported by advertising, favoured another type of the press that was consumerist-oriented and aimed at a wider, politically disengaged, and more affluent audience. Ad money did not attack working-class newspapers – it simply ignored them. Readers also did not stop reading working-class papers. But these papers were disadvantaged by the environment with growth in advertising that allowed the accelerated development of a different type of media. Working-class papers have almost entirely gone extinct. Those that continued to be published were generally sustained by subsidies from unions or donations, i.e., through payment *from above*.

This structural impact of advertising was the focus of Herman and Chomsky's 1988 book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. As they explained,

> Before advertising became prominent, the price of a newspaper had to cover the costs of doing business. With the growth of advertising, papers that attracted ads could afford a copy price well below production costs. This put papers lacking in advertising at a serious disadvantage: their prices would tend to be higher, curtailing sales… For this reason, an advertising-based system will tend to drive out of existence or into marginality the media companies and types that depend on revenue from sales alone. (Herman and Chomsky, 2002 [1988], p. 14)

As a result, "Working-class and radical media also suffer from the political discrimination of advertisers," concluded Herman and Chomsky. "Political discrimination is structured into advertising allocations by the stress on people with money to buy" (Ibid., p. 16).

As Murdock pointed out, advertising also impacted the news coverage in "quality" papers. They competed for ad money by offering advertisers an "editorial environment" conducive to their products. Specifically, he mentioned that personal investment advertising increased the media's tolerance, and even appetite, for a "misleading picture of modern capital and the corporate economy" (Murdock, 1982, p. 143). "Personal finance news also began its ascendancy in the 1970s. The focus was on individualism…," confirmed Martin.[1] The middle-class audience learned that they have "savings," and these "savings" should be invested in financial markets. Not only did this setting serve the development of financial capitalism, but it also invisibly held the public back from participating in protest movements and ensured political stability, implies Martin.

The market force – the media's desire to attract advertising money – had both political and economic implications, as it changed the structure of the media market along with the structure of the social, demographic, and political interests represented by and in the news media. The advertising-based news media focused on creating content that was attractive to the buying audience desired by advertisers. The audience received a picture of the world in which controversies and social issues were suppressed and consumerist ideals of a wealthier and happier life were emphasized. The media started competing for advertisers' favour by presenting

[1] Martin, Christopher R. (2019, August 27). "How writing off the working class has hurt the mainstream media." *Nieman Reports*. https://niemanreports.org/articles/how-writing-off-the-working-class-has-hurt-the-mainstream-media/.

their audience as affluent and prone to buying goods and services; moreover, they attracted and shaped such an audience to become a valuable commodity on the advertising market. The interests of affluent, able, educated, middle-class urbanites were prioritized in discourse formation in order to attract, retain, and sell them to advertisers (Martin, 2019; Mir, 2020).

Thus, not only did the allocative control of advertising over discourse formation in the mass media beautify reality, as it also shaped both the habits of media consumption and the audience itself. This environmental "media engineering" became social engineering – through shaping the audiences and their habits, it formed society. The growth of consumerism amid the decline of political activity of the masses was broadly recognized in the PEC in the late 20th century specifically in connection with advertising funding of the mass media. In 1999, Robert McChesney published the book *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times*, in which he introduced the "Media/Democracy Paradox." He stated that the media formally assumed "a central role in providing institutional basis for having an informed and participating citizenry," but in fact, they thrived while failing real democracy. Despite mass communication permeating everywhere, "our era is increasingly depoliticized," he wrote. "Traditional notions of civic and political involvement have shriveled. Political participation (elections 1998) fell to one-third of eligible voters" (McChesney, 2015 [1999], p. 2).

This was caused in no small part by the media, as McChesney suggested, specifically by corporate control, the concentration of media ownership, profit-seeking, and advertising. These structural settings brought the "hypercommercialism and denigration of journalism and public service." He concluded that,

> The media have become a significant anti-democratic force in the United States and, to varying degrees, world-wide. The wealthier and more powerful the corporate media giants

> have become, the poorer the prospects for participatory democracy. (McChesney, 2015 [1999], p. 2)

This was what he called the “Media/Democracy Paradox”: as the media grew rich, democracy became poor. Strongly critical about the commercial restraints on journalism, McChesney claimed that professional standards could not withstand corporate pressure because of a kind of “Eleventh Commandment” in the commercial news media: “Thou Shalt Not Cover Big Local Companies and Billionaires Critically” (McChesney, 2015 [1999], p. xvii).

The Herman-Chomsky diagnosis of the news media as an institution of “manufacturing consent” also implied the effects of advertising. Advertising is one the “filters” of the Propaganda Model, the second one in order and, supposedly, in significance (though Herman and Chomsky rejected the idea that the “filters” were ranked by their importance). Along with corporate ownership, profit-seeking, news sourcing, flak (negative feedback from influential actors), and anticommunism, advertising made the American and, by extension, any free-market-country news media select topics and news to better accommodate the needs of the ruling capitalist elites.

Herman and Chomsky also highlight that it was not a media-boss or an advertising counteragent who dictated what newsrooms could tell or write. It was an environment that afforded certain business models and a business model that preselected certain views, people, and content. The contrarian news choices still could easily be made by news professionals. But these choices would go against the environmental affordances and would be eventually outweighed by other choices that were afforded – and favoured – by the environment.

The free-market nature of skewing media coverage towards “manufacturing consent” in the news media fits well with the idea Dallas Smythe expressed at about the same time in his paper "On the audience commodity and its work" (1981). Smythe described a two-part function of media. He wrote:

> The answer <…> to the question, what is the principal function which the commercial mass media perform for the capitalist system was essentially to set an agenda for the production of consciousness with two mutually reinforcing objectives: (1) to mass market the mass-produced consumer goods and services generated by monopoly capitalism by using audience power to accomplish this end; (2) to mass market legitimacy of the state and its strategic and tactical policies and actions, such as election of government officers, military thrusts against states which show signs of moving toward socialism (Vietnam, Korea, Cuba, Chile, Dominican Republic, etc.), and policies against youthful dissent. (Smythe, 2012 [1981], p. 187)

Herman and Chomsky's ideas resonated with this view. They claimed that their PM "traces the routes by which money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002 [1988], p. 2).

If the negativity bias in news coverage is tied to the dependence of the media on readers, then the dependence of the media on advertisers can be characterized as the "positivity bias." McLuhan's above-mentioned one-liner "Real news is bad news" had an extension in *Understanding Media*: "Ads are news. What is wrong with them is that they are always good news" (McLuhan, 1964. p. 222).

The "positivity bias" of advertising funding became especially evident in the digital era, when the allocative control of ad money became immediate and increasingly more automatized (through ad-selling algorithms). Digital technologies exposed the discourse-forming power of advertising at a scale unavailable for observation of the political economists in the 20th century.

In February 2017, the London *Times* reported that the commercials of hundreds of large companies, universities, and charities, including Mercedes-Benz, Waitrose and Marie Curie, appeared on “YouTube videos created by supporters of terrorist groups such as Islamic State and Combat 18, a violent pro-Nazi faction.”[1] The authors of videos and websites with embedded YouTube videos receive royalties from ads appearing on their resources. The *Times* wrote,[2]

> The practice is likely to generate tens of thousands of pounds a month for extremists. An advert appearing alongside a YouTube video, for example, typically earns whoever posts the video $7.60 for every 1,000 views.

More than 250 brands, including L’Oréal, McDonald's, Audi, Marks & Spencer, Lloyd's of London, HSBC, RBS and many others, suspended their campaigns on YouTube. The largest boycott in the modern history of advertising, soon labeled “Adpocalypse,” began.

YouTube reportedly started losing millions in ad revenue. The root issue behind these brands’ revolt against YouTube and Google was programmatic ad trading, an automatic auction-based system driven by algorithms that decides what ads are put onto what videos according to price, outreach, and some other parameters. While offering the most efficient and fastest method of ad placement, the system was generally blind to content; not to mention that video content is inherently difficult to classify. This was further exacerbated by the fact that the extremist and controversial videos might have also been popular, so the programmatic algorithm saw them as a good vehicle for ads and placed respectable brands alongside them.

After the scandal shook the ad world, Google implemented measures that gave advertisers more control and confidence that their reputation would not be compromised and that their ad budgets would not subsidize extremists and terrorists. Google undertook additional efforts to better classify types of content and mark those that might be considered risky for brand

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[1] Mostrous, Alexi. (2017, February 09). “Big brands fund terror through online adverts.” *The Times*. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/big-brands-fund-terror-knnxfgb98

[2] Ibid.

safety.[1] Thus, the notion of "brand safety" became a powerful regulative criterion in the relations between ad money and media carriers, be it social media platforms or news outlets.

Eventually, Google introduced "Advertiser-friendly content guidelines"[2], the instructions that list what types of content are "not suitable for ads and will result in a 'limited or no ads' monetization state." Among the categories of content that will not be included in the program of monetization on YouTube were "Controversial issues and sensitive events." Here is how Google defined them:

> 'Controversial issues' refers to topics that may be unsettling for our users and are often the result of human tragedy.
>
> A sensitive event is usually an unforeseen event in which there has been a loss of life, typically as a result of a pre-planned malicious attack. Sensitive events can cause a mournful response from the public or, at times, an extreme or visceral reaction. An event must be relatively recent if it's going to be considered a sensitive event. Historical events are generally allowed to monetize if presented within the context of a documentary or historical debate.
>
> This policy applies even if the content is purely commentary or contains no graphic imagery.[3]

Basically, the news media that cover all dramatic events must understand that their videos will most likely not be monetized on YouTube. The allocative lever of ad money effectively suppresses this kind of news from distribution, ad placement, traffic gathering, and, therefore, production. The fallout of the Adpocalypse affected all content creators, but it had the most profound impact on those covering social issues and with relatively small numbers of subscribers – many news media providers, especially local ones, fell into this category. According to

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[1] Shayon, Sheila. (2017, March 23). "Google increases YouTube brand safety controls following boycott." *Brandchannel*. https://www.brandchannel.com/2017/03/23/youtube-brand-safety-032317/

[2] Advertiser-friendly content guidelines. Google. https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/6162278

[3] Ibid.

Pottinger, “Some creators called this demonetization a form of censorship. Certain videos about social issues on both sides of the political fence were demonetized” (Pottinger, 2019, p. 529).

Some studies have suggested that placing ads alongside harmful content did not, in fact, harm brands in the viewers’ perception (see, for example: Bellman S., et al., 2018). However, “brand safety” characterizes not so much the actual effect on the audience, but rather the concerns of advertisers and especially the corporate bureaucrats responsible for ad placement. They simply do not want to take the risk of undesirable association; besides, regardless of the audience’s reaction, there is always the risk of activists detecting ads alongside controversial content and accusing brands of sponsoring extremists – a new form of Herman and Chomsky’s flak (to be discussed in Chapter 5).

Advertisers have always preferred to avoid any troubling content. In the meantime, reports about political troubles, catastrophes, crimes, tragedies, violence and the like are often what constitute the most important news. From advertisers’ point of view, this news is risky content; therefore, ad money, when given a choice, would prefer not to deal with this content at all. Media buyers confirm that,

> Brands don’t want to be near controversial issues or near any news. But the net of controversial issues has grown. The 24-hour news cycle means there’s always some kind of drama.[1]

“All it takes is one letter from one person saying you were here. People are tweeting at advertisers. It’s fear of the screenshot,” a media buyer said at a professional summit.[2] In 2018, a

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[1] Pathak, Shareen. (2019, February 22). “‘Fear of the screenshot’: Candid thoughts of ad buyers at the Digiday Media Buying Summit.” *Digiday*. https://digiday.com/marketing/candid-thoughts-ad-buyers-digiday-media-buying-summit/

[2] Ibid.

Digiday's survey of 400 media buyers "found that 43 percent of respondents said they explicitly avoid advertising next to the news and half of those say they're steering clear of news content more than they had before." If buyers choose to remain on news sites, "they must understand that doing so comes with a risk."[1] One of the survey's findings is particularly interesting. When asked if they "avoid advertising next to Trump related content," 58% of marketers answered 'yes'.[2] Moreover, due to the advancement of ad-buying inventory, marketers obtained an opportunity to blacklist certain words in order to avoid unfavourable contexts for their ads to be placed in. As a result, more advertisers want to avoid controversial content entirely. In June 2020, during the massive protests against racism and police brutality, a big advertiser,

> …told a leading online news publisher not to run its ads in stories related to the Black Lives Matter movement. Articles mentioning police-brutality victims such as "Breonna Taylor" and "George Floyd" were off limits, as were those with the word "protests."[3]

Advertisers, when given a choice, tend to ban news as carriers or backgrounds for their commercials. Digital advertising tools have simply and candidly exposed what was known in the industry long ago: advertising does not like the news because the news is often bad news. It is not a beneficial context for displaying advertisements to the audience. On the internet, new advertising tools have allowed allocative control of advertising money to turn into operational control – the direct demand to the platforms and publishers regarding what content should be used to accompany brands. This obviously shall not be news content.

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[1] Weiss, Mark. (2018, December 3). "Digiday Research: 43 percent of media buyers say they avoid news content." *Digiday*. https://digiday.com/marketing/digiday-research-43-percent-media-buyers-say-avoid-news-content/

[2] Ibid.

[3] Haggin, Patience. (2020, July 12). "Target, MTV blocked ads from news mentioning 'George Floyd' and 'Protests'." *The Wall Street Journal*. https://www.wsj.com/articles/target-mtv-blocked-ads-from-news-mentioning-george-floyd-and-protests-11594576272

The further ad-tech develops, the more it interferes with news production and consumption. The new inventory of advertising allows for the preselection of not only content but also the emotional conditions of news consumers in order to accommodate advertisers' wishes. For instance, the cable sports network *ESPN* has created an instrument that predicts viewers' moods during digital sports event broadcasts. "About 80% of people who register with the ESPN app, for example, select their favorite sports and teams in exchange for a more tailored experience," reported Quartz. "ESPN pairs that information with what's happening in the game to predict what fans are feeling and serve them ads that cater to the moment." [1] Travis Howe, *ESPN*'s senior vice president, said that, "Whether or not a sports fan is happy, sad, slightly anxious, or overjoyed, we have the ability to anticipate their emotion and deliver relevant ads to them that creates a personalized experience."[2] It is easy to assume that it is always more preferable for advertisers to have their ads exposed to fans of the winning team. The feeling of unity in joy and happiness is the best context for an ad message to sneak in. This makes the channel of ad delivery interested in consumer happiness, and, if possible, in creating this happiness. A media channel with such an ability is incentivized to pursue their users' happiness for better advertising business.

The emotional personalization of ad delivery has also become a trendy business tool in the news media of general interest. In 2016, *USA Today* introduced a sort of emotional scoring of its content for better offers to advertisers. "The publisher is trying to show a link between the

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[1] Rodriguez, Ashley. (2018, May 3). "ESPN is selling ads based on sports fans' wildly changing emotions." *Quartz*. https://qz.com/1268657/espn-is-selling-ads-based-on-sports-fans-changing-emotions/

[2] Ibid.

emotions a story is likely to evoke and ad performance," reported *Digiday*.[1] *USA Today* started "categorizing its content by topic and tone." A certain score calculated on that basis would presumably give advertisers a better sense of where to place their ads, depending on readers' expected emotions induced by an article.

In 2018, the *New York Times'* Advertising & Marketing Division launched nytDEMO, an AI-driven product that aims to analyse readers' demographic data and reactions for better engagement and ad targeting. One of the projects, called Project Feels, employed machine learning to identify "the most meaningful associations between content, keywords, and emotion using deep learning." The AI-driven model was reportedly able to predict "emotional response to any content." Based on this knowledge, "perspective targeting" would be offered as a new ad product. "Perspective targeting allows advertisers to target their media against content predicted to evoke reader sentiments like self-confidence or adventurousness," reported the *New York Times* press-release.[2]

Similar tools were worked on in *El Pais*. Pedro Ventura, director of technology on data and monetization at Prisa Media, said:

> News can't be happy all the time; that's the reality. <…> We're general news, so like the Guardian or Le Figaro, we cover a broad spectrum, and, of course, much of that is

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[1] Moses, Lucia. (2018, September 19). "Project Feels: How USA Today, ESPN and The New York Times are targeting ads to mood." *Digiday*. https://digiday.com/media/project-feels-usa-today-espn-new-york-times-targeting-ads-mood/

[2] The New York Times Company press release. (2018, February 15). "The New York Times Advertising & Marketing Solutions Group Introduces 'nytDEMO': A Cross-Functional Team Focused on Bringing Insights and Data Solutions to Brands." https://investors.nytco.com/press/press-releases/press-release-details/2018/The-New-York-Times-Advertising--Marketing-Solutions-Group-Introduces-nytDEMO-A-Cross-Functional-Team-Focused-on-Bringing-Insights-and-Data-Solutions-to-Brands/default.aspx

> terrorist-related news or the Catalonia conflicts. Some advertisers just don't want to be near that.[1]

To accommodate advertisers, the publisher of *El Pais* has defined a set of 32 audience emotions and created "happiness" segments, among others, in order "to put advertisers at ease." Newspapers would charge a higher fee for advertisers who want to include this option on top of regular targeting.[2]

It is hard to overestimate the invisible harm that will be done to journalism by such tools. With mood-based targeting, the prioritization of news content will gradually be outsourced to advertisers. The selling of emotions to advertisers inevitably leads to a temptation to induce only those emotions that suit advertising, with happiness being at the top. The ad-based media are merchants of happiness, now with the tools of precise emotional measurement and targeting.

The selling of emotions and the ability to induce emotions to accommodate the payer represent the ultimate degree of advertising's impact on news production. Those media relying on ad revenue are eventually incentivized to induce happiness, which in turn incentivizes positive news and leads to the creation of a more positive picture of the world.

In conclusion, this chapter endeavoured to prove and illustrate that there is a regularity, a dependence, if not causality, between ad funding and positive news coverage, on the one hand, and reader funding and negativity, on the other. Of course, many other general and specific factors defining the principles of news coverage in concrete media outlets may be at play. Actual businesses can implement different degrees of balance between those two extremes. But when

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[1] Davies, Jessica. (2019, April 29). "El Pais owner Prisa Media built a brand-safety tool to reassure news-wary advertisers." *Digiday*. https://digiday.com/media/el-pais-owner-prisa-media-built-brand-safety-tool-reassure-news-wary-advertisers/

[2] Ibid.

news coverage is primarily funded by readers, i.e., by payment *from below*, it tends to darken reality and cultivate frustration, as fear and frustration may drive further consumption of news. When news coverage is funded by advertisers, i.e., by payment *from above*, it tends to idealize reality and shape consent, as consent is the necessary prerequisite for the further "consumption" of capitalist political and economic relations.

It is not just about how the world is seen. It is about how the audience feels and what the audience becomes. Media business that mostly relies on ad revenue requires an audience that consists of happy and economically able consumers. Media business that mostly relies on reader revenue requires an audience that consists of frustrated and politically agitated citizens. The news media not only appeal to these audiences – they create and reproduce such audiences.

CHAPTER 4. DIGITAL CHALLENGES AND BUSINESS CONCERNS OF THE NEWS MEDIA AS FACTORS IN THE CHANGES IN DISCOURSE FORMATION

This chapter examines the decline in the news media business caused by the internet and the efforts of the news media to adapt. The chapter advances the hypothesis that under the pressure of digitalization, the news media shifted from primarily relying on advertising revenue to actively seeking support from readers and donors. As outlined in Chapter 3, the reader-centric business model fosters a bias towards negativity in news coverage. Numerous studies confirm the significant shifts in tone, focus, and language of news coverage during the digital and business transformation period spanning from 2000 to 2020. In particular, a massive study based on an extensive 30-year long linguistic analysis[1] (1990s-2010s) showed that the presentation of news became less rational and more emotional. The study revealed that,

> Over time, and as society moved from "old" to "new" media, news content has generally shifted from more objective event- and context-based reporting to reporting that is more subjective, relies more heavily on argumentation and advocacy, and includes more emotional appeals. (Kavanagh, et al., 2019)

This shift was observed across different types of news media. Specifically, print journalism in the pre-2000 period maintained "context- and event-based reporting, reliance on directives, and use of titles and official positions." Post-2000 journalists started using character-centered stories to cover social issues to agitate and attract readers. The shift in the language and style of news presenting from objective and factual reporting to a more subjective and statement-based delivery contributed to what the researchers have called "Truth Decay."

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[1] Kavanagh, Jennifer, et al. (2018). "How the style and language of news presentation is changing in the digital age." *RAND Corporation*. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB10059.html

Another massive study presented a longitudinal (2000–2019) analysis of sentiment and emotion in 23 million headlines from 47 popular news media outlets in the United States. According to the authors,

> Results show an increase of sentiment negativity in headlines across written news media since the year 2000... The chronological analysis of headlines emotionality shows a growing proportion of headlines denoting anger, fear, disgust and sadness and a decrease in the prevalence of emotionally neutral headlines across the studied outlets over the 2000–2019 interval. (Rozado, Hughes, and Halberstadt, 2022)

Finally, a paper titled "Cross-national evidence of a negativity bias in psychophysiological reactions to news" presented findings from a 17-country, 6-continent experimental study, affirming that the pursuit of audience engagement drove news coverage towards negativity. As the study concluded,

> Insofar as our results make clear the pervasiveness of negativity biases on average, they help account for the tendency for audience-seeking news around the world to be predominantly negative. (Soroka, Fournier, and Nir, 2019)

The significant shifts in news coverage and discourse formation, as evidenced by data from content and linguistic analysis, unmistakably correlated with the proliferation of digital technologies. This chapter links the technological environmental changes (digitalization), as perceived through the lens of media ecology, with the business and political challenges faced by the news media.

No longer gatekeepers: the loss of the monopoly over news

On November 15, 2011, New York police officers arrested two hundred Occupy Wall Street protesters in Zuccotti Park. Six journalists happened to be among them, including two journalists of the Associated Press (AP). They tweeted the news about their arrest. The next day, AP employees received an email, as quoted in *New York Magazine*:

> In relation to AP staff being taken into custody at the Occupy Wall Street story, we've had a breakdown in staff sticking to policies around social media and everyone needs to get with their folks now to tell them to knock it off. We have had staff tweet — BEFORE THE MATERIAL WAS ON THE WIRE — that staff were arrested. (Highlighted in *NYMag*.) [1]

New York Magazine wrote that in AP, "The official rules note, 'Don't break news that we haven't published, no matter the format.' (Reuters plainly spells out the same idea in their handbook: 'Don't scoop the wire')."[2]

The case was widely discussed by media critics. It revealed that journalists must supply news not to the public but to their employers. But Twitter happened to be a faster and better tool for covering breaking news than even a newswire agency. Now, all the major media have guidelines, in essence, restricting the rights of their staffers in using social media. "If you have a piece of information, a photo or a video that is compelling, exclusive and/or urgent enough to be considered breaking news, you should file it to the wire, and photo and video points before you consider putting it out on social media," the AP policy reads[3]. The main reason for such restrictions is to not give away value that constitutes media business.

The case unveiled a fundamental contradiction. Journalism was believed to inform people to make them citizens. It was a core institution that enabled the development of the public sphere. But the institution needs to be maintained. In the 20th century, its public service was paid

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[1] Coscarelli, Joe. (2011, November 16). "Associated Press staff scolded for Tweeting too quickly about OWS Arrests." *New York Magazine*. https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2011/11/ap-staff-scolded-for-tweeting-about-ows-arrests.html

[2] Ibid.

[3] BBC News. (2011, November 17). "Associated Press reporters told off for tweeting." https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-15772243

for either through news retail or through advertising. This was a sort of institution maintenance fee paid by society. However, with the advent of the internet, news and ads could bypass traditional media, rendering the institution maintenance fee, traditionally collected by the media from readers and advertisers, redundant for former payers. News and ads can now be produced and delivered without the involvement of traditional media in the supply chain.

Under these conditions, media organizations came up with ideas to support and preserve their once-walled garden with artificial restrictive measures. There was an idea, for example, to license journalists in order to distinguish them from bloggers. A legislative initiative in Canada even proposed to "identify those journalists who were dedicated to 'serving the public interest,' and anyone with the professional rank would enjoy certain privileges such as 'better access to government sources.'"[1] The prohibition for journalists to post the news before supplying it to the wire comes from the same logic. The media try to restore their monopoly by artificially restricting the environmental affordances for others.

"If Twitter is beating your news wire, you have bigger problems," wrote Mathew Ingram, one of the leading media analysts, in 2011, in "Memo to AP: Twitter is the newswire now."[2] The title of his next report posed the main question of that time: "What happens when journalism is everywhere?"[3] He wrote:

> When the Arab Spring demonstrations were under way in Egypt's Tahrir Square and reports were streaming out through Twitter and Facebook and text messages and cellphone videos, it was easy to feel superior to the Egyptian government. How could they

[1] Ingram, Mathew. (2011, September 7). "No, licensing journalists isn't the answer." *GigaOm*. https://gigaom.com/2011/09/07/no-licensing-journalists-isnt-the-answer/

[2] Ingram, Mathew. (2011, November 16). "Memo to AP: Twitter is the newswire now." *GigaOm*. https://gigaom.com/2011/11/16/memo-to-ap-twitter-is-the-newswire-now/

[3] Ingram, Mathew. (2011, November 18). "What happens when journalism is everywhere?" *GigaOm*. https://gigaom.com/2011/11/18/what-happens-when-journalism-is-everywhere/

> not realize that information can no longer be contained by blockades or even internet blackouts when everyone has the power to publish? Now the authorities in New York City and elsewhere have been getting a dose of that medicine, with the "Occupy Wall Street" protests being tweeted and live-streamed in real time. As the Associated Press learned this week to its chagrin, we all have newswires at our disposal now.[1]

In 2011, the tone of such revelations sounded alarming but also rather optimistic. The capacity of former news consumers to bypass the control of elites over information was seen as threatening the established authorities, which was seen as a positive development in authoritarian countries. As for the media, it was assumed that they should have somehow adjusted to the new challenge.

It was evident that the internet replaced paper as a carrier of information. Many thought the consequences would be limited by the change in the carrier, but the media would be able to readjust to the digital. However, technological changes brought about a deeper impact – it turned out that the news can be a commodity only in the condition of scarcity. But the internet made reporting, commenting, editing, illustrating, sharing and other formerly journalist activities affordable to everyone. Once again, similar to the time of *Respublica Literaria*, the affordance for people to report something noteworthy to each other developed into the affordance to report something "newsworthy." The blogosphere and then social media have become a venue where people share important news scooped in all possible sources, including, but not limited to, the news media. People became reporters themselves, prompting media theorist Dan Gilmor call this phenomenon "We the Media," as the title of his 2004 book suggested. The affordance for people

[1] Ibid.

to report something newsworthy was even labeled in the early 2000s as “random acts of journalism”:

> Citizens are discovering how easy it can be to play reporter and publisher. To practice random acts of journalism, you don’t need a big-league publication with a slick Web site behind you. All you need is a computer, an internet connection, and an ability to perform some of the tricks of the trade: Report what you observe, analyse events in a meaningful way but, most of all, just be fair and tell the truth as you and your sources see it. (Lasica, 2003, p. 73)

In 2003 Nieman Reports, Joseph Daniel Lasica highlighted the stochastic and “statistic nature” of such “random reporting”:

> This is not meant to imply that such individual random acts of journalism are always committed consciously, with the explicit intention to act as a citizen journalist. Rather, users may simply choose to report on the events around them as part of their everyday social media practices, directed in the first place at their imagined audience of friends and followers – their “personal public.” (Lasica, 2003, p. 73)

Nevertheless, the overall mass of such mutual informing covered everything people could witness and be interested in – a phenomenon Castells called “mass self-communication” in a networked society (Castells, 2009). The reach and power of such mutual informing have evolved incredibly with the proliferation of smartphones.

The question of the quality and trustworthiness of information produced and delivered by the news media or by social media can be a matter of debate. The proponents of old media imply that journalists produce high-quality and trustworthy news (such a statement would have been ridiculed 30 years ago). However, on a large scale, the quality of news produced by either traditional or social media does not matter. What truly matters is the dynamics of media consumption and people’s choice of what media channels to use to inform themselves. Media consumption does need to be based on “professional” or “trustworthy” sources: people choose sources that are more available or more attractive. Social media platforms became such a source of choice. Most crucial for the news media is not the competition with other sources for the quality of news, but the competition for people's time.

The time spent with media in general is growing. In digitized countries, people consume media for more than 12 hours per day. Per week, this is already two times more than a full-time job (Figure 5).

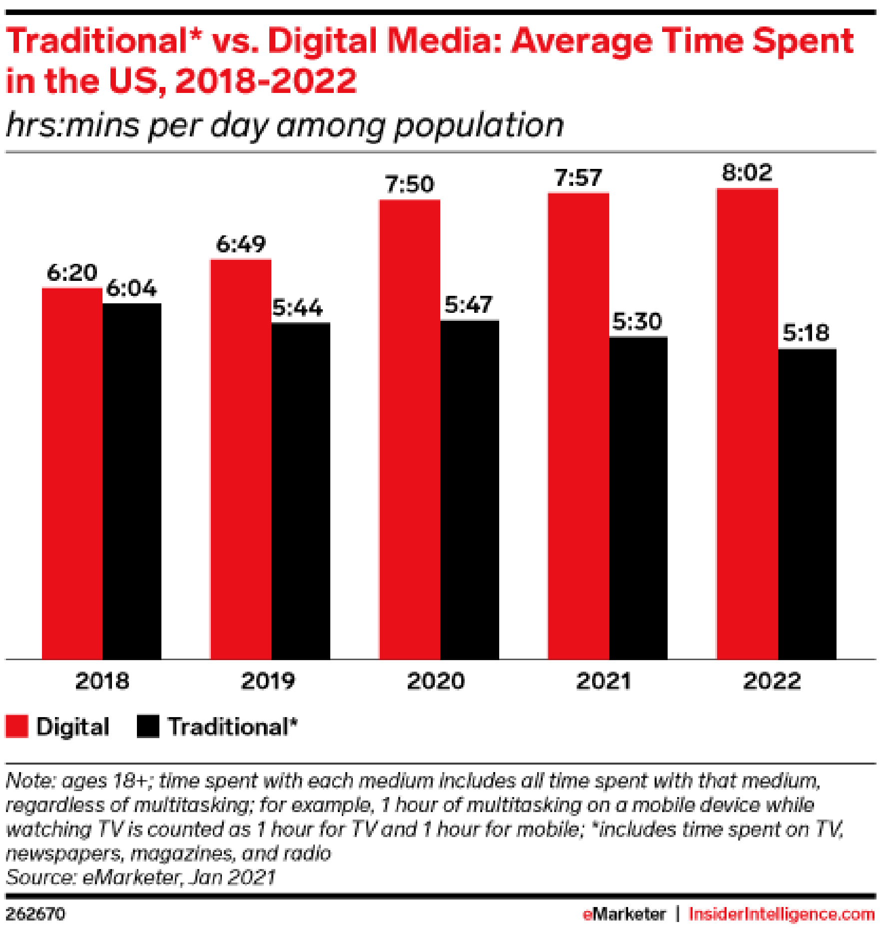

Figure 5. Daily time spent with digital and traditional media. Source: eMarketer[1]

[1] Cramer-Flood, Ethan (2021, February 4). US Time Spent with Media 2021 Update. eMarketer. https://www.emarketer.com/content/us-time-spent-with-media-2021-update

Old media still have a significant share of people's daily media diet, but this share has been decreasing and, most importantly, the structure of this share is not favourable for the news. News consumption occupies a tiny and ever-decreasing fraction of a person's daily media diet. In 2011, an average US adult spent 44 minutes per day with the press (including both magazines and newspapers). In 2021, this had shrunk to 19 minutes. The statistics on time spent with newspapers show an even more significant decline: from 26 minutes in 2011 to just 10 minutes per day in 2021.

The consumption of TV has shrunk from 4 hours 34 minutes in 2011 to 3 hours 7 minutes in 2021. TV, of course, still stands strongest among old media, but it would be justifiable to assume that newscasts do not take a significant time share of the remaining 3 hours of daily TV consumption. Besides, as was highlighted, television as a medium contributes rather to the emotional perception, to the attitude and affirmation, while discourse formation relies on textual forms and historically was the prerogative of newspapers and journals. (Of all old media, only radio remains less impacted by the internet, because it is listened to in cars predominantly, where the eyes and hands of drivers cannot switch to digital devices).

The decline in the consumption of old media is even more sizeable if assessed in ratio, because total media consumption has grown from 11 hours 11 minutes to 13 hours 21 minutes within the decade of the 2010s (Figure 6).

Average Time Spent per Day with Major Media by US Adults, 2011-2015

hrs:mins and CAGR

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	CAGR (2011-2015)
Digital	**3:40**	**4:20**	**4:51**	**5:15**	**5:38**	**11.4%**
—Desktop/laptop*	2:33	2:27	2:19	2:22	2:22	-1.8%
—Mobile (nonvoice)	0:48	1:35	2:16	2:34	2:51	37.2%
—Other connected devices	0:18	0:18	0:17	0:19	0:25	7.8%
TV**	**4:34**	**4:38**	**4:31**	**4:22**	**4:15**	**-1.8%**
Radio**	**1:34**	**1:32**	**1:30**	**1:28**	**1:27**	**-2.0%**
Print**	**0:44**	**0:38**	**0:32**	**0:26**	**0:21**	**-17.0%**
—Magazines	0:18	0:16	0:14	0:12	0:10	-13.5%
—Newspapers	0:26	0:22	0:18	0:14	0:11	-19.8%
Other**	**0:39**	**0:38**	**0:31**	**0:26**	**0:24**	**-11.7%**
Total	**11:11**	**11:46**	**11:55**	**11:57**	**12:04**	**1.9%**

*Note: ages 18+; time spent with each medium includes all time spent with that medium, regardless of multitasking; for example, 1 hour of multitasking on desktop/laptop while watching TV is counted as 1 hour for TV and 1 hour for desktop/laptop; *includes all internet activities on desktop and laptop computers; **excludes digital*
Source: eMarketer, April 2015

188127 www.eMarketer.com

Average Time Spent with Media in the US, 2018-2022

hrs:mins per day among population

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Digital	**6:20**	**6:49**	**7:50**	**7:57**	**8:02**
—Mobile (nonvoice)	3:36	3:57	4:31	4:36	4:41
—Audio	0:59	1:07	1:08	1:13	1:17
—Social networks	0:45	0:47	0:54	0:53	0:53
—Video*	0:38	0:43	0:50	0:52	0:54
—Other	1:06	1:12	1:31	1:30	1:30
—Desktop/laptop	1:57	1:54	2:02	1:58	1:56
—Video*	0:23	0:23	0:24	0:24	0:24
—Audio	0:07	0:07	0:07	0:07	0:07
—Social networks	0:08	0:06	0:06	0:06	0:05
—Other	1:19	1:18	1:25	1:21	1:20
—Other connected devices	0:47	0:58	1:17	1:22	1:26
TV***	**3:42**	**3:27**	**3:34**	**3:19**	**3:07**
Radio***	**1:41**	**1:39**	**1:32**	**1:31**	**1:31**
Print***	**0:21**	**0:19**	**0:19**	**0:19**	**0:18**
—Newspapers	0:12	0:10	0:10	0:10	0:10
—Magazines	0:09	0:09	0:09	0:09	0:08
Other traditional media	**0:20**	**0:19**	**0:22**	**0:21**	**0:22**
Total	**12:24**	**12:33**	**13:38**	**13:27**	**13:21**

*Note: ages 18+; time spent with each medium includes all time spent with that medium, regardless of multitasking; *excludes time spent with video via social networks; **includes all internet activities on desktop and laptop computers; ***excludes digital*
Source: eMarketer, Jan 2021

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Figure 6. Daily consumption of media in the US in 2011–2015[1] and 2018–2022[2]. Source: eMarketer

Thus, the abundance of information on one hand, and the shrinking availability of time for news consumption on the other, reduce the capacity of news to be a commodity. The latest data confirm the sharp decline in the consumption of the professional news through professional channels. The Reuters Institute 2022 Digital News Report shows that, from 2013 to 2024:

- ✓ Receiving the news from the press decreased from 47% to 15%
- ✓ Receiving the news from TV decreased from 72% to 48%
- ✓ Receiving the news from radio decreased from 28% to 16%

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[1] eMarketer. (2015, April 16). US Adults Spend 5.5 Hours with Video Content Each Day. https://www.emarketer.com/content/us-time-spent-with-media-2021-update

[2] eMarketer. (2015, April 16). US Adults Spend 5.5 Hours with Video Content Each Day. https://www.emarketer.com/content/us-time-spent-with-media-2021-update

✓ Receiving the news from social media increased from 27% to 42%.

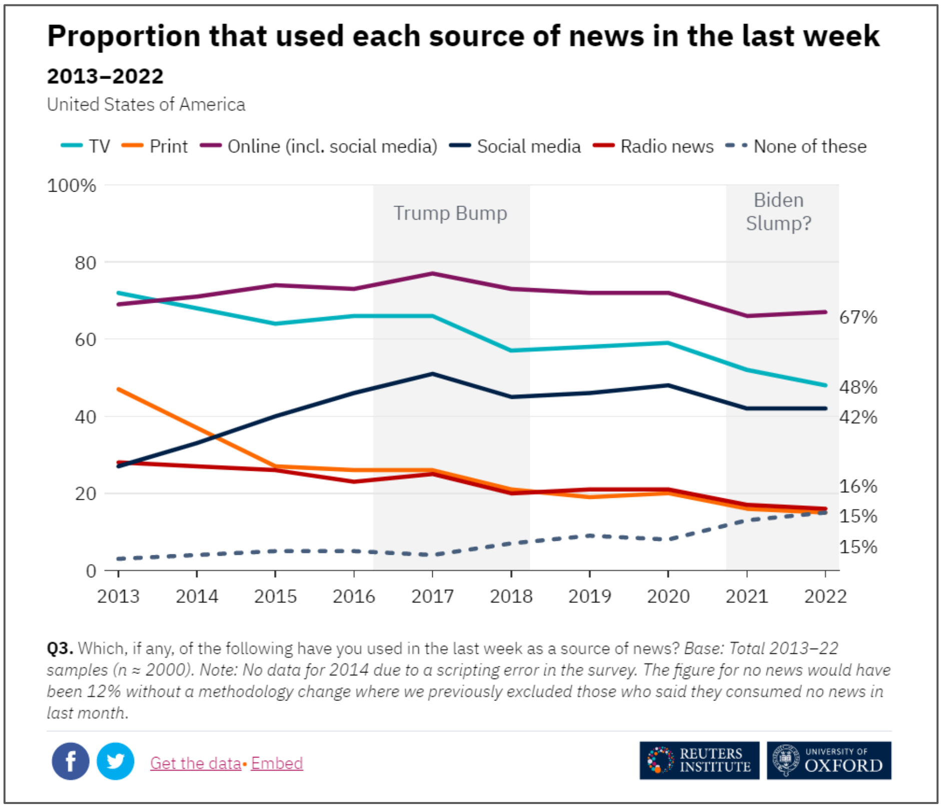

Figure 7. Proportion that used each source of news in the last week. 2013–2022. Source: The Reuters Institute 2022 Digital News Report.[1]

Some observers point out that, even on social media, much of the news is still supplied by professional journalists. This is true: not only do the professional media put their news snippets on social media to attract traffic, but professional journalists themselves publish news and links to news on their newsfeeds. However, in both cases, the media cannot profit from news delivery: “professional” news is given away for free.

[1] The Reuters Institute 2022 Digital News Report. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2022/dnr-executive-summary

Many news media who share their content on social media end up in the so-called "cannibalism" of format. Seeking to attract an audience through interesting content (as everyone else does on the internet), the news media are forced to use the best of their content in the form of news teasers and clickbait. Accompanied by comments and selected by the algorithms personally for everyone, those news snippets most often form a sufficient picture of the day in everyone's newsfeed, making it unnecessary for users to visit the news website to read the original story. Thus, due to the snippet's cannibalism of news, this form of digital marketing of news deprives news outlets of not only business opportunities but also of traffic.

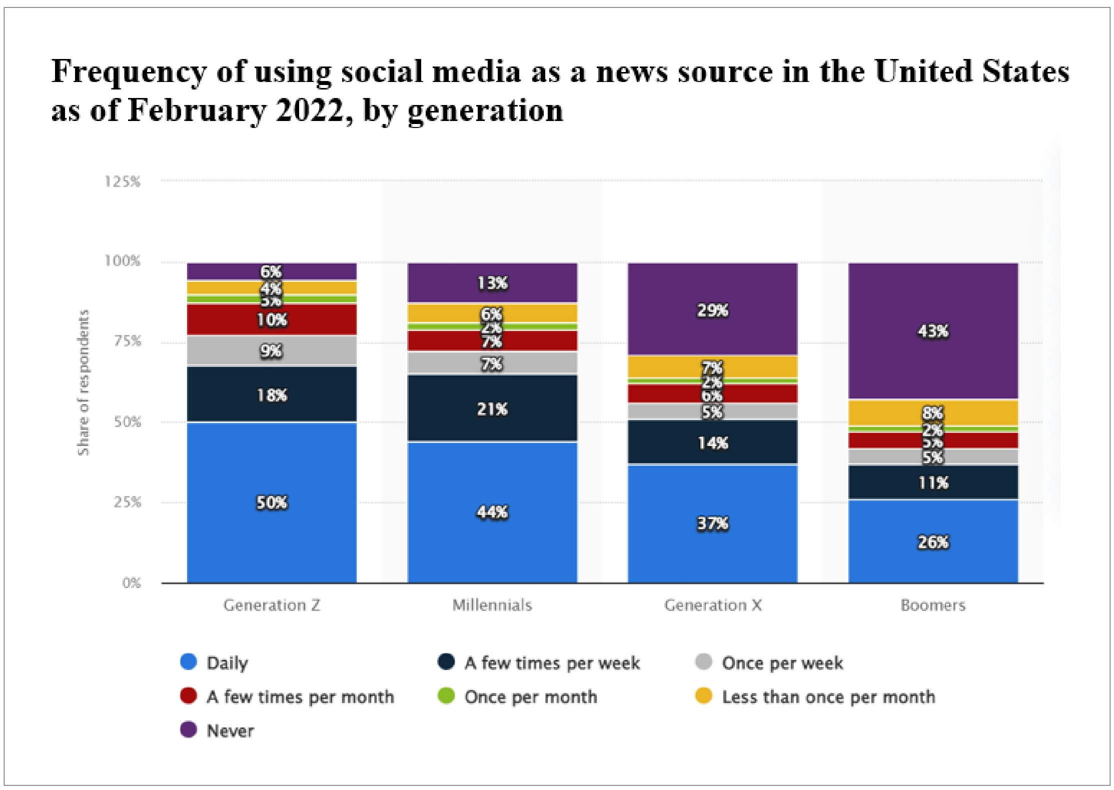

Figure 8. Frequency of using social media as a news source in the United States as of February 2022, by generation. Source: Statista.[1]

[1] https://www.statista.com/statistics/1124159/us-generational-social-media-news/

The growing role of social media in news supply is especially evident in the generational dynamic. According to a Statista's study, only a quarter of Boomers in 2022 got their news from social media on a daily basis, but 44% of Millennials and 50% of Generation Z used social media as their daily news source. This means that newly arriving generations choose other-than-professional sources to get news. Clearly, the further generational dynamic is not favourable for the news media (Figure 8).

The media competition for time and attention leads to another negative outcome: so-called news fatigue or news avoidance. Struggling to attract readers, the news media joined the clickbait race, excessively churning out sensational or triggering headlines. Studies show that the audience increasingly skips news not only because of competition from other forms of media content but also often as a deliberate or spontaneous choice to avoid "toxic" content. The Reuters Institute 2022 Digital News Report confirmed that people increasingly avoid news.

Most common reasons for news avoidance

- ✓ 43% say "there is too much politics and COVID-19"
- ✓ 36% say "news has negative effect on mood"
- ✓ 29% say "they are worn out by amount of news"
- ✓ 29% say "the news is untrustworthy or biased"
- ✓ 17% say "it leads to arguments I'd rather avoid"
- ✓ 16% say "there is nothing I can do with the information."

Source: The Reuters Institute 2022 Digital News Report. [1]

[1] The Reuters Institute 2022 Digital News Report. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2022/dnr-executive-summary

News avoidance exacerbates the challenge of selling news, which has already been intensified by the abundance of news, competition with other forms of media consumption for users' time, the cannibalism of news snippets, and other detrimental environmental factors.

Advertising has fallen below the threshold of sustainability for the news media

In the news business, ad revenue dominated throughout the 20th century, reaching 80% of total revenue in newspapers.[1] A critical event occurred in 2014, when ad revenue plummeted below the level of the revenue from readers for the first time in a hundred years (more precisely, in the recorded history of the industry). According to WAN-IFRA (2015), circulation brought $92.4 billion to newspapers around the world in 2014, while ad revenue brought in only $86.5 billion (Figure 9).

World Press Trends		
	2014	Compared to 2013
Print circulation	$89.9 bln	up 0.4%
Print advertising	$77 bln	down 5.2%
Digital circulation	$2.5 bln	up 45.3%
Digital advertising	$9.5 bln	up 8.3%

Figure 9. World press trends: print and digital revenue in 2014. WAN IFRA: World Press Trends 2015.[2]

[1] WAN-IFRA (2015). World Press Trends 2015. https://www.slideshare.net/WAN-IFRA/250515-wpt-2015-final

[2] Ibid.

The press worldwide had changed its main funding source. Instead of being paid mostly *from above*, by advertisers, journalism started being paid *from below,* by readers/viewers. This shift also occurred in TV cable networks, which experienced a similar transformation: revenue from advertising fell to or even below the levels of revenue from TV-package subscriptions.

This happened not because of the growth in reader revenue – it continued to steadily decline. But ad revenue dropped faster. Also in 2014, the Newspaper Association of America reported that print ad revenue in 2013 had hit the lowest level since the industry started measuring it in 1950 (Figure 10, in inflation-adjusted dollars).

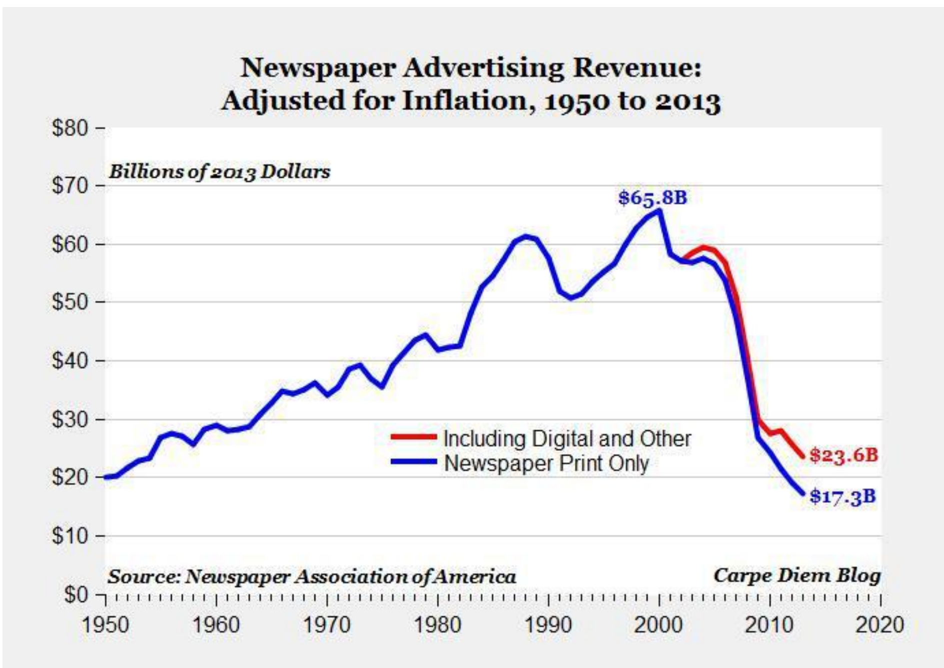

Figure 10. The decline of ad revenue in print. Source: The Newspaper Association of America. [1]

[1] Weissmann, Jordan. (2014, April 28). "The decline of newspapers hits a stunning milestone." *Slate*. https://slate.com/business/2014/04/decline-of-newspapers-hits-a-milestone-print-revenue-is-lowest-since-1950.html.

Also noteworthy is the fact that the US population in 1950 was about 180 million, while in 2013 it was more than 330 million. Additionally, the economy in 1950 was just one-seventh of its size in 2013. So, compared to the growth of the population and economy, the advertising decline in the media looks even more dramatic.

The decline began in the early 2000s, when local ads – classifieds – started moving to the internet. Newspaper classified advertising used to bring in $19.6 billion, approximately one-third of ad revenue, at their peak in 2000.[1] The web-platforms Craigslist, eBay, Kijiji, and others disrupted this market by providing a superior service for free (or under the "freemium" model – partly free). Newspapers' classified ad revenue plummeted to $2.2 billion in 2018. Thus, $17 billion in revenue was quickly wiped out because consumers had migrated to a better online service with the same (or better) functions.

Even the strongest American newspapers could not retain advertisers, as best exemplified by the *New York Times*, whose flip from ads to readers as the main source of revenue happened in 2012 (Figure 11).

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[1] Reinan, John. (2014, March 3). "How Craigslist killed the newspapers' golden goose." *Minnesota Post*. https://www.minnpost.com/business/2014/02/how-craigslist-killed-newspapers-golden-goose/

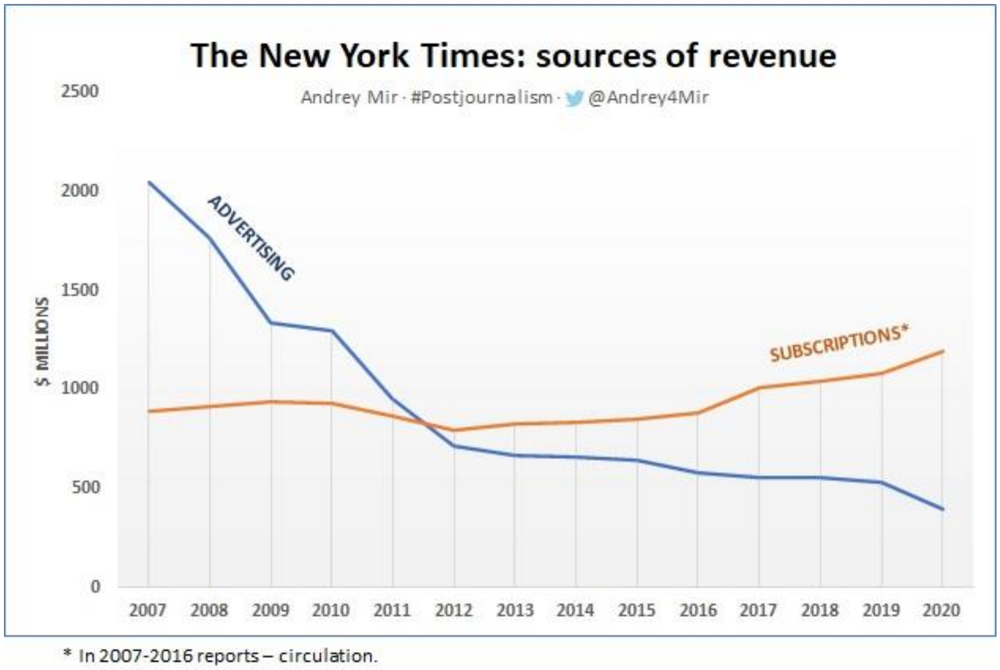

Figure 11. The New York Times: sources of revenue. The source of data: The New York Times Company.[1]

In total, America's newspaper advertising revenue fell from $63.5 billion in 2000[2] to $12.3 billion in 2018.[3] The news media as an advertising channel are no longer the most efficient, regardless of their carrier – be it print, TV, or websites. News media ad delivery was and remains "blind" towards users. The best it could do was the approximate group targeting of social demographics. Instead of the offline ad monopoly of the news media, the so-called duopoly of Google-Facebook has formed in online advertising. Unlike the media, Google and Facebook know the exact personal preferences of each user and provide the personally

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[1] The New York Times Company's press releases. http://investors.nytco.com/press/press-releases/default.aspx.

[2] Kaiser, Robert G. (2014, October 16). "Bad news about the news." *The Brooking Essay*. http://csweb.brookings.edu/content/research/essays/2014/bad-news.html

[3] Watson, Amy. (2019, December 2). "Advertising revenue of U.S. newspapers 2013-2018." *Statista*. https://www.statista.com/statistics/196470/classified-advertising-revenue-of-us-newspapers-since-2000/

customized delivery of ads to billions. In 2014, Google alone made $51 billion in ad revenue. To compare: American newspapers' ad revenue this year was $23 billion, and the entire world's newspaper industry collected $89 billion in ad revenue. The Google-Facebook duopoly surpassed 60% of the share in US digital advertising in 2018.[1] In 2019, Google's ad revenue reached $134 billion.[2] The media might try to improve content or ad delivery, but it does not matter. Digital platforms offer a completely different scale, cost, accuracy, and efficiency of advertising. In his book *The Filter Bubble*, Eli Pariser wrote,

> An advertising pioneer once famously said, "Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted – I just don't know which half." But the internet turned that logic on its head – with click-through rates and other metrics, businesses suddenly knew exactly which half of their money went to waste. (Pariser, 2011, p. 42)

This is a view from the side of advertisers but not journalists. For the media, that "half" of advertisers' money was not a waste. This was the institution maintenance fee paid by society for journalism to exist. But now, businesses can choose not to overpay for advertising and not to pay the institution maintenance fee for journalism at all. Print advertising – and any advertising in a channel with group (not personally customized) outreach – is simply technologically outdated. Customized online advertising on digital platforms is an advertising medium of the next generation. "Online advertising is looking more and more like a contest that publishers can't

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[1] Dang, Sheila. (2019, June 5). "9 months ago Google, Facebook have tight grip on growing U.S. online ad market: report." *Reuters*. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-alphabet-facebook-advertising/google-facebook-have-tight-grip-on-growing-u-s-online-ad-market-report-idUSKCN1T61IV

[2] Clement, J. (2020, February 5). "Advertising revenue of Google from 2001 to 2019." *Statista*. https://www.statista.com/statistics/266249/advertising-revenue-of-google/

win – not on a large scale, at least," as *Slate* indicated in an article with a title that speaks for itself: "The pivot from advertising."[1]

Ad revenue was crucially important to the news media. When the loss of advertising became evident, the news media started looking for a replacement for this fading revenue source.

The news business: the search for a new viable model

In 2015, Robert McChesney released the second edition of his 1999 book, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*. In the 15 years that passed from the first edition, the media landscape underwent a profound transformation. While it was unclear if democracy stopped being poor, the media was certainly no longer rich. Much of the content from the first edition had become outdated, yet McChesney's preface for the 2015 edition remained prescient in its analysis. He wrote:

> It is ironic that the journalism hellhole I described in 1998 looks almost like a Golden Age today. Journalism has been in freefall collapse since the early 2000s. <...> With the emergence of the internet, advertising no longer is tethered to journalism and the commercial basis for sufficient general news production has collapsed. This is a disaster for a political system predicated upon having an informed and engaged citizenry. There is no reason to believe a widespread and effective commercial journalism will ever return. (McChesney, 2015 [1999], p. xxxviii)

Corrupted by advertising in its heyday, within a mere 15 years, journalism fell from the heights of glory to the bottom of an abyss where advertisers no longer bother to corrupt it. "The marriage of capitalism and journalism is over," concluded McChesney (McChesney, 2015 [1999], p. lii). Advertising was no longer capable of maintaining the media. As for news retail, it

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[1] Oremus, Will (2017, November 21). "The pivot from advertising." *Slate*. https://slate.com/technology/2017/11/its-time-for-online-media-to-pivot-from-advertising.html

was never capable of this on its own; and now, on the internet, the news has completely ceased to be a commodity.

The first signs of decline in the news industry were overshadowed by the financial crisis of 2008. Many in the industry expected to recover along with the national economies overcoming the global financial crisis. But it soon became evident that the crisis in the news media, unlike the global financial crisis, was not cyclical. In the beginning, this change was seen as a change of the material carrier – the switch from paper to digital platforms. The industry leaders started thinking about adaptation to the digital. The common attitude of those striving to save the industry and businesses was expressed by John Paton, a news publisher, who coined his famous motto “Digital first” in 2010.[1] Media organizations started looking into new models of earnings.

Many media outlets rushed for any ancillary businesses they could create in the hopes of replacing lost revenue. Instead of two major sources of revenue, ads and news sales, the news media tried to adopt a multiple revenue approach, similar to a casino’s strategy of “many small bets,” where investments are spread across multiple avenues to enhance the likelihood of success. Event organising was always one of the most logical ancillary businesses for the media, as forums and conferences produce content, too, though in a different form. The *Texas Tribune* has been the most recognized event producer among the American and, most likely, world news media. In the first half of the 2010s, the publication earned one-fifth to one-fourth of its revenue from organizing public, educational, and business events.

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[1] Jarvis, Jeff. (January 11, 2010). “John Paton on newspapers’ future.” *BuzzMachine*. https://buzzmachine.com/2010/01/11/john-paton-on-newspapers-future/

Education as a form of content production and communication has become a side business for some news media, too. Not only business-to-business media but also the biggest media brands entered the education market. In 2016, The School of the *New York Times* offered their educational programs to pre-college students and professionals.[1] The School of the *New York Times* charged tuition fees and offered scholarships – exactly in the way traditional universities would do. It became a full-scale educational institution with a brand and self-advertising capacity that many prominent universities would envy.

The list of ancillary businesses maintained by the *New York Times* has not been limited to educational programs. The New York Times Store[2] sells memorabilia and souvenirs branded by the *New York Times*. Clients can also buy branded and customized calendars, cookbooks or *New York Times* reprints related to certain data in the past, such as someone's birthday. The store also offers *New York Times*-branded clothes, toys, and goods of all kinds. In 2014, "the *Times'* 'other revenue,' which included the store and other brand extensions, brought in 5-10 percent of total revenue of the *Times*."[3] Another *New York Times* side-business program, The New York Times Journeys[4], sells travel packages that range from New York City tours to cruises around the world. Similarly, the *Wall Street Journal* launched the WSJ Business Travel Service, which became a part of its benefits program WSJ+ for subscribers, along with the WSJ Wine Club.[5]

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[1] The School of The New York Times – About. https://nytedu.com/about/

[2] The New York Times Store. https://store.nytimes.com/

[3] Moses, Lucia. (2015, July 24). "Publishers set up retail operations to diversify revenue." *Digiday*. https://digiday.com/media/publisher-stores-drive-commerce-preserving-reader-trust/

[4] The New York Times Journeys. https://www.nytimes.com/times-journeys/

[5] Moses, Lucia. (2018, October 10). "How The New York Times uses T-shirt discounts and tours to drive subscriptions." *Digiday*. https://digiday.com/media/new-york-times-shirts-tours-subscription-goals/

Special events, sold to the general public and/or with discounts to subscribers, became a mandatory part of all membership programs after the *Guardian* invented this approach in 2011 in order to have a substitute for subscription. Such a program was aimed at subscribers, or now members-donators, but also created a new stream of revenue by combining subscription and event organising (or the production of some other services). Thus appeared the new concept of membership, according to which members, formerly subscribers, but with some additional perks, paid not for content but for something else, which was neither news nor advertising (it will be analyzed in the section about the membership model).

The biggest news brands tried to sell their branded franchise in the ways Disney or the Transformers franchise did. The most successful in this niche was *Playboy*: in 2016, the retail value of Bunny-licensed goods reached $1.5 billion. But the biggest player among publishers in this market was Meredith, parent of *Better Homes and Gardens*, "which accounted for over $22 billion, … second only to the $57 billion generated by Disney, according to License Global."[1] Many other publishers became active in brand-licensing, too, including Hearst, with $350 million; Rodale, with $155 million; and Condé Nast, with $150 million in brand-licensed goods sold.

Not only can the news media produce branded merchandise or license their brand for someone else's goods, they also entered this market with their "lines" of products. For example, *Cosmopolitan* launched its own jewelry line, while *ELLE* launched its own line of fragrances.[2] In 2017, *BuzzFeed* started selling an internet-connected "precision smart cooktop." It seems that the

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[1] Willens, Max. (2017, June 13). "Why Time, Conde Nast and other magazine publishers are charging into brand licensing." *Digiday*. https://digiday.com/media/publishers-brand-licensing/

[2] Innovation Media Consulting. (2019). "Licensing and brand extensions: profit or minefield?" *Innovation in Media 2019-2020 World report*. https://innovation.media/newswheel/profit-or-minefield

experiment was so successful that *BuzzFeed* allied with Epoca International, a houseware manufacturer, and Walmart in a joint venture under the brand *BuzzFeed*'s Tasty, a video recipes division complemented by e-shopping. The venture was aimed at producing, promoting and selling spoons, spatulas, and other kitchenware.[1]

As the media are supposed to be capable of attracting an online audience, venturing into e-commerce emerged as a logical and promising avenue for establishing ancillary businesses. Many publications have tried e-commerce, though with different outcomes. Even new hybrids of half-media/half-e-commerce have appeared, such as *PopSugar*, initially a lifestyle online media outlet that acquired a fashion shopping search engine but turned into a lifestyle media/shopping company. The only problem with e-commerce was that, in order to sell something, the media needed to have this something. And there are always a lot of other actors in the market who already have it. The news media might have an advantage in gathering audience but not in goods' production, logistics, and selling. This hybrid of media/e-shopping may be promising but not for the media business. Looking for other forms of business revenue, the news media enter niches where other actors have comparable positions and often incomparably better financial and technological resources. At the same time, in selling something else, the news media risked diluting their reputation. They faced the risk of mutating from journalism to content marketing. As *Digiday* once put it,

> Given the challenges of digital media, commerce is a tempting way for publishers to create new revenue streams by extending their brands. But slapping commerce links on

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[1] Kafka, Peter. (2018, March 1). "BuzzFeed has a new business model, so it's selling its own line of kitchen tools at Walmart." *Vox*. https://www.vox.com/2018/3/1/17066402/buzzfeed-walmart-tasty-kitchen-gadget-tools-retail-deal

articles can lead to the impression that the editorial side is for sale, damaging the publisher's credibility.[1]

The "glass wall" between advertising and news, the achievement of 20th century journalism, was crumbling. The fall of this wall used to be a dream of advertisers. Now newsrooms themselves have started offering commercial brands to permeate news content. "Native advertising" emerged, a narrative format that couples "selling something else" with the editorial journalistic approach, directly using journalistic tools and styles for marketing something under the guise of storytelling. Publishers were even often proud of their achievements in *native advertising* and other kinds of *advertorials* and *infomercials* – essentially, ads, artfully embedded in editorial content. The dissolving of journalism's integrity through marketing intensified.

By the mid-2010s, it had become clear that ancillary businesses would not replace lost revenue but divert organizational resources and undermine the news media's reputation. Gradually, the media industry turned to the only remaining option – attempts to sell content to the digital audiences. After all, this was an "authentic" media commodity. However, digital audiences were hesitant to pay for content when ample free options were readily available, and their time for news consumption was increasingly competed for by various other media formats. Those paid digital subscriptions the media managed to attract were insufficient to support journalism. As John Paton, the author of the "Digital First!" concept, eventually admitted, "Print dollars are becoming digital dimes."[2]

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[1] Moses, Lucia. (2015, July 24). "Publishers set up retail operations to diversify revenue." *Digiday*. https://digiday.com/media/publisher-stores-drive-commerce-preserving-reader-trust/

[2] Ingram, Mathew. (2013, November 18). "John Paton says what most media CEOs won't about paywalls – they are a short-term tactic at best." *GigaOm*.

Along the strategy "many small bets" and attempts to sell news to the digital audience, a new expectation and even demand in the media was gradually emerging: society should pay for journalism as a fundamental democratic institution. Some experts and industry leaders insisted on public funding (or financial support of some kind), while others explored non-profit opportunities or relied on funding from foundations and billionaires for journalism just to exist.

Subsidizing journalism – not for profit but for journalism

This section analyzes the development of the philanthropic funding of journalism and the effects on journalism brought about by this funding. The philanthropic funding of journalism stems from the recognition of its vital societal role, whether it is investigating corruption or informing citizens about pressing social issues. Such funding typically originates from either foundations or rich philanthropists.

In recent years, some new money has been injected into the media industry, shaping a new trend in the philanthropic model of funding. In 2013, Jeff Bezos, Amazon's owner and one of the richest men in the world, purchased the *Washington Post* for $250 million.[1] The Silicon Valley entrepreneur and philanthropist Laurene Powell Jobs, the widow of Apple's founder Steve Jobs, bought *Atlantic* magazine in 2017.[2] Patrick Soon-Shiong, a billionaire biotech entrepreneur and Los Angeles' richest resident, bought the *Los Angeles Times* for $500 million

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[1] Bezos, Jeff. (2013, August 5). "Jeff Bezos on Post purchase." The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/jeff-bezos-on-post-purchase/2013/08/05/e5b293de-fe0d-11e2-9711-3708310f6f4d_story.html

[2] Lee, Edmund. (2017, July 28). "Laurene Powell Jobs is buying the Atlantic magazine." Vox. https://www.vox.com/2017/7/28/16055162/laurene-powell-jobs-acquired-atlantic-magazine-publisher-steve-widow-philanthropist-nonprofit

in 2018.[1] The same year, co-founder of Salesforce.com Marc Benioff and his wife Lynne acquired *Time Magazine* for $190 million.[2] "For the new guard of wealthy West Coast titans, media is the new philanthropy," wrote Sara Fischer in *Axios*. "And traditional titles, rich with history and cachet, give newcomers access to the talent and infrastructure needed to build influence."[3]

Typical philanthropic motives are evident in the case of the *Los Angeles Times.* In 2018, the *Los Angeles Times* was about to cut jobs and close its bureau in DC. This information "spurred Soon-Shiong to act 'as desperately fast as possible' to save the paper." As quoted in the paper itself, he said that the idea of reducing the newsroom and getting rid of the Washington bureau "would be the death knell of the institution as we knew it"[4] In a different interview, Soon-Shiong admitted: "I overpaid. It wasn't the money. It wasn't the business. It was, 'Do we want this paper to exist or not?'"[5] Soon-Shiong's motives were obviously philanthropic (or were depicted as such). Through his own personal financial means, he substituted the vanishing institution maintenance fee for the news media in the attempt to save the institution. A concerned billionaire took on the role of a public interest champion.

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[1] James, Meg, & Chang, Andrea. (2018, April 14). Patrick Soon-Shiong — immigrant, doctor, billionaire, and soon, newspaper owner - starts a new era at the L.A. Times. The Los Angeles Times. https://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-patrick-soon-shiong-profile-la-times-20180413-htmlstory.html

[2] Trachtenberg, Jeffrey A. (2018, September 16). "Time Magazine sold to Salesforce founder Marc Benioff for $190 million." The Wall Street Journal. https://www.wsj.com/articles/time-magazine-sold-to-salesforce-founder-marc-benioff-for-190-million-1537137165

[3] Fischer, Sara. (2018, September 18). Axios Media Trends. Axios. https://www.axios.com/newsletters/axios-media-trends-53628ed9-1d3a-4fbd-a556-ff99ded1e713.html

[4] James, Meg, & Chang, Andrea. (2018, April 14). Patrick Soon-Shiong — immigrant, doctor, billionaire, and soon, newspaper owner - starts a new era at the L.A. Times. The Los Angeles Times. https://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-patrick-soon-shiong-profile-la-times-20180413-htmlstory.html

[5] Pointer Morning MediaWire. (2018, October 3). http://go.pardot.com/webmail/273262/261477187/05a03d1423b5f4e679759d5a65bd9a7e928a25fa68b605d3fec3923ac62eb01a

Despite the widespread view that the rich do not care about the public good, some of them want and, most importantly, are able to compensate for the declining maintenance fee for journalism. A study showed that "chain-owned" newspapers (a rough proxy for stock market traded) "place a higher emphasis on profits over professional or community goals and have smaller news staff" compared to "independent" (often family-owned) newspapers. Respectively, "'independently owned newspapers cover controversial ideas more often' than their corporate chain-owned counterparts" (as quoted in: Benson, Neff & Hessérus, 2018, p. 280). In other words, private owners are generally more prone to consider non-profit goals in their enterprise than the dispersed agency of ownership through the stock market. Billionaires can understand the public significance of the media and care about it; the market does not.

However, concerned billionaires are not the only ones who have sometimes subsidized journalism. Google and Facebook, whose very existence and technologies were killing media business in the first place, have pledged to donate $300 million each to journalism projects and organizations in recent years through various initiatives.[1] "The irony is hard to miss," pointed out Mathew Ingram in this regard, calling these odd philanthropists "the platform patrons" of the media.[2]

Generous funding from the digital giants, however, raised understandable concerns in the industry suffering from those giants. Emily Bell highlighted that, "The suddenness of technology companies caring about the financial stability of journalism is not at all coincidental." Funding of

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[1] Fischer, Sara. (2019, February 19). "Pledges to save local news reach nearly $1 billion." Axios. https://www.axios.com/nearly-1-billion-given-to-save-local-news-1550578396-018b9987-a750-4f13-9cb3-f97c8fcec072.html

[2] Ingram, Mathew. (2018, May 16.) "The platform patrons: How Facebook and Google became two of the biggest funders of journalism in the world." Columbia Journalism Review. https://www.cjr.org/special_report/google-facebook-journalism.php

the media organization was seen as a part of their lobbyist and marketing efforts. She argued that, when Google launched its Digital News Initiative in Europe, "it was a direct response to pressure by EU regulators. The money was allocated from a marketing budget and amounted to a lobbying exercise." She concluded that, "Facebook, Apple, and Google do things that journalists should be investigating, not profiting from."[1]

Besides billionaires and Big Tech buying into the media, there is a vast array of philanthropy initiatives supporting journalism financially. Individual philanthropists, family foundations, institutional funders, corporate partners, and even jurisdictions such as the state of New Jersey[2] and nation-states such as Great Britain or France are advancing financial initiatives to support journalism, making up for lost market sources of revenue.

One of the most consistent and sustainable sources of philanthropy funding of journalism arose in the form of specialized foundations. The Knight Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, Omidyar Network, American Journalism Project, Open Society Foundations, Rockefeller Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, C&A Foundation, Ford Foundation, Humanity United, and United Nations Foundation are among them. They fundraise money from private and institutional donors and allocate the proceeds to journalist projects and organizations. In 2019, Sara Fisher of *Axios* calculated that, "Nearly $1 billion has been committed to saving local news in America over the next several years" in the philanthropy sector,[3] which is comparable to the

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[1] Bell, Emily. (2019, March 27). "Do technology companies care about journalism?" *Columbia Journalism Review*. https://www.cjr.org/tow_center/google-facebook-journalism-influence.php

[2] Gabbatt, Adam. (2018, July 6). "New Jersey pledges $5M for local journalism to boost state's 'civic health'." *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/jul/06/new-jersey-journalism-local-news-civic-information-consortium

[3] Knight Foundation. (2019, February 19). "Knight Foundation focuses on building the future of local news in $300 million, five-year commitment." https://knightfoundation.org/press/releases/knight-foundation-focuses-on-building-the-future-of-local-news-in-300-million-five-year-commitment/

pledged commitment of the Big Tech giants, Google and Facebook. To put these sums into perspective, US newspapers generated about $25 billion in revenue in 2018.[1]

Clearly, by adding philanthropic programs aiming to maintain certain forms and themes in journalism (investigative, feminist, minority, environmental, humanitarian, etc.) to this, it is safe to assume that foundations, corporate donations and billionaires' contributions have accounted for a significant amount of media funding. A new source of funding, however, has posed a new issue. The effects of advertising and reader revenue on discourse formation were more or less recognized. As this dissertation hypothesizes, in general, the ad-driven business model incentivizes journalism to manufacture consent and create an audience of happy consumers, while the reader-driven business model incentivizes journalism to chase sensations and agitate readers. But what does the philanthropy-driven model do to journalism? How will funding by billionaires, through corporate partnerships, and by foundations impact journalism and discourse formation? New forms of allocative control (incentives through selective funding) have not been properly studied yet, but they already impact discourse formation.

Interestingly, the influence of billionaires on the media they purchased poses the least risk, because if and when it occurs, it is highly transparent. When the owner wants or implies that certain viewpoints should be reflected in editorial policies, or if they interfere with newsroom autonomy by other means, it is swiftly scrutinized by experts and noticed by the general public. As the risks of losing the all-important social capital are far greater when financial capital is substantial, billionaire owners tend to steer clear of interfering with newsroom autonomy. The

[1] Newspapers Fact Sheet. https://www.journalism.org/fact-sheet/newspapers/

reason is not solely their virtuous nature – even if they possess such qualities – but rather the fact that they are closely watched and expected to behave appropriately.

A prime example of such public oversight occurred in 2019 when Jeff Bezos was undergoing a divorce, and intimate details of his new relationship were leaked. The entire industry, along with experts and the public, immediately began watching how the *Washington Post* would report on the scandal. This was significant news not only because gossip about a billionaire's personal life is inherently newsworthy (though it is), but also because his personal matters could potentially affect his assets, the industry, investment strategies, and the stock market overall (Similar attention was drawn to *Bloomberg* when Michael Bloomberg announced his plans to run for the presidency in 2019).

The *Washington Post* managed to cover the delicate issue, though maybe not in the best possible way.[1] But the very fact that the newspaper's maneuvering was immediately thrust into the spotlight proved that the control of media by billionaires is the most visible and, therefore, most transparent form of philanthropic influence in the media. Even if a less reputable proprietor had interfered and a less credible newspaper had tolerated such encroachment, it would likely have become public knowledge and prompted a reassessment of both the newspaper and its news coverage under those circumstances.

Society expects – or suspects – that the proprietor may interfere, and it creates a sort of immunity to the potential harm of interference. The same scrutiny applies to corporate sponsorship of the media, which is always under the microscope as well. When Emily Bell

[1] Pompeo, Joe. (2019, January 14). "'The first test case': amid the Bezos divorce, the Washington Post tries to sift between the tawdry gossip and the real news." *Vanity Fair*. https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2019/01/the-bezos-divorce-the-post-tries-to-sift-between-the-gossip-and-the-real-news

compared Google's partnership with the media to the supporting of journalism by billionaires (the aforementioned Bezos and others), she wrote that,

> Individuals who have made money from technology have sometimes used it to support journalism… In all these operations, transparency and a commitment to editorial independence from funding makes for somewhat comfortable relationships. But when it comes to corporate interests, journalists have to be alert to agendas in conflict with their own.[1]

Even though the struggling media industry accepts funding from Google and Facebook, people in the media understand whose money they are taking and what is at risk. The same is true for the public. However controversial these relationships may be, they remain in the spotlight. Ethical and regulatory questions are raised. Operational control is almost excluded, and allocative control is understood and watched over.

The same cannot be said about the funding of journalism by foundations. Generally, foundation funding is perceived positively because there are no risks of corrupting agency, unlike what is expected in the cases of billionaires' or corporations' funding of the news media. As transactional revenue in the media steadily declines, foundation funding is widely welcomed in the industry and by the public, typically without reservations.

However, this growing financial support comes with a price that few in the industry, and virtually nobody in the public, are aware of yet. To understand this price, the specificity of allocative control employed by foundations needs to be explored.

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[1] Bell, Emily. (2019, March 27). "Do technology companies care about journalism?" Columbia Journalism Review. https://www.cjr.org/tow_center/google-facebook-journalism-influence.php

Allocative control means that foundations' resources are directed toward certain specific topics or forms of journalism, while others are ignored. This incentivizes newsrooms to pursue projects and approaches that will most likely be approved for philanthropic funding.

In their search for funding, the media try to meet the expectations of foundations, not those of the audience, the market, or their own. Therefore, when foundation funding is significant, topic choice becomes quietly conducted by foundations, not by the media. A part of the media's autonomy is surrendered to foundations or their agendas.

The ideological and cultural consequences of the foundations' influence on journalism are not neutral. Before funding the media, foundations themselves need to fundraise. Basically, they offer agendas and ideas in the "philanthropy market." These ideas must fit a certain understanding of public good but also be "fundraiseable." Thus, the selection of sponsors occurs, and these sponsors become patrons of the foundations and, via foundations, of the news media.

Who are those people or organizational sponsors? Fundraising is aimed at responsible and concerned citizens. They should be concerned enough to want to donate and affluent enough to be able to donate. Thus, fundraising, and specifically fundraising with further funding of the news media, creates some social-demographic filters. Certain social-demographic groups and their collective worldviews or interests become a source or reference for the news media as soon as the contributions of these social-demographic groups become a source of revenue for the news media.

The ideas and activities selected for funding through fundraising will likely correlate with the realm of civic activism. No one would condemn civic activism for striving to promote its ideas and agendas. However, following activism agendas may cause issues for journalism. For traditional journalism, public service was a byproduct of the news business. For civic activism, public service is the primary goal. These are two different mechanisms of discourse formation. Journalism agenda-setting is inherently panoramic and inclusive, while civic-activism agenda-setting is inherently hyper-focused and exclusive. Foundation funding incentivizes journalism to turn into activism. This is how Murdock's allocative control works: seeking funding within programs announced by foundations, newsrooms select those topics and formats they hope will fit the foundations' preferences, which in turn are selected under a certain activism agenda, not the news agenda. Therefore, funded by foundations, the media tend to drift from the news agenda toward the activism agenda.

Foundations want to direct the press towards addressing urgent social issues. This is the whole point of fundraising for journalism and funding journalism. The media are incentivized not to broaden the agenda in order to reach a wider and united audience but rather to propagate the properly aligned message to a larger number of potential followers. The media engage in attracting the audience but not selecting the message; the message has already been pre-selected. As Ben Smith from the *New York Times* put it, "nonprofit journalism can be boring, more attentive to its donors than its audience."[1]

The switch from audience-driven agenda-setting to message-driven agenda-setting leads to the fragmentation, not the generalization, of the audience. If advertising funding made the news media stick to consumer profiling of the audience, foundation funding pushes the news media towards "civic profiling" of the audience. Consumer profiling was depoliticizing and uniting, while civic profiling is politicizing and dividing. By making the news media focus on

[1] Smith, Ben. (2020, March 29). "Bail out journalists. let newspaper chains die." *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/29/business/coronavirus-journalists-newspapers.html

certain topics, foundation funding reverses the cohering effect of the advertising model. Therefore, foundation funding has the potential to contribute to polarization.

When advertising was the predominant source of revenue for the news media, the formative effect of ad money on news production was thoroughly studied. Now, when advertising and its impact on media is almost gone, it is logical to take a closer look at the agenda-setting effects of the newly emerging sources of funding. These effects have started to attract the attention of media researchers. Rodney Benson from New York University conducted a study of foundation funding. He wrote that,

> … Yet there has been too little critical analysis of the nonprofit alternative... We need better answers to questions like: Who exactly is in charge of these nonprofits, what are foundations asking in return for their support, and what are the material and ideological limits to reform embodied in this new organizational model of journalism? In other words, we must acknowledge the possibility that foundations are just as capable of non-democratic "media capture" on behalf of their own interests as they are of fostering civic benefits for society as a whole. (Benson, 2018, p. 1060)

Based on the analysis of the "close intertwining of elite management and boards between foundations, nonprofits, and commercial media" and having conducted a series of interviews with them, Benson stated that,

> Despite the language of civic duty that surrounds the foundation world like a golden haze, there are also often specific strings and metrics attached to grants. Foundations increasingly prefer funding specific projects to general operations, increasing the possibility of some degree of "media capture" by foundation donors <…>. Certainly, such arrangements create the possibility of a conflict of interest, or appearance of such. (Benson, 2018, p. 1073)

He concluded that,

> Foundation project-based funding has also sometimes skewed media attention towards fashionable issues favored by philanthropic donors while ignoring a range of

> equally or even more urgent social problems. Philanthropic support mostly reinforces and extends an upper middleclass, pro-corporate orientation in mainstream American journalism. (Benson, 2018, p. 1060)

As foundation-funded journalism is predestined to focus on pre-selected pressing social issues, it often reiterates the themes of the mainstream media but without the panoramic view the mainstream media are expected to offer due to their market-driven news coverage. "Even if donors don't make clear their desire for a particular thesis or ideological slant, there are the potentials for self-censorship. Money talks," stated James Warren in *Poynter*, discussing the *New York Times*' plan to seek philanthropic funding. He quoted Alan Mutter, a former newspaper reporter and current industry analyst, who wrote to him that,

> Third-party funding necessarily raises questions of (1) whether a topic would have been covered if the money were not available, and (2), whether the reporting and conclusions of the resulting stories were influenced by the need to please donors, especially if the publisher has a hope of obtaining future funding.[1]

The social-demographic filtering effect of foundation funding has also been noticed. Bensons stated that,

> …Nonprofit media are not likely to do any better than mainstream media in connecting to the non-urban, non-cultural elite voters whose concerns about jobs, trade, and globalization tend to be ignored or dismissed in news coverage and public policy, and who arguably as a result helped elect the "populist" Republican Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency. (Benson, 2018, p. 1067)

Martin Scott, Mel Bunce and Kate Wright in their paper "Foundation Funding and the Boundaries of Journalism" (2019) explored the foundation impact specifically on non-profit

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[1] Warren, James. (2017, September 3). "The New York Times is looking for nonprofit funding. Will it succeed where others have failed?" *Poynter*. https://www.poynter.org/business-work/2017/the-new-york-times-is-looking-for-nonprofit-funding-will-it-succeed-where-others-have-failed/

international news and came to similar conclusions about the filtering effect (or allocative control, in Murdock's term) of foundation funding. They found that,

> … Foundations did not try to directly influence the content of the journalism they funded. However, their involvement did make a difference. It created requirements and incentives for journalists to do new, non-editorial tasks, as well as longer-form, off-agenda, "impactful" news coverage in specific thematic areas. As a result, foundations are ultimately changing the role and contribution of journalism in society. (Scott, Bunce & Wright, 2019, p. 2034)

The authors stated that, "Foundation funding ultimately encourages journalists to focus on producing longer-form, off-agenda news coverage about topics that broadly aligned with the priorities of the most active foundations" (Scott, Bunce & Wright, 2019, p. 2035).

The pre-selected focusing of foundation-funded journalism on narrow topics at the expense of a more balanced panoramic view was also noticed. They stated that,

> In the case of non-profit international news, foundations direct journalism (both intentionally and unintentionally) towards outcome-oriented, explanatory journalism in a small number of niche subject areas. (Scott, Bunce & Wright, 2019, p. 2035)

These findings support the hypothesis that foundation funding leads journalism to focus on the message and not on the audience (as commercial journalism would). This setting pushes journalism toward pre-selected message delivery, which is closer to marketing and propaganda than to journalism.

Finally, a significant and mostly unnoticed effect of foundation funding relates to risks that the necessity to secure funding exceeds the necessity to solve social issues. This is a common risk in philanthropic fundraising: the amount of money raised depends on the scale of the issue rather than the efficiency of the proposed solution. This "allocative" effect often leads to the reproduction of issues rather than their resolution. When foundation funding incentivizes certain themes and diverts resources from others, it leads to pressing, in sponsors' opinion, social issues to be pressed even more by the news media. Genuinely, fundraising aims to solve pressing issues with financial contribution being just a means, not the goal. But for the contractor – for the media – funding *is* the goal. The contractor is oftentimes more interested in the perpetuation of the funding than the solving of the issue because there will be no funding without this issue.

The problem is more or less known in philanthropy. In foundations, special ethical committees are often tasked with overseeing the appropriateness of expenditures to ensure that funding does not inadvertently perpetuate the very issues it aims to combat. But when it comes to crowdsourced fundraising, exemplified in the media by the membership model (which is explored in the next section), the problem only grows, as there is no such ethical supervision or even public understanding of the agenda risks related to philanthropy funding.

This risk is particularly evident when the philanthropic contractor is a media outlet, as mass media have the ability to shape reality through news coverage. For journalism, foundation funding almost inevitably creates a conflict of interest. Journalists will subliminally overemphasize the significance of those topics that are well-funded by philanthropists. The agenda will skew towards better-funded issues not due to newsrooms' autonomous judgment of newsworthiness but rather because of newsrooms' need for available funding. Eventually, the pressing social issues reported on under such incentives may not only receive extensive coverage but also become ingrained in the agenda and, consequently, in the media-induced reality.

Moreover, since philanthro-journalism is a compensatory business model (to replace the losses in ad and reader revenues), its ultimate goal is not solution of pressing social issues but securing the continuation of funding. This turns media activism into false activism – it is not even "performative" activism (activism for the sake of virtue signalling) but rather commercial activism. In fact, activism is becoming a new commodity under this business model, straying far from its intended role as public service.

To summarize, the allocative control of foundation funding may cause the following effects:

- It filters news and discourses by incentivising topics and formats that are favourable for funding while neglecting others.
- It narrows journalists’ scope and leads to discourse concentration.
- It skews news supply towards messages preselected by an external choice, and thus it reduces newsroom autonomy.
- It pushes journalism to turn into activism, and not a fair and noble sort of activism, but false and commercial activism – activism as a commodity that is meant to replace the lost commodity of ad delivery and news.
- It tends to exaggerate pressing social issues, the solutions to which are the focus of and funded by sponsors; the exaggeration of issues is aimed at mobilizing the audience through increasing its concerns with the funded issue. The side effect is the intended agitation of the audience.
- It poses the risks of the artificial introduction and reproduction of funded issues in the audience’s worldview for the sake of securing further funding.
- It leads newsrooms to focus on better message delivery, not serving the audience. Instead of being the agent of the audience, journalists become the agent of the sponsor, which is a sign of marketing and propaganda.

- It leads the media to profiling audiences according to their civic concerns and thus reduces the social demographic of the audience to class and political identifiers. At the systemic level, this increases the risks of politicization and polarization.

For this dissertation, the criticism of foundation funding helps define the focus of attention in the analysis of the next prospective model of the funding of journalism – the membership model and its subsequent surrogates.

The membership model, its genesis and transformation into a subscription-donation surrogate

To analyse the origin, development, and essence of the membership model, this dissertation uses the case study of the *Guardian*'s membership program, the historically first and most developed model of membership in the media industry.

"Since you're here... we're asking readers like you to make a contribution in support of our open, independent journalism." This appeal is shown to everyone accessing archived articles on the *Guardian* website. The *Guardian* does not sell news. On its Support website[1], the *Guardian* asks:

> Support our journalism with a contribution of any size. Your support helps protect the Guardian's independence and it means we can keep delivering quality journalism that's open for everyone around the world.

Unlike some other media outlets that have fenced their content with a paywall, the *Guardian* decided to keep its journalism open for all, regardless of where they live or what they can afford to pay.

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[1] Support the Guardian web site. https://support.theguardian.com/us/contribute

The *Guardian* membership program originated from its event production activities. In 2012, the newspaper organized a festival, testing a new format of audience engagement and a new segment of business. The festival succeeded: 6000 readers attended it over the weekend. "The atmosphere was great. The debates were absorbing. The food, fringe conversations and music were incredibly relaxed and enjoyable," wrote Alan Rusbridger, then the editor-in-chief. After this success, the *Guardian* started thinking about developing it further. After two years of experiments, in 2014, the media outlet announced the launch of the membership program. Alan Rusbridger wrote:

> From today you can become a member of the Guardian. You can become a closer part of the community of journalists, readers and friends of an institution that has been around for well over 190 years. By joining you can be part of our journey of transformation into an open and global 21st-century media company.[1]

Within its membership program, the *Guardian* promoted access to a range of events and different newsroom-led activities, inviting readers to join their "three-tier membership scheme."[2] Thus, the model still looked transactional: it sold a product – the events, with ranged access, similar to a freemium model. At some point, however, the paper revealed that people would be paying for their symbolic affiliation with the *Guardian* and not only for the club-like service for socialites. The club-style membership engagement remains a pleasant addition to the offer. "Instead of using tote bags, tickets to live events, or other swag," the *Guardian* started asking for support, shifting "from a commercially focused plea to an emotional, service-based request."[3]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Sweney, Mark. (2014, September 10). "Guardian launches new three-tier membership scheme." The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/media/2014/sep/10/guardian-membership-scheme-patrons-kings-cross

[3] Schmidt, Christine. (2017, November 17). "Asking members to support its journalism (no prizes, no swag), The Guardian raises more reader revenue than ad dollars." *NiemanLab.*

The newspaper has started soliciting direct financial support for its journalism. This is what has become the essence of a new business model of journalism, now known to the media industry around the globe as the "membership model."

Thus, the classification of the program as 'membership' mutated into something different from what was initially assumed, but the original meaning (membership) was preserved in the title. For now, the label "membership program/membership model" has become the description of a new form of financial interaction with the audience that is, primarily, opposite to a paywall. It keeps media content free to access but, in return, openly solicits donations from the audience to support journalism provided by a media organization. In reality, this is a purified version of an institution maintenance fee for journalism, being levied on a voluntary basis and directly collected by a media outlet.

As business in general continued to decline, the new membership program became a challenging venture for the *Guardian*. By 2016, the first period of the membership program had brought in even bigger losses than expected. But the program was given carte blanche by the publisher for three more years to prove that membership could work.[1] Judging by some circumstantial evidence, a reversion to a paywall remained a possibility if the new program had not succeeded. A set of other radical measures was implemented. New editor-in-chief Katharine Viner took over from Alan Rusbridger. Expenses and jobs were significantly cut. A U.S.-based philanthropic arm was established in 2016 that reportedly secured $6 million "in multi-year

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https://www.niemanlab.org/2017/11/asking-members-to-support-its-journalism-no-prizes-no-swag-the-guardian-raises-more-reader-revenue-than-ad-dollars/

[1] Martinson, Jane. (2016, January 25). "Publisher of the Guardian and Observer aims to break even within three years and launches a new strategy focusing on future growth." The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/jan/25/guardian-news-media-to-cut-running-costs

funding commitments" in the first year.[1] The *Guardian* widened its news operations in Australia, the US, and worldwide. The efforts appeared to pay off. In 2019, "*Guardian* performs remarkable comeback, but at cost of 450 jobs."[2] BBC reported that, "The *Guardian* recorded an operating profit of £0.8m for 2018-19: its first such profit in two decades and the culmination of one of the most significant turnarounds in recent British media history."[3]

Curiously, the *Guardian* continues offering a subscription that is not based on a paywall and just offers premium extra benefits such as access to a presumably fancy news app or ad-free reading on the website. Thus, it is not news trade but rather a sale of "something else." At the time of breaking even (May 2019), the *Guardian* was selling 190,000 of these premium subscriptions, which were seen by analysts as another form of reader support.[4] At the same time, the *Guardian* had "365,000 recurring financial contributors and members" and also "print subscriptions across the Guardian, Observer and Guardian Weekly at a record total of 110,000."[5] On top of this, more than 300,000 people had given one-off contributions in the previous year.

In 2018, Statista put the *Guardian* in 7th place among the world's leading newspapers in digital subscriptions, counting recurring memberships as subscriptions (Figure 12).

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[1] Bilton, Ricardo. (2017, August 28). "Could The Guardian's quest for philanthropic support squeeze out other news nonprofits?" *NiemanLab.* https://www.niemanlab.org/2017/08/could-the-guardians-quest-for-philanthropic-support-squeeze-out-other-news-nonprofits/

[2] Mayhew, Freddy. (2019, May 1). "Guardian performs remarkable comeback, but at cost of 450 jobs." PressGazette. https://www.pressgazette.co.uk/guardian-comeback-financial-but-at-cost-of-450-jobs/

[3] Rajan, Amol. (2019,1 May). "Guardian records first operating profit since 1998." BBC. https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-48111464

[4] Benton, Joshua. (2019, May 1). "Want to see what one digital future for newspapers looks like? Look at The Guardian, which isn't losing money anymore." NiemanLab. https://www.niemanlab.org/2019/05/want-to-see-what-one-digital-future-for-newspapers-looks-like-look-at-the-guardian-which-isnt-losing-money-anymore/

[5] Tobitt, Charlotte. (2019, May 1). "Guardian group meets target to break even at end of three-year financial turnaround plan." PressGazette. https://www.pressgazette.co.uk/guardian-group-meets-target-to-break-even-at-end-of-three-year-financial-turnaround-plan/

Number of digital-only subscribers to selected newspapers worldwide as of 1st quarter 2018 (in 1,000s)	
1. The New York Times (USA)	2800
2. The Wall Street Journal (USA)	1389
3. The Washington Post (USA)	1000
4. The Financial Times (UK)	720
5. Bild (Germany)	390
6. The Economist (UK)	350
7. The Guardian (UK)	300
8. Aftonbladet (Sweden)	250
9. Times of London (UK)	220
10. Le Monde (France)	160

Figure 12. Number of digital-only subscribers to selected newspapers worldwide as of 1st quarter 2018. Source: Statista[1]

In 2019, with 190,000 premium subscriptions and 365,000 recurring financial contributors and members, the *Guardian* would likely have taken 5th place in the world in the rating of digital subscriptions.

Further development did not prove that the membership model can become a saviour for the media business. The business of the *Guardian* and other membership pioneers rather stalled. However, the efforts and innovations of the *Guardian* proved that soliciting direct financial support from the audience for the cause of journalism can be a more or less viable model, especially amid the lack of any other model able to replace lost advertising revenue. Many other media organizations have started applying different elements or versions of membership in their

[1] Watson, Amy. (2018, November 14). "Number of solely digital newspaper subscribers worldwide 2018." **Statista**. https://www.statista.com/statistics/785919/worldwide-number-of-digital-newspaper-subscribers/.

business. Most membership ideas revolved around selling a symbolic affiliation with a quality (or local, or activist) journalistic brand. Programs of engagement usually come as a supplement, ranging from seminars and festivals to readers' participation in newsroom planning meetings and teleconferences.

In 2017, the Dutch news web site *De Correspondent*, which successfully practiced membership for a while[1], established the Membership Puzzle Project in partnership with the New York University journalism program led by Jay Rosen, a renowned media expert. Having started studying "membership trials and membership errors"[2] in the media around the world, the Membership Puzzle Project found that membership know-how is in high demand. They managed to secure $700,000 in foundation funding to support membership projects in 17 countries[3] under the patronage of the Membership in News Fund.[4] While studying membership cases and innovations, they also promoted the idea of membership in the audience.

The membership evangelists from the Membership Puzzle Project distinguish the "thin" model of membership, when members just donate money to their favourite media outlet and mostly resemble donors, from the "thick" model, when members also show up to events, offer advice and feedback, and interact.[5]

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[1] Ingram, Mathew. (2013, Nov 29). "This online journalism startup raised $1.7M in crowdfunding and you've never heard of it." *GigaOm*. https://gigaom.com/2013/11/29/this-online-journalism-startup-raised-1-7m-in-crowdfunding-and-youve-never-heard-of-it/

[2] The Membership Puzzle Project. About. https://membershippuzzle.org/about

[3] Schmidt, Christine. (2018, October 22). "Here's how you can be part of a $700,000 experiment in building membership models around the world." *NiemanLab*. https://www.niemanlab.org/2018/10/heres-how-you-can-be-part-of-a-700000-experiment-in-building-membership-models-around-the-world/

[4] Membership in News Fund. https://membershippuzzle.org/fund

[5] Rosen, Jay, & Peon, Gonzalo del. (2017, October 4). "Introducing the Membership Models in News Database for your use and contributions." The Membership Puzzle Project. https://membershippuzzle.org/articles-overview/introducing-the-database

The Membership Puzzle Project created a database of news organizations employing different forms of membership and had collected more than 160 names from around the world by 2020.[1] Each media outlet in this list had a "mission statement" that essentially represented an offer behind the membership pitch, with a range of areas of commitment – from investigative journalism to helping to find fun on the internet. The list contained many well-recognized and much spoken of titles, such as *Charlotte Agenda*, *BuzzFeed News*, *Columbia Journalism Review*, *HuffPost*, *Intercept* and others. Some news brands were known for their specific journalist services, such as *PolitiFact*, which focused on political fact checking; Russian dissident *Novaya Gazeta*; the German "constructive journalism" brand *Perspective Daily*, which focused on solutions; and *Positive News*, which had a similar idea. Perhaps the biggest names, along with the *Guardian*, on the list were *Texas Tribune* and the *Atlantic*.

As exemplified by the *Guardian*, *De Correspondent*, and many others, the membership model, in essence, married individual subscription and philanthropy foundation funding, eliminating the intermediaries (foundations). The media themselves accepted the role of fundraiser for a cause – but now the cause was not some kind of pressing social issue but rather journalism itself. In terms of transaction, the membership model is crowdfunding for journalism.

The impact of capital, advertisers, billionaires, or authorities on agenda-setting through different forms of direct and indirect control over news production has been known for a long time. The impact of philanthropy funding is only starting to be recognized. The impact of the membership model on discourse production remains uncharted territory.

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[1] Membership in News Database. https://membershippuzzle.org/tools/database

In collecting the practices and know-hows of membership from around the world, the Membership Puzzle Project emphasizes that listening to “people formerly known as the audience”[1] is one of the keys to success; however, it’s not just listening. Basically, newsrooms must let the readers in, in any form that may please them. Not complying with the wishes of donors can put the continuation of funding at risk. “Participation takes many forms in the more muscular models for membership” – reported Jay Rosen and Gonzalo del Peon. – “In the UK, The Bristol Cable’s members have a say in everything from editorial to strategic and business decisions, according to co-founder Adam Cantwell-Corn. The organization has monthly meetings at which members and staff vote on the topics they want to see covered that month.”[2]

When people from outside the newsroom vote on the topic to be covered, this is not even allocative control – this is operational control. Newsroom autonomy has been saved from advertisers (they are just not interested anymore). It is more or less protected from the rare species of billionaires concerned with the media’s survival. But, under crowdfunding, newsroom autonomy is readily given away to the crowd. By sending money and posing demands regarding editorial policy, the crowd of concerned readers/members, not editors, decides if all the news is “fit to print.” When the audience members donate to support journalism or any cause advocated by journalism, they effectively gain influence, transitioning from being mere consumers to becoming commissioners. Many media outlets readily accept this external intervention because it comes from their readers, and there is nothing wrong with listening to the readers.

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[1] Rosen, Jay. (2006, June 27). “The people formerly known as the audience.” *PressThink*. http://archive.pressthink.org/2006/06/27/ppl_frmr.html

[2] Rosen, Jay, & Peon, Gonzalo del. (2017, October 4). “Introducing the Membership Models in News Database for your use and contributions.” *The Membership Puzzle Project*. https://membershippuzzle.org/articles-overview/introducing-the-database

When the donating audience obtains allocative and sometimes even operational control over newsroom autonomy, what exactly will this control be used for? The key distinction between the donating audience and subscribers is that the donating audience does not consume the news it pays for. The "buying public" does not buy news for itself – it buys news for others, who supposedly need this news that is properly selected and packed. It is not so much the "buying public," as it is rather the "paying public." The paying public wants journalism to be maintained for the public service it delivers to society in general, i.e. to others. This is the whole point of the membership model – not to buy news for oneself but to pay for others to read it. In explaining the difference between subscription and membership, Jay Rosen emphasized the role of a *cause* for media fundraising:

> Subscription is when you pay your money and receive a product, like The New Yorker magazine via snail mail or access to the Times of London website. It is fundamentally a transactional relationship.
>
> Membership is when you join a cause because you believe in the importance of the work being done.[1]

Therefore, the paying public not only buys journalism for others, it also joins a *noble cause*. Originally, this cause was supposed to be journalism itself, the institutional existence of a media brand and the public service it provides. But this is not the only interpretation of a cause. The cause can also encompass the existence of a particular type of journalism, such as the "unbreaking news" of *De Correspondent* or the existence of a certain tradition of journalism, such as the 200-year-old brand of the *Guardian*. Eventually, a cause is also a theme, an

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[1] Rosen, Jay, & Peon, Gonzalo del. (2017, October 4). "Introducing the Membership Models in News Database for your use and contributions." *The Membership Puzzle Project*. https://membershippuzzle.org/articles-overview/introducing-the-database

approach, or a narrow topic to be covered, for which the "members" of the *Bristol Cable* would vote, as they are allowed to make decisions in the newsroom.

Not only does the membership model subsidize content to be delivered for free to those who do not want to or cannot pay for it, it also preselects this content to fit the idea of a cause chosen by the payers. It makes content ideologically charged and meant to be spread for free. These are, essentially, the technical characteristics of propaganda. The membership model subtly incentivizes journalism to mutate into propaganda.

Economically, membership is a hybrid model that combines the elements of payment *from above* and *from below*. In terms of the expected effect, which is paid for, membership resembles paying *from above* for agenda-setting, in the same way as advertisers or political sponsors would do it to spread a message or cover certain topics. In terms of a transactional mechanism, membership resembles paying *from below*, as payers are "people formerly known as the audience" (Rosen[1]). They used to buy news but now are solicited to pay to support a cause in the form of news coverage. Under the membership model, a part of the audience has turned into the paying public and taken the place that formerly belonged to advertisers or propagandists.

The impact of membership model on journalism is probably even more profound because, being most likely the only relatively efficient business innovation in the declining industry, membership has impacted traditional subscription. Media organizations with paywalls have started to solicit subscriptions as donations, adopting, along the way, other features of membership, such as ideologically aligning with the donating audience and selecting the most

[1] Rosen, Jay. (2006, June 27). "The people formerly known as the audience." *PressThink*. http://archive.pressthink.org/2006/06/27/ppl_frmr.html

donatable topics and approaches in news coverage. Fundraising motives have infiltrated the subscription model. In its surrogate forms, the membership model has changed the nature of reader revenue and its impact on the mass media.

Subscription solicited as donation: the environmental effect of the shift in political-economic settings

This section explores the effects of the hybrid membership-subscription model on discourse formation.

In the media markets of developed countries, a peculiar phenomenon has emerged in which paying for journalism may become more appealing than buying its product (news). The societal need for the news media to persist outweighs the economic demand for consuming news through traditional news media channels. As one study concluded, "Respondents are more likely to donate $10 to a free news site than pay a fee of $10 to access news."[1]

In the digital media environment, users are bombarded by news. As a result, before users make a rational choice and visit news media websites, they have already gone through the social media newsfeed and hence have been briefed of the daily news. The news in the newsfeed can be supplied by professional news media but not necessarily and certainly not exclusively. Politicians, activists, influencers, bloggers, and journalists-as-bloggers all contribute to shaping the news agenda on the newsfeed. Because of the networked and instantaneous nature of sharing on social media, news has forfeited any opportunity to preserve exclusivity, which was once

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[1] Van Duyn, Emily, Jennings, Jay, and Stroud, Natalie Jomini. (2018, January 18). "Chicago News Landscape." Moody College of Communication. The University of Texas at Austin. https://mediaengagement.org/research/chicago-news-landscape/

crucial for journalism and its business model. Now, news belongs to the newsfeed rather than to the source that originally published it.

The news provided by social media is faster, broader in scope, deeper in scoop, more personally customized. It has a better sensory/emotional impact because of the multimedia format, and has other advantages. But social media as a source of news has a significant flaw. It is not authorized by society as a legit source. While people no longer need the news media to get the news, they still need the media to make sure the news resonates with others, with the collective. People want to make sure the news they encounter in their newsfeed is "officially" accepted by society as valid. The traditional journalistic role of authorizing public discourses takes on new significance in the digitized media landscape. The news media cannot cope with the pace of news delivery in the social media newsfeed, but as a publicly authorized source of news they still serve as a sort of notary. They cannot supply the news, but they can provide the service of news validation.

The hypothesis regarding the switch of the news media from news supply to news validation can be supported by two arguments. First, many studies show that an increasingly larger part of the public receive the news via social media, as was shown in the beginning of this chapter. The quality of news is not relevant. Generally, it suffices for daily agenda coverage. The collective mechanism of news selection and delivery, along with the algorithms of relevance, provide everyone with the most relevant and personally customized newsfeed. At the same time, when disturbing events happen, the traffic to traditional journalist sources, such as news media websites or cable TV networks, grows immediately, displaying people's demand to get an authorized confirmation of the significance of the news (see, for example, studies: Olmstead, Mitchell, and Rosenstiel, Pew Research Center, 2010; Malling, 2021; Newman, Reuters Institute

Digital News Report, 2023). The "behaviour" of news traffic shows that people already know the news and visit news websites for confirmation of its public significance.

Thus, a new public demand emerged, or rather was refined, out of the old functions of journalism: the demand for the validation of news delivered by social media or, more broadly, via various digital channels. Recognizing the loss of priority in news supply but still experiencing some demand for news validation, leading news media began adjusting to validating news. This development was spurred by political-economic factors but driven by environmental – media-ecological – mechanisms. A new niche for traditional media started forming. Similar to a notary, the news media have started checking the significance of events already reported and widely commented on in social media against the public understanding of events' significance. Metaphorically speaking, the media's license for news supply has been re-issued by the public as a "notary" license for news validation.

News that requires validation is almost always disturbing news – as negative news is always more valuable from the perspective of risk taking (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979). Therefore, if news validation remains the only viable commodity for the news media, they need to learn to react to the news that is the most disturbing. Moreover, the media need to learn to look for such news. This is not unusual for journalism. The news media has always been prone to looking for bad news. But when it comes to news validation and not just news supply, the media need to validate news within a certain value system. The validation of disturbing news is always value-based validation. When journalists *report* news, pursuing the best quality requires their personal alienation and objectivity. But when journalists *validate* news, pursuing the best quality requires their alignment with a value system within which the news is valid. Thus, the traditional negativity bias of journalism has been complemented by the inclination towards ideological bias.

In parallel to the switch from news supply to news validation, the growing popularity of the membership model introduced, to the news media, the opportunity to directly solicit support for the cause of journalism. The convergence of news-value validation and membership pitching created a sort of dependence of the news media on soliciting support for their role in covering disturbing news within certain value systems.

These political economic conditions of news production and consumption had emerged in the USA by the time of Trump's presidency and aligned with the political development. Trump became a main supplier of triggering news, and the news media were ready to attract readership (and viewership) through validating this triggering news within progressive or conservative value systems. The election campaign and victory of Donald Trump created the so-called "Trump bump" in the media – the surge in subscription numbers and viewership ratings for leading American mainstream media[1]. The Trump bump exemplified the viability of the new news-validation model, as posited by this research hypothesis and supported by the market numbers.

The mainstream newspapers and TV cables demonstrated significant gains in audience and soon revenue during the Trump bump. The *New Yorker*, the *Atlantic*[2] and the *Washington Post*[3] doubled or tripled their subscriptions in the first year of Trump's presidency. In July 2018, the *Washington Post's* vice-president of marketing, Miki Toliver King, presented a report

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[1] *The Economist*. (2017, February 16). "Traditional media firms are enjoying a Trump bump. Making America's August news groups great again." https://www.economist.com/news/business/21717107-making-americas-August-news-groups-great-again-traditional-media-firms-are-enjoying-trump-bump.

[2] Doctor, Ken. (2017, March 3). "Trump bump grows into subscription surge – and not just for the New York Times." *The Street*. https://www.thestreet.com/story/14024114/1/trump-bump-grows-into-subscription-surge.html.

[3] Stelter, Brian. (2017, September 26). "Washington Post digital subscriptions soar past 1 million mark." *CNN*. http://money.cnn.com/2017/09/26/media/washington-post-digital-subscriptions.

showing a correlation between marketing efforts and subscription success (Figure 20). However, if we overlay the key events of Trump's campaign and presidency onto the subscription growth curve, we will see another pattern of correlation, a more obvious one. It was not a "marketing bump"; it was the Trump bump (Figure 13).

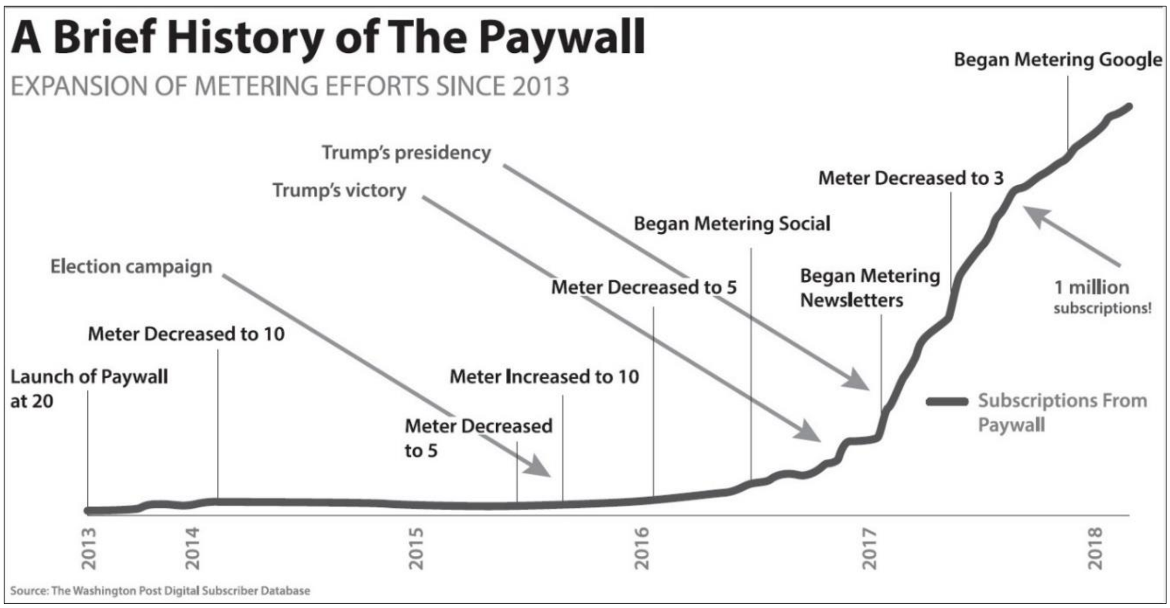

Figure 13. Correlations between the growth of the Washington Post's digital subscriptions and marketing strategy or Trump-related events. Source: World News Publishing Focus, WAN-IFRA[1]; Trump-related events are added.

The real symbol of the Trump bump was the *New York Times*. The Gray Lady made unprecedented progress during the first year of Trump's presidency. At the beginning of the campaign, the *New York Times* had slightly over 1 million digital subscribers to its news products. The paper almost doubled this number by the time of Trump's inauguration. As of

[1] Veseling, Brian (2018), 'Washington Post puts emphasis on creating paths to subscription', *World News Publishing Focus*, *WAN-IFRA*, 30 July, https://blog.wan-ifra.org/2018/07/30/washington-post-puts-emphasis-on-creating-paths-to-subscription.

December 2017, the *New York Times* had 2.2 million digital subscribers for its news product; by August 2020, this number had reached 4.4 million.[1] All these numbers set world records for digital subscriptions to a news media product (Figure 14).

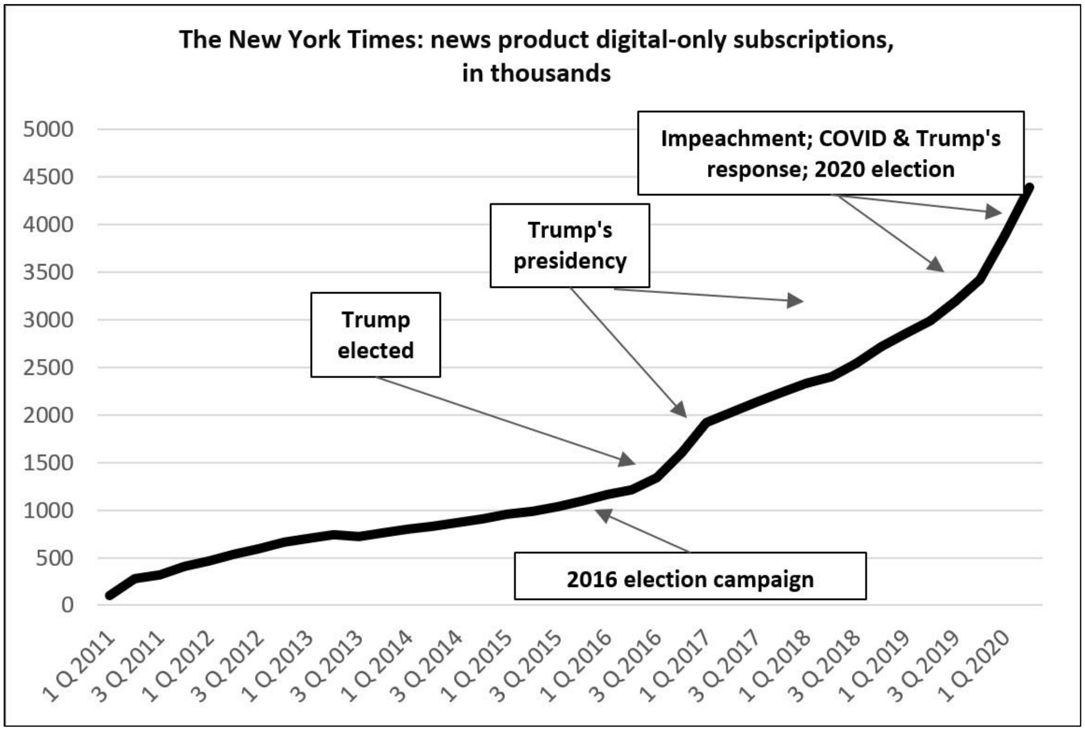

Figure 14. The New York Times: news product digital-only subscriptions (in thousands). Source: The New York Times Company's press releases[2]. It is also necessary to take into account the fact that marketing efforts, such as discounted offers, might have also affected the dynamic of subscription.

As the loss of the niche for news supply forced the media to drift towards news validation, the motives of the membership model (soliciting support for a cause) acquired a new

[1] The New York Times Company reports 2020 second-quarter results. (2020, August 5). https://investors.nytco.com/news-and-events/press-releases/#data-item=The-New-York-Times-Company-Reports-2020-Second-Quarter-Results.

[2] The New York Times Company's press releases. http://investors.nytco.com/press/press-releases/default.aspx.

and very powerful cause – the protection of democracy from Trump. These two parallel processes, the membership model's development and the emergence of news validation, both triggered by a technological change (the advent of the internet), had developed independently for a while but conjoined in 2016–2017 and created the conditions for a perfect storm that changed the very nature of the media and journalism. The cause of journalism, which was an initial motive of the fundraising pitches in the *Guardian* membership model, turned into the cause of democracy. An essentially professional business motive turned into an essentially political motive while remaining a business pitch for subscription. The media began introducing "non-profit" membership pitches in their commercial, "for-profit," models of subscription. For journalists, manifesting political stances shifted from being a professional taboo to a professional creed. They started commodifying the political.

The most common explanation of this metamorphosis related to the threat Trump posed to democracy. However, Trump was the "figure," while the determinative changes occurred in the "ground," according to this McLuhan dichotomy. The news media were forced to join the political fight because of the changes in their business model (the flip from plentiful ad revenue to the struggle for digital subscriptions/donations). The argument is simple – similar processes occurred in many countries, where the salient "figures" (Brexit, ADF in Germany, the rise of conservative ressentiment in Italy, Sweden, Hungary, Australia, India, Brazil, etc.) overshadowed the occurrences in the "ground" – the tectonic shift in the news media business. Therefore, the politicization of the news media cannot be reduced to the figure of Trump or American exceptionalism.

From the political-economic/media-ecological point of view, Trump and the rise of conservative ressentiment in general were not the cause of politicization and polarization in the news media. But the threat they posed for representative democracy turned out to be a perfect cause for the news media to use to solicit support from the public. More and more news organizations were employing membership techniques of soliciting financial support. Even the most successful proponents of paywalls, such as the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*, started promoting some of the motives based on a membership philosophy in their subscription offers: supporting a cause.

"*Washington Post* sells itself to readership with new slogan," reported CBS News[1] in February 2017, a month after Trump's inauguration. This slogan was "Democracy Dies in Darkness," a phrase coined by legendary American investigative journalist Bob Woodward, whose name, of course, immediately calls to mind reporting on the Watergate scandal, when the *Post* brought the American president to account. Amid Trump's accusations of the media being "the enemy of the people," the slogan emphasized the role of the news media as a pillar of democracy. Subscription marketing directly proclaimed ideological values and put them at the core of the commercial offer. The line between membership and subscription was becoming increasingly blurred. In many cases, the membership model did not supplement subscription but rather coalesced into it. The merging of philanthropy and transactional business corrupted them both.

An increasingly larger number of media organizations started drifting towards the hybrid of membership and subscription. Perhaps, due to historical media and political traditions, the functions of journalism and political stances merged more easily in the American media. The

[1] Bat, John. (2017, February 22). "Washington Post sells itself to readership with new slogan." *CBS News*. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-washington-post-introduces-its-new-slogan/

cause of journalism mutated into a political cause. The hybrid is easy to recognize – the media 1) offer subscription to content and 2) simultaneously ask for support for a cause they aim to promote. Symbolic or direct referrals to Donald Trump were sometimes used as subscription teasers, such as the figure of Trump in this subscription offer on Facebook by the *New York Times* (*Figure 15*).

Figure 15. The New York Times' subscription commercial on Facebook.

Watching the success of the industry's flagships, other media also tried to sell the Trump scare, openly linking membership and the political cause. As *Slate* offered on their website: "We've been holding Trump to account all year. Help us keep going. Become a member." The fusion of membership and subscription, on the one hand, and of political and journalism causes, on the other, amid the shrinking business, has produced some odd operational combinations of business and philanthropy. In March 2020, *Slate* announced that its membership program, Slate

Plus, would be combined with a paywall. But, all the same, "Becoming a member is also the best way to help us shape that journalism," hence the need to "Support our independent journalism."[1]

Increasingly, more media outlets have started pitching subscription as membership. The news media have started soliciting subscription as donation. With this shift, subscribers gradually become two new categories of payers:

1) those who pay a validation fee for the news validation service of the media, and

2) the donating audience contracting the media to influence others.

Because the largest mainstream media outlets in the US, both liberal and conservative, in 2016–2020 performed rather well in commodifying Trump in the form of subscriptions solicited as donations to the cause, the rest of the media market has started moving in the same direction. The media were increasingly pitching their services as a noble cause in the hopes of attracting audience support in the form of subscriptions/donations. Thus, a political-economic shift of an industrial scale occurred. The hybrid of a transactional scheme with membership motives could not but come with consequences. The membership model assumes that, through their donations, people join the cause of journalism; however, donations require the best possible triggers. The threat to democracy – or, also taking into consideration the conservative media, political outrage – is a better trigger than simply supporting journalism. The subscription-donation pitches inevitably shifted to more triggering causes, with Trump as a threat to democracy being the best example.

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[1] Hohlt, Jared. (2020, March 25). "Slate Is Starting a Metered Paywall." *Slate*. https://slate.com/briefing/2020/03/slate-metered-paywall.html

The newly forming business model began impacting the mechanisms of discourse formation in ways specific to philanthro-journalism and the membership model. The allocative control of subscription-membership money started driving editorial policies towards narrowing and dramatizing topics that were expected to better attract subscription-donations. The media were incentivized to amplify and dramatize issues whose coverage was most likely to be paid for (see, for example: Patterson, 2016; Meer, Hameleers, and Ohme, 2023; Arguedas, et al., 2023, and many others). Not only did the media have to address “pressing social issues,” but they were also incentivized to support and amplify readers’ irritation and frustration with those issues. The more concerned people became, the more likely they would donate (money or time spent) to a media outlet manifesting the fight for the cause. Ideally, the media should not just have exaggerated but also induced the public’s concerns. Regardless of the political inclinations of journalists themselves, the political-economic conditions created a professional and industrial environment favourable for the politicization and polarization of discourse formation in the news media.

To conclude the chapter, the switch of news consumption from traditional to digital media caused the decline in the news media’s business model. The news media lost their advertising revenue and their audiences to digital platforms. However, news delivered through social media did not possess the quality of being “authorized” by social convention. This function traditionally belonged to the news media, being earned through their 500-year history. The news media found a new niche – using their historical authority to validate the most disturbing news that cause people to seek confirmation and explanation within certain value systems. In parallel, the news industry tested different models of business or funding and revealed that the most, and possibly only, viable model was soliciting donations to a cause of journalism in the form of subscription. Having nothing else to sell, the news media started selling the cause of journalism or other causes in which discourse formation had a serious impact. This resulted in selling politicized causes. After switching from news supply to news validation, the news media themselves have become politicized.

The next chapter explores the main directions and side-effects of this adaptation – the specific changes in editorial policies, news gathering, and discourse production induced by the new environmental conditions of the new niche – the niche of news validation.

CHAPTER 5. STRUCTURAL, PROFESSIONAL AND IDEOLOGICAL CHANGES IN THE MEDIA UNDER THE NEW ENVIRONMENTAL AND BUSINESS CONDITIONS

This chapter explores some consequences of the switch of the news media from news supply to news validation due to the changes in the media-ecological conditions and political-economic models of news production and consumption. The introduction of a new medium, the internet, caused a cascade effect in the media environment. Dramatic changes in the news media were a part of this cascade effect. Over the last 10 to 15 years, both advertisers and audiences have fled to better platforms on the internet, where content is free for users and far more attractive while ad delivery is cheaper and far more efficient. The news media were to switch to a different source of revenue. They started pursuing the support of digital audiences who were already experiencing subscription fatigue and news overload. The news was delivered for free to everyone and ceased to be a commodity. Having the membership model as the only viable example, the media started soliciting subscriptions as donations – first to the cause of journalism but eventually to the cause of democracy.

This cascade of environmental and political-economic changes politicized the media and reprogrammed their settings in discourse production. The switch from plentiful advertising revenue to the struggle for digital subscriptions overturned not only news business but also the principles of news coverage and even the standards of journalism. The chapter explores some of these changes in journalism and editorial policies.

Outsourcing newsroom autonomy to subscribers-donors

Ad money incentivizes positivity, and reader money incentivizes negativity, but there has always been a third factor balancing the external impacts – newsroom autonomy. When the media were rich and their independent journalism was a factor in their market value, newsroom autonomy was capable of resisting not only the push for negativity but also the pressure from both the political interests of the elites and the commercial interests of the media's own sales departments.

Normally, journalists are affiliated with but not assimilated by the elites. In terms of social demography, newsrooms are filled with highly educated and passionate people who are well-networked within the elites but remain a part of their own professional guild. In terms of psychology, those selected for this profession meet specific criteria. They must be highly ambitious, often bordering on narcissistic. They require a proclivity, sometimes messianic, for public service. Driven by competitiveness, they must possess an innate, ever-challenging need to dig for scoops "at any cost." All these criteria create a professional caste with a high level of self-awareness and self-determination.

These professional qualities generally forced journalists to oppose the political pressure of the elites as well as the business pressure within their own media outlets as commercial enterprises. Or, it also can be said that newsroom autonomy creates economic value of a higher level than the sale of ads or news. The *Washington Post* boosted its symbolic and real capital after the 1972-73 Watergate scandal. By promulgating the huge story worthy of a presidential resignation, the *Post* won not only a Pulitzer Prize in 1973 but also the competition in the media market in covering politics (Salomon, 2014). Naturally, this boost in status had business implications, as the growing authority of the newspaper resulted in increased circulation and ad sales. "By 1973, the Post had achieved the number-one position in Washington, accounting for 65.8 percent of advertising space, 56.6 percent of daily circulation, and 67.1 percent of Sunday circulation," as reported in "The Washington Post Company History Timeline."[1] Similarly, in the 1971–73 Pentagon Papers scandal, the *New York Times* and their colleagues in the *Post* and other major outlets faced a serious legal risk that any normal business would have steered away from. But not the news media. *Time Magazine* reported that applications to journalism schools in 1974 reached an all-time high.[2]

"At news organizations the central organizing principle is usually to produce something with social impact first ahead of utility or profit," said Emily Bell, the director of the Tows Centre for Digital Journalism at the Columbia Journalism School, NY. She substantiated her statement with simple logical proof: by just doing their job, journalists are more likely to "end up being ostracized or imprisoned rather than ringing the opening bell at the New York stock exchange."[3]

The search for all kinds of "Pentagon Papers," "Panama Papers," and other WikiLeaks-type leaks that would smash the elites was a fundamental professional standard, elaborated by journalism in the late 20th century on the basis of an advertising-based business model. Despite posing some tactical risks for business, professional standards of journalism provided significant strategic gains for both the reputation and the business of the news media.

In the Golden Age of the media, the end of the 20th century, the principles of news coverage were governed by the complex interplay of three factors: advertising dependence,

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[1] The Washington Post Company History Timeline. https://www.zippia.com/the-washington-post-careers-62401/history/#

[2] *Time Magazine*. (1974, July 08). "Coyer Story: Covering Watergate: success and backlash." http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,943934,00.html

[3] Bell, Emily. (2014, November 23). "What's the right relationship between technology companies and journalism?" *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/media/media-blog/2014/nov/23/silicon-valley-companies-journalism-news

reader dependence and newsroom autonomy. Ad money incentivized the beautifying of reality and a structural shift in the news agenda towards less disturbing content, but there also was the so-called "glass wall" between the newsroom and advertising sales department. Journalism, not the ad spots on the paper sheet, has always been the main asset of newspapers. Media CEOs generally understood this. Newsroom autonomy used to mitigate the distortions induced by media business when the media business provided enough money for newsrooms to stay strong and self-confident. Paradoxically, when media business failed its function of maintaining journalism, the encroachments from the business side of media outweighed the resistance of newsroom autonomy.

With the switch from ad revenue to seeking reader revenue, the principle of the editorial "glass wall," which used to protect the newsroom from advertisers' wishes, logically disappeared. The sales department now interacts with the audience, not advertisers. How is it possible for the newsroom to fence itself off from the wishes of subscribers? The wall between the editorial and business dissolves when the business rests on readers.

As a result of the media-environmental and economic transition caused by digital media, not only have the news media been rendered dependent on declining revenue coming predominantly from readers, but they have also become defenseless against readers. Newsroom autonomy has shrunk because of both the decrease in revenue and the increase in dependence on readers' support. The media needed to reorganize their editorial policies to accommodate the expectations of readers, i.e. the subscribing-donating audience. Readers pay to make sure 1) they receive the right agenda and 2) the right agenda is delivered to others. This dissertation hypothesizes that the combination of the validation fee and the membership surrogate of subscription serves to push journalism toward crowdfunded propaganda: the media becomes compelled to validate, justify, and deliver the desired worldview of the paying audience.

This observation can be supported by a similar process occurring in social media that has been identified as “participatory propaganda” (Wanless & Berk, 2017; Asmolov, 2019; and others). Participatory propaganda signifies the phenomenon of ordinary users joining, subliminally or deliberately, the distribution and support of political ideas in efforts that traditionally were intrinsic to classical propaganda. Now, the blogosphere and particularly social media have given users an opportunity to be the propagandists in their own right. In participatory propaganda on social media, people contribute their participation. For “crowdfunded propaganda” in the news media, people contribute their money to a cause. But for the latter, people need someone to do agenda-setting on their behalf, and this agenda-setting contractor is the news media. These new conditions of media business afford and, due to the lack of an alternative, favour the development of *crowdfunded and outsourced propaganda* in the former niche of news production by the media.

The ultimate goal of reader-driven media within the validation/membership subscription model is to make people donate. The product is not the news – readers already know all the relevant news from social media. The product is even not agenda-setting, because the donating audience is already immersed in their preferred agendas on social media. The work of the media is now to refine and justify the agenda and inculcate it in others. But for the media themselves, the desired result is making people subscribe-donate again and again.

As was discussed in Chapter 3, the media induce the demand for their product. To that end, they induce a reality in which the audience will stay constantly triggered and willing to donate. Within this new business model, the media commodify what they fight with. This is why the mainstream media in the US kept "commodifighting" Trumpism, even though everyone understood how beneficial it was for Trump and despite many scholars and activists' calls for not covering Trump (for example, a vivid proponent of this strategy was cognitive linguist George Lakoff[1]).

Under the advertising model, the social-demographic characteristics of the target audience were well-known. The most important were income, education, job position, area of living, property cost, etc. – all revolving around the ability to buy advertised goods. As noted by Herman and Chomsky, the cultural power of marketing and advertising created a world of virtual communities based on consumer demographics and taste differences. They wrote:

> These consumption- and style-based clusters are at odds with physical communities that share a social life and common concerns and which participate in a democratic order. These virtual communities are organized to buy and sell goods, not to create or service a public sphere," wrote Herman and Chomsky about the power of the media to create the audience. (Herman & Chomsky, 2002 [1988], p. xviii)

If the characteristics and political impact of the ad-driven media's audience were known, then what are the characteristics of the audience of the reader-driven media in the digital media environment? This has yet to be identified by media sociologists and political scholars. But the main assumption could be made on the basis of etymological analysis. The core feature of the donating audience is that it consists of people who are able to donate. They are not just financially able – the amount of money donated to the media is not enormous – but rather they

[1] See, for example: Knigge, Michael. (2018, January 21). "Don't retweet Trump and don't use his language. Interview with cognitive linguist George Lakoff." DW. https://www.dw.com/en/dont-retweet-donald-trump-and-dont-use-his-language/a-42213110; Gladstone, Brooke, and Lakoff, George. (2016, December 2). "How Talking about Trump makes him normal in your brain." On the Media. Podcast with George Lakoff. https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/otm/segments/george-lakoff.

are psychologically inclined to do this. They are a particular class of people, presumably educated enough, most likely old enough (they are familiar with old media consumption and remember what a significant role the media used to play). The most important characteristic of this cohort has to be their political involvement and empathy, at least at some level, along with their political or social awareness and civic consciousness. The closest synonym for "donating audience" would be "concerned citizens." These people likely have some active civic views – a cause – that they think should be joined by others. Other social-demographic groups, such as younger or less educated groups, are likely to remain unaffected by the subscription pitches of traditional media. The ability to activate the concern of this cohort becomes an important business asset for the news media, impacting the principles of discourse formation, as will be demonstrated in the following sections.

The flip from the "advertising license to do business" to the "readership license"

This section hypothesizes on the change in one of the filters of Herman-Chomsky's Propaganda Model, the "advertising license to do business," under the new media-ecological and political-economic conditions induced by digital media.

The Propaganda Model, introduced by Herman and Chomsky in 1988, became one of the most prominent concepts in the political economy of the news media, thereby garnering significant criticism as well. Even a critical essay collection, *The Anti-Chomsky Reader*, was published by Peter Collier and David Horowitz in 2004. A significant portion of the criticism was directed toward the alleged totality of the model: it was argued that the model presupposed complete subservience of the news media to the elites. However, as the critics noted, in reality different news media also practiced investigative journalism, watchdog journalism, accountability journalism, and various forms of critical reporting on elites and capitalism in general. Another significant aspect of the criticism highlighted that the Propaganda Model failed to account for the role of human consciousness and individual professional choice in journalism, thereby aligning with the criticism of techno-determinism.

In response to this criticism, Herman and Chomsky typically argued that the model merely depicted the conditions under which relationships between elites and the news media were likely to develop. Essentially, they implied an environmental aspect in their model. Environmental conditions are not contingent on individual choice, and their "totality" does not solely predetermine all various outcomes since other factors can come into play. The model does not prescribe every action or behavior of each individual or media outlet involved; instead, it describes the conditions that favour (afford and therefore invite) actions leading to better survival and success for actors, institutions, relations, and narratives. The implied environmental nature of the Propaganda Model made it applicable for combining with media-ecological analysis of the news media.

Herman and Chomsky singled out five factors – or "filters," as they called them – that represented the impact of these specific political-economic conditions on ideologically skewed news coverage. A concise and slightly simplified description was given by Herman in 2000:

> We noted that the five factors involved – ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak and anti-communist ideology – work as 'filters' through which information must pass, and that individually and often in cumulative fashion, they greatly influence media choices. (Herman, 2000, p. 102)

Herman and Chomsky avoided the temptation to rank their filters by importance. As they commented on different occasions, "It varies from case to case" (as quoted in Alford, 2018, p.

152). They also admitted that the Propaganda Model's filters may have different manifestations in different political systems and clarified that they described the media system that existed in the USA. Similar observations ("We have several observations, but no rules," as quoted in Mullen, 2009, p.12) have been said to be applicable in other countries with media systems integrated into free capitalist markets or even those without the latter. 20 years after the model was published, Herman and Chomsky said that,

> (a) Ownership and (b) advertising belong to straightforward institutional analysis – these are the kinds of institutional arrangements that predominate among US media firms and elsewhere. (c) Sourcing and (d) flak are two well-established processes to which any elite-serving media will adapt, whether we are talking about the elite US or British media or the elite media under Stalin and Hitler. On the other hand, (e) anti-communism, as a major theme of media production during the twentieth century, was reflective of the prevailing system of belief in the Western states, and has evolved with the collapse of the Soviet bloc since the first edition of Manufacturing Consent. (Mullen, 2009, p. 13-14)

Their approach clarified that the impacts of various Propaganda Model filters may vary over time and in different contexts. This chapter follows this premise and explores how certain filters of the classical Propaganda Model might or should operate in an environment where advertising revenue is no longer the primary source of funding for the media, as it was when Herman and Chomsky introduced their model.

Advertising, indeed, was listed as the second filter in the Propaganda Model after ownership/profit-seeking. Even though Herman and Chomsky did not rank the influence of the filters, it is clear that the mechanism through which the owners of media seek profit has a profound impact on "media choices," according to the logic of the Propaganda Model. This mechanism was advertising. It funded journalism throughout the 20th century, enabling the news media to reach the pinnacle of their prosperity and influence by the 1980s.

Herman and Chomsky titled the section on advertising "The advertising license to do business: the second filter." This metaphor suggested that media organizations that aligned with advertisers' demand gained better opportunities for success or even survival in the highly competitive market. To win advertisers' favour, the media needed to gather a proper audience – both in quality and quantity – and provide a proper "supportive selling environment" (Herman, 2000, p. 102). Advertisers would choose those media that attracted a better audience and had a better context.

Besides the purely marketing selection of an appropriate audience and appropriate context, advertisers conformed to what we would now call "brand safety." Herman and Chomsky stated that advertisers generally preferred to avoid publications "with serious complexities and disturbing controversies that interfere with the 'buying mood'" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002 [1988], p. 17). Advertising money generally rendered the media industry more politically neutral. This neutrality did not necessarily stem from high standards of impartiality alone (though such standards existed at the level of newsroom autonomy), but also because political biases would repel readers with opposing views, thereby diminishing the audience. Advertising money, seeking a larger audience with the "buying mood," depoliticized the media and protected society from the risks of political polarization in the media.

In the logic of the Propaganda Model, the switch from advertising money to readers' money can be described as a switch from the "advertising license" to the "readership license to do business" in the media. The switch also entailed a flip in the "licensing requirements." As the previous analysis of philanthro-journalism and the membership model showed, the competition for donating money opens better opportunities for media that focus on "donatable," meaning "triggering," topics. Therefore, if the figurative "advertising license" depoliticized news coverage, the figurative “donation license” politicized news coverage. What is also important is that the news media aimed at subscriptions-donations tend to drift towards the extremes of the spectrum, where emotions are stronger and where triggers for donations work better. Much like how the pursuit of ad money invisibly pushed the media industry to become politically disengaged, the pursuit of donation money invisibly drove the media industry towards greater partisanship and political divisiveness.

Herman and Chomsky metaphorically compared advertisers to the patrons of the media. They wrote:

> The choices of these patrons greatly affect the welfare of the media, and the patrons become what William Evan calls “normative reference organizations,” whose requirements and demands the media must accommodate if they are to succeed. (Herman & Chomsky, 2002 [1988], p. 16)

After ad money disappeared, the media found a new payer, patron, and “normative reference organization” – the public capable of donating for a cause. Such analysis of the allocative control of subscription-donation money shows that it is the will and wish of the audience, picked up by the editors, that is increasingly becoming a new significant filter for discourse formation. If editors are not adequately aligned with the most concerned, vocal, and presumably donating audience, they risk being excluded from a system that demands alignment with the values of the donating audience. The backlash of the audience has become more powerful than ever before because now it is increasingly the audience who pays, or is expected to pay, for journalism (in the case of TV, the role of cable subscription has increased, too, while the role of advertising has decreased; but this dissertation focuses on the press as the main source of discourses).

Thus, the pursuit of money from certain payers, and even the expectation of getting money through a certain mechanism, has created the environmental conditions for changes in news coverage and discourse formation. The flip from ad money to the expectation of getting money from the digital audience not only shifted the focus of allocative control in discourse formation from consumerism to politicization – it also changed the nature of another filter of the Propaganda Model, flak.

New flak – the pressure of the digital audience

This section employs case studies, including the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, to analyze the development of the Propaganda Model filter of flak in contemporary media-environmental and political-economic conditions, characterized by the switch in funding journalism from advertising to subscriptions-donations. Specifically, the case study on the *New York Times'* evolution of relations with the audience from the 2000s to the late 2010s demonstrates how the *New York Times* transitioned from shielding its reporters from crowd pressure to permitting digital feedback to influence particular editorial and HR choices, effectively relinquishing a portion of operational control to the audience.

In *Manufacturing consent*, Herman and Chomsky introduced the notion of flak to the political economy of the news media. They saw flak as a "means of disciplining the media" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002 [1988], p. 2). They wrote:

> "Flak" refers to negative responses to a media statement or program. It may take the form of letters, telegrams, phone calls, petitions, lawsuits, speeches and bills before Congress, and other modes of complaint, threat, and punitive action. It may be organized centrally or locally, or it may consist of the entirely independent actions of individuals.

> If flak is produced on a large scale, or by individuals or groups with substantial resources, it can be both uncomfortable and costly to the media. (Herman & Chomsky, 2002 [1988], p. 26)

According to Herman and Chomsky, flak could cause reputational harm, lead to the withdrawal of advertising contracts or force the media to spend a lot of money on remedial PR and legal defenses, sometimes including court cases. Hence, flak was not merely unpleasant negative feedback; it could result in decreased revenue and increased expenses. Besides, because of flak, people in the media could lose their jobs. This factor forced them to censor themselves at the level of personal choices.

To develop the idea of Herman and Chomsky in the contemporary conditions of the growing dependence of the news media on the digital audience, flak can be seen as originating from two sources:

1. Institutional flak, which relates to the traditional Herman-Chomsky view of it, and

2. Grassroots flak, a new phenomenon growing from the increasing power of the "people formerly known as the audience" (Rosen[1]) and amplified by social media.

Institutional flak has been long known as the product of different think tanks and institutions that "studied" news media and the freedom of the press. Herman and Chomsky listed a number of such organizations at the time they introduced their model, such us the American Legal Foundation, the Capital Legal Foundation, the Media Institute, the Center for Media and Public Affairs, Accuracy in Media, Freedom House and others. These entities conducted media studies, provided judgments about media biases, sometimes filed libel suits to aid "media

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[1] Rosen, Jay. (2006, June 27). "The people formerly known as the audience." *PressThink*. http://archive.pressthink.org/2006/06/27/ppl_frmr.html

victims," and organized pressure on media outlets in other ways. Herman and Chomsky highlighted that these institutions had wealthy corporate sponsors and could be "regarded as institutions organized for the specific purpose of producing flak" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002 [1988], p. 27).

However, technically speaking, a media environment has to have institutions studying the news media and their impact. These institutions have to produce critical evaluations of the news media and media market, including criticisms of flaws, biases, and possible corruption in the news media. Being incorporated into social, political, and economic relations and often funded by corporations, those expert institutions represent, of course, the institutional normative power of capitalist society – this fact gave Herman and Chomsky their rationale for including expert, research, and legal institutions into the filter of flak.

Since the time Herman and Chomsky first described their Propaganda Model, the nature of institutional flak has changed. Especially in the late 2010s, when the media had already engaged in politicization, institutional flak became not just "expert," but openly political as well. Attempts to incite flak were observed coming from as high as the presidential level. President Trump's stance toward the media garnered a special label: "Trump's war on the media."[1] His animosity towards certain media was not limited to his attacks on journalists and media outlets; his invectives spearheaded backlash and sometimes real threats to media organizations from the alt-right.

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[1] Roig-Franzia, Manuel, and Ellison, Sarah. (2020, March 29). "A history of the Trump War on Media — the obsession not even coronavirus could stop." *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/media/a-history-of-the-trump-war-on-media--the-obsession-not-even-coronavirus-could-stop/2020/03/28/71bb21d0-f433-11e9-8cf0-4cc99f74d127_story.html

Some initiatives from the political right also represented organized network flak activities. For example, as reported in the press, a group of conservatives, including GOP consultant Arthur Schwartz, embarked on a mission to uncover journalists' embarrassing social media posts. They utilized algorithms to scan posts dating back to the journalists' teenage or college years, as reported by the *Washington Post*[1]. They occasionally succeeded; after some inappropriate posts were found, several liberal media high-ranking professionals resigned.

The group even tried to raise $2 million to investigate reporters and editors from "CNN, MSNBC, all broadcast networks, NY Times, Washington Post, BuzzFeed, Huffington Post, and all others that routinely incorporate bias and misinformation into their coverage. We will also track the reporters and editors of these organizations," as was stated in their fundraising pitch.[2]

Attempts to organize institutional pressure on the media have been undertaken by the left, too. The group of liberal activists known as "Check My Ads" launched a campaign against disinformation by publicly exposing and consequently deterring advertisers from supporting media figures such as Steve Bannon, Glenn Beck, and Dan Bongino. Succeeding in fighting right-wing provocateurs, the group decided in June 2022 to apply the same technique to fight FOX News.[3]

As the media became more involved in political struggle, so too did the flak machine. There were widely discussed cases of institutionally organized flak aimed not just at researching

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Allen, Mike. (2019, September 3). "Trump allies raise money to target reporters." *Axious*. https://www.axios.com/2020-presidential-campaign-trump-allies-journalists-6733432f-b008-45d3-99c2-9dca7931faff.html

[3] Allyn, Bobby. (2022, June 9). "Group aiming to defund disinformation tries to drain Fox News of online advertising." *NPR*. https://www.npr.org/2022/06/09/1103690822/group-aiming-to-defund-disinformation-tries-to-drain-fox-news-of-online-advertis

and exposing media biases but also directly retaliating against media outlets leaning towards certain political stances. Herman and Chomsky would have hardly imagined it, but some types of flak developed features of "special operations." A story involving the *Washington Post* in 2017 provides an example. A woman contacted reporters and accused Republican U.S. Senate candidate Roy Moore of sexual harassment when she was underage. It took the *Post*'s reporters two weeks to investigate the inconsistencies in the woman's account and reveal that she was affiliated with Project Veritas, "a group of conservative provocateurs that for a decade has run sting operations to embarrass left-leaning groups and seek evidence of political bias among top media organizations," as the *Washington Post* characterized it.[1] The *Post* nearly fell into the trap, but professional rigor guided them to safety. The provocation failed, and the reputation of the *Washington Post* was saved. [2]

However, the case revealed new possibilities for contemporary flak. Now, flak can not only react to real or alleged failures of the media but also proactively seek to incite such failures.

The development and derivations of institutional flak have been recently complemented by a new phenomenon that can be called grassroots flak (Mir, 2020). Traditionally, the control over discourse formation, as it is seen through a Marxist lens, was assigned to corporate, financial, and political elites. However, by emancipating and amplifying authorship of the masses, the internet and social media have changed the distribution of power in discourse

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[1] Roig-Franzia, Manuel, and Ellison, Sarah. (2020, March 29). "A history of the Trump War on Media — the obsession not even coronavirus could stop." *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/media/a-history-of-the-trump-war-on-media--the-obsession-not-even-coronavirus-could-stop/2020/03/28/71bb21d0-f433-11e9-8cf0-4cc99f74d127_story.html

[2] White, Jeremy. (2017, November 28). "Washington Post claims woman came to them with false Roy Moore abuse story in bizarre plot to discredit newspaper." *Independent*. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/roy-moore-washington-post-fake-story-woman-veritas-sting-plot-james-okeefe-alabama-a8079216.html

production. New media platforms have empowered those previously voiceless, “the people formerly known as the audience” (Rosen[1]). In their turn, the news media voluntarily accepted their dependence on digital audiences, hoping to get subscriptions from them. These two factors – the voicing of the formerly voiceless and the media’s growing dependence on subscriptions-donations from them – has resulted in a new way of “disciplining the news media,” digital grassroots flak.

Historically, the accidental discontent of the audience with certain coverage in a media outlet could be generally ignored. For readers’ accidental discontent to become a force powerful enough to affect media choices, it needed to reach a significant threshold – for example, hundreds or thousands of readers would need to cancel their subscriptions. In practice, this rarely (if ever) happened. Quite the opposite – any scandal rather improved news media copy sales. The discontent of advertisers was much more dangerous for the media. The risks of losing 2–3 advertising contracts would have mattered much more than the risk of losing hundreds of subscribers. The dispersed nature of transactions with readers invalidated the potential of readers’ influence on the editorial practices in the past. This is why Herman and Chomsky, generally, did not recognize any kind of readers’ flak. The audience had no agency in their Propaganda Model. The audience’s flak did not exist, or it was insignificant in the media market, which was dominated by advertising revenue. All the flak registered by Herman and Chomsky was institutional and based on the news media’s fear of losing ad contracts or going to court.

[1] Rosen, Jay. (2006, June 27). “The people formerly known as the audience.” *PressThink*. http://archive.pressthink.org/2006/06/27/ppl_frmr.html

In this sense, if we follow Herman and Chomsky's view of flak, as advertising money has diminished, flak should seemingly have lost its effectiveness in the new business environment dominated by reader revenue. However, this has not been the case. Flak has mutated and created a new and powerful offspring. Flak is no longer the prerogative of the elites having access to opinion-making. Digital grassroots flak has acquired significant influence in this new environment. The power of grassroots flak can be compared to that of elites in the past. But the reach and speed of grassroots flak even exceeds the reach and speed of "media disciplining" tools that were previously exclusively in the elites' possession. Not only has every reader gained the means to publicly express their discontent with the news media, but social media have additionally amplified flak of the ordinary people through the algorithms and mechanisms of virality.

A case study involving one of the most respectful and powerful media outlets in the world, the *New York Times*, illustrates this shift in the audience's capability to produce flak.

In his 2011 book *The Filter Bubble: How the New Personalized Web is Changing What We Read and How We Think,* Eli Pariser distinguished between the ways traditional news media and the new online news media conformed to what the audience wanted. He compared the newsroom of *Gawker,* the then-skyrocketing tabloid-type of new online media outlet (the late 2000s) and the *New York Times*. In Gawker's newsroom, there was a Big Board, a huge screen showing the top posts by page views. "Write an article that makes it onto the Big Board, and you're liable to get a raise," reported Pariser. "Stay off it for too long, and you may need to find a different job" (Pariser, 2011, p. 32). The *New York Times* at the time held a completely opposite stance, disregarding the instant reactions of the audience. Pariser saw this as an advantage and even as a hallmark of journalistic integrity:

> At the New York Times, reporters and bloggers aren't allowed to see how many people click on their stories. This isn't just a rule, it's a philosophy that the Times lives by: The point of being the newspaper of record is to provide readers with the benefit of excellent, considered editorial judgment. "We don't let metrics dictate our assignments and play," New York Times editor Bill Keller said, "because we believe readers come to us for our judgment, not the judgment of the crowd. We're not 'American Idol.'" Readers can vote with their feet by subscribing to another paper if they like, but the Times doesn't pander. Younger Times writers who are concerned about such things have to essentially bribe the paper's system administrators to give them a peek at their stats. (The paper does use aggregate statistics to determine which online features to expand or cut.) (Pariser, 2011, p. 32)

Pariser's observation preserved important historical evidence. In the late 2000s, the *New York Times* disregarded the immediate likes of the crowd and kept "media choices" to its own editors. Ten years later, this attitude changed. Editors whose newspapers depended solely on reader revenue could no longer assert that readers might leave if they disagreed with editorial choices.

In 2017, the *New York Times* decided to eliminate the position of public editor, a sort of audience's ombudsman, the figure responsible for absorbing and representing public criticism about *New York Times*' journalism. "Does *The New York Times* really need to pay a public editor when everyone on Twitter will happily criticize Times articles for free?" commented Laura Owen in NiemanLab.[1] In his memo on the matter, Times publisher Arthur Sulzberger Jr. wrote:

> …our followers on social media and our readers across the internet have come together to collectively serve as a modern watchdog, more vigilant and forceful than one person could ever be.[2]

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[1] Owen, Laura Hazard. (2017, May 31). "The New York Times is eliminating the position of public editor; here's the Sulzberger memo." *NiemanLab*. https://www.niemanlab.org/2017/05/the-new-york-times-is-eliminating-the-position-of-public-editor-heres-the-sulzberger-memo/

[2] Ibid.

The decision was widely criticized in the media industry. A professional representative would filter criticism from the public, highlighting what is significant while mitigating impulsive reactions of emotional discontent. Basically, the public editor was a means for dealing with this new digital grassroots flak. By shutting down the function of public editor-mediator, the *New York Times* chose to deal with grassroots flak directly. The decision was noteworthy because it reflected the struggle of the news media with the new conditions of flak.

The next clashes of the *New York Times* with grassroots flak became increasingly dramatic. On January 17, 2018, the *New York Times* published the letters of Trump supporters on its opinion page. Introducing the daring initiative, the *New York Times* wrote that,

> The Times editorial board has been sharply critical of the Trump presidency, on grounds of policy and personal conduct. Not all readers have been persuaded. In the spirit of open debate, and in hopes of helping readers who agree with us better understand the views of those who don't, we wanted to let Mr. Trump's supporters make their best case for him as the first year of his presidency approaches its close.[1]

The fact that the leading American newspaper gave a pulpit to Trump's supporters caused outrage in the *Twitterati*, as *New York Times* executive editor Dean Baquet called a liberal and most vocal fraction of Twitter. "The New York Times is in bed with Donald Trump!" sarcastically summed up the reaction of Jim Warren in *Poynter*.[2] The *New York Times* was forced to defend its decision. Op-ed editor James Bennet took responsibility and said, "It's my fault."

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[1] *The New York Times.* (2018. January 17). "Vision, Chutzpah and Some Testosterone". https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/17/opinion/trump-voters-supporters.html

[2] Warren, Jim. (2018, January 18). "Giving his backers a high-profile platform." *Poynter. Morning Media Wire*. https://bit.ly/35Aaei4

When readers buy content for themselves, they can be judgemental; the public is always judgemental. But everyone understands that subscribers cannot impose their requirements upon concrete editorial decisions. Consumers can be unsatisfied, they can even cancel subscriptions, but they cannot dictate what the news media cover and how they cover it. Transactional news retail more or less protected newsroom autonomy from the audience's encroachment upon content control (operational control, in Murdock's term). But when the readers' motives are not to get news but to join a cause, the readers become the patrons. They still pay *from below* but out of motives *from above*. The audience embraced its newfound power, partly because they were being acknowledged as the patrons donating to the cause and also due to their real and increased ability to amplify their voices on social media. Readers began to feel entitled to have a say and to assert their influence over the coverage of specific topics. The audience, indeed, accepted the role of a "normative reference organization" instead of advertisers. Most importantly, the newsroom accepted this new balance of power, too. Striving to please the digital audience as the last remaining hope to sell news, the newsroom engaged in discussing concrete topics with imaginary readers, represented by the most vocal voices on Twitter.

This is how Jay Rosen characterized this newly emerged relationship between the audience and the *New York Times* in 2018:

> The readers of the New York Times have more power now. <...> The Times depends on its readers' support more than it ever has. <...> One of the joys of having a subscription to the Times is threatening to cancel it. Which is simply to say that a Times loyalist is also a

critic. It has always been that way — the Times gets a lot of criticism — but now the situation is growing more tense and anxious.[1]

Interestingly, there is no available data that would suggest that grassroots flak converts into the actual cancelling of subscriptions. For example, the *New York Times'* column by Republican senator Tom Cotton, who called to "send in the troops" during the protests against police brutality and racism in 2020, entailed a significant reader backlash on Twitter. The reaction was so powerful that *New York Times* op-ed editor James Bennet, who published Cotton's column to represent the spectrum of opinions, was forced to resign[2]. Twitter was filled with the calls to cancel *New York Times* subscriptions. However, this incident did not result in decreasing subscription numbers that quarter, according to New York Times Company financial reports.[3] Quite the opposite, as *New York Times* subscriptions numbers continued to grow during this period of the Trump bump.

It can be assumed that digital grassroots flak comes with a different mechanism of "disciplining the media." This mechanism is not transactional – it does not impact subscription revenue. It is more likely that it is not real business outcomes but rather the fear of digital audience discontent that enables the effect of grassroots flak on the media. After losing ad business and searching for alternative sources of revenue, the media turned to the hope of digital subscription and therefore became susceptible to the moods of the digital audience. The news media's fear of alienating subscribers might prove more effective than actual subscription

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[1] Rosen, Jay. (2018, October 21). "Next time you wonder why New York Times people get so defensive, read this." *PressThink*. https://pressthink.org/2018/10/next-time-you-wonder-why-new-york-times-people-get-so-defensive-read-this/

[2] Darcy, Oliver. (2020, June 7). "James Bennet resigns from New York Times after Cotton op-ed backlash." *CNN*. https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/07/media/james-bennet-new-york-times-resigns/index.html

[3] The New York Times Company press releases. https://investors.nytco.com/news-and-events/press-releases/.

cancellations, which, in fact, have never been confirmed or detected on a noticeable scale. If this hypothesis is correct, then it is the media's self-accepted dependence on real and imaginary audiences that made the media so unusually susceptible to criticisms of the digital public. The power of this new flak rests on the news media's own fear of audience discontent.

From time to time, newsrooms tried to resist the pressure of these new conditions. For example, in 2018 Jay Rosen distinguished the *New York Times* from the *Washington Post*, implying that the *Times* tried to withstand the pressure of the audience that came from both political sides. Rosen quoted the *New York Times*'s publisher, Arthur G. Sulzberger, who said that,

> We won't be baited into becoming 'the opposition.' And we won't be applauded into becoming 'the opposition.'[1]

As Rosen clarified, "By 'baited' he clearly meant the taunts of people like Steve Bannon and President Trump. By 'applauded' he meant, I think, the pressure coming from Times loyalists." At that time, those expected to pay for the *Times'* journalism were already primarily readers, not advertisers, and they typically belonged to a specific socio-demographic stratum. As Rosen characterized the most demanding *New York Times* readers,

> They want the Times to be tougher on his <Trump> supporters and more relentless in calling out his lies. They want Times journalists to see what they see — an assault on democratic institutions, the corruption of the American Republic — and to act accordingly.[2]

As of 2018, the *New York Times* still resisted this new flak. Rosen wrote:

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[1] Rosen, Jay. (2018, October 21). "Next time you wonder why New York Times people get so defensive, read this." *PressThink*. https://pressthink.org/2018/10/next-time-you-wonder-why-new-york-times-people-get-so-defensive-read-this/

[2] Ibid.

> But these people are perceived as a threat by the Times newsroom. The fear is that they want to turn the Times into an opposition newspaper. This is not how the Times sees itself. The fear is that they want the Times to help save American democracy. This too is not how the Times sees itself.[1]

Rosen compared the stances of *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, bringing up the *Post*'s motto "Democracy Dies in Darkness." He quoted Dean Baquet, executive editor of the *Times*, who once made fun of the *Washington Post* motto, saying that it "sounds like the next Batman movie."[2] It seemed that Dean Baquet was mocking the *Washington Post* which, by 2019, had already turned the "cause of journalism" into the "cause of democracy" in their business strategy of soliciting subscriptions as donations.

The *New York Times* tried to remain the national "paper of record" and represent a spectrum of opinion, at least in op-ed. In a November 2019 interview with *BBC*[3], Dean Baquet said:

> I make it very clear when I hire, I make it very clear when I talk to the staff, I've said it repeatedly, that we are not supposed to be the leaders of the resistance to Donald Trump. That is an untenable, non-journalistic, immoral position for The New York Times."[4]

But the most demanding part of the readership thought differently. In 2018, op-ed editor James Bennet managed to defend his decision to publish the letters of Trump's supporters. In 2020, he was forced to resign[5] after choosing the wrong columnist (Republican senator Tom

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[1] Ibid.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Baquet, Dean. (2019, November 13). "New York Times: 'We're not supposed to be leaders of the resistance to Donald Trump'." *BBC*. https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p07tvmjn
[4] As quoted in: Jones, Tom. (2020, June 8). "The controversy at The New York Times is over more than just one op-ed. The future of the Times could be at stake." *Poynter*. https://www.poynter.org/newsletters/2020/the-controversy-at-the-new-york-times-is-over-more-than-just-one-op-ed-the-future-of-the-times-could-be-at-stake/
[5] Darcy, Oliver. (2020, June 7). "James Bennet resigns from New York Times after Cotton op-ed backlash." *CNN*. https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/07/media/james-bennet-new-york-times-resigns/index.html

Cotton, who said to "send in the troops" in a column on the op-ed page during the BLM protests). The pressure of the digital audience ended up in the resignation of one of the key newsroom figures.

Amid Bennet's resignation, some media critics tried to remind Baquet about the "we are not the resistance" quote, but politicization in the media has now progressed much further, to the degree that the very concept of covering "all sides" has become effectively banned by flak. "The spirit of open debate" and "better understanding of those who disagree" that the *New York Times* tried to maintain in 2018 could not withstand digital grassroots flak in 2020.

Soon after James Bennet, another staff editor and *New York Times* op-ed writer, Bari Weiss, also resigned, accusing some colleagues of bullying her in the company Slack channels and on Twitter for having different views. In her resignation letter, she wrote: "Twitter is not on the masthead of the New York Times, but Twitter has become its ultimate editor."[1]

Considering the significance of the *New York Times*, it can be said that the career cases of its opinion editors, whatever individual specificities they had, set an example for the industry, which was another effect of flak. At a systemic level, the chilling effect of these cases narrowed the spectrum of voices in the media, as everyone saw what might happen to them individually if they do not align with the expectations of the most vocal part of the audience.

Thus, grassroots flak continues to fulfill the role of "disciplining the media" as outlined by Herman and Chomsky. The difference is that digital grassroots flak is more all-pervading, powerful, and aggressive than the institutional flak that existed under the ad-funded business model of the news media in the times Herman and Chomsky described their Propaganda Model.

[1] Ibid.

Digital grassroots flak has become the most powerful form of flak. The power of grassroots flak was handed to the audience by the news media themselves. The power of flak resulted not only in media choices and career consequences but also in professional requirements. The risks of disciplining have started influencing the profession of journalism at the systemic level – at the level of professional standards.

The changes in the professional standards of journalism

This section covers the discussion in the media and media criticism regarding the change of some of the fundamental standards of journalism. The section illustrates how media-ecological conditions (the public's switch to digital media consumption) and political-economic conditions (the switch from advertising funding to seeking reader funding) conjointly changed the principles of news coverage and discourse formation.

The professional standards and ethical norms of journalism aim to protect the public status of journalists and uphold the reputational capital of the media. The adherence to standards has always had a business dimension: journalists' independence and the reputation of the media organizations increased their influence and secured the loyalty of larger or more affluent audiences and hence more advertising revenue. Professional standards and ethical norms, therefore, are maintained by the "subjective" moral resolve of professionals and by "objective" business incentives. In the 20th century, journalism in free-market countries created and extolled a well-articulated set of ethical norms and professional standards. The norms and standards were written in the codes widely accepted by practicing media organizations and professional media associations. [1]

At the practical level, journalism standards were intended to ensure the reliability and trustworthiness of reporting, the primary qualities that enabled the media to conduct business, garner respect and authority, and provide public service. Included within the fundamental standards of journalism were objectivity, independence, impartiality, accuracy, transparency, truth seeking, diligence in newsgathering, accountability, and harm limitation. One can argue that all these standards have constantly been violated to a greater or lesser extent; however, the violation of these standards has not diminished their regulative power.

The connection between professional standards and business outcomes strengthens standards because it introduces a systemic factor into the equation. The impact of reputation on business is one of the regulators maintaining standards, in addition to people's moral predispositions. At the same time, the invisible ties between standards and business make standards susceptible to changes when business models change. The switch of the media business model from ad revenue to the growing expectation of subscriptions-donations, accompanied by the increasing dependence on the mood of the most active digital audience (grassroots flak), has formed new conditions that have impacted both the moral and business rationales behind professional standards. As the debate within the journalist professional community indicates, some of the previously established standards are increasingly neglected, while others are openly rejected. Aligning with the expectations of the audience for media to

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[1] See, for example: Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics, https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp; or American Press Association Principle of journalism, https://americanpressassociation.com/principles-of-journalism/.

pursue "a cause" (increasingly more the cause of democracy) means that journalists are no longer allowed to be impartial. They must take a stance. This is completely opposite to what the journalism of the 20th century adhered to.

It is even possible to pinpoint the historical moment when the reversal in the valorization of objectivity and impartiality occurred in American journalism. Due to the strong tradition of media criticism, American journalism showcased this transformation of professional standards in a particularly vivid way. After Trump shockingly won the 2016 election, the public started enquiring for explanations. One of the theories claimed that it was the mainstream media that contributed to Trump's victory. Not only did the mainstream media generously cover Trump, seeing his campaign as entertainment, they also rigorously scrutinized Hillary Clinton's campaign and dossier, based on the professional premises of impartiality and neutrality. Basically, the media did not seriously analyze Trump's political agendas and promises to the electorate, as they did not really see him as a politician. Clinton, however, was treated as a politician, and therefore her background and policy statements were analyzed according to the standards of accountability journalism. In short, the media exercised infotainment when covering Trump and political journalism when covering Clinton. This difference in approaches favoured Trump and harmed Clinton. As was calculated by the *Columbia Journalism Review*,

> Even more striking, the various Clinton-related email scandals – her use of a private email server while secretary of state, as well as the DNC and John Podesta hacks – accounted for more sentences than all of Trump's scandals combined (65,000 vs. 40,000) and more than twice as many as were devoted to all of her policy positions.[1]

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[1] Watts, Duncan J., and Rothschild, David M. (2017, December 5). "Don't blame the election on fake news. Blame it on the media." *Columbia Journalism Review*. https://www.cjr.org/analysis/fake-news-media-election-trump.php.

Another study showed that, “the majority of mainstream media coverage was negative for both candidates, but largely followed Donald Trump’s agenda: when reporting on Hillary Clinton, coverage primarily focused on the various scandals related to the Clinton Foundation and emails” (Faris et al., 2017). “Don’t blame the election on fake news. Blame it on the media,” a headline in CJR stated.[1] Ultimately, a kind of “abuse” of professional standards was declared to be responsible for the dramatic failure of Clinton and the shocking victory of Trump.

From this point on, two flak responses arose.

1. A call to the media not to spread the agenda of a wrong political side, a side destructive for democracy – the side of Trump.

2. More generally: a demand to reconsider the norm of listening to both sides and giving equal consideration to all competing opinions, if one side is clearly dangerous for democracy.

Before 2016, the media in the USA might have expressed their endorsements in the editorials; but when reporting, they tried to uphold standards of rigor and impartiality towards political sides. After 2016, this stance started rapidly changing. Journalists and the public began to openly demand a revision of journalism’s standards towards more impact and involvement for the sake of democracy. For example, *CNN’s* White House correspondent Jim Acosta, known for his aggressive style of questioning Trump, claimed that, “Neutrality for the sake of neutrality doesn’t really serve us in the age of Trump.”[2]

At first, the demand not to cover the president needed justification. One popular rationale for standing against Trump stemmed from his loose command of facts. Special experts in the

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ecarma, Caleb. (2019, May 28). “CNN’s Acosta Rejects ‘Neutrality for the Sake of Neutrality’ during trump era in new book.” *Mediaite*. https://www.mediaite.com/trump/cnns-jim-acosta-rejects-media-neutrality-during-trump-era-in-new-book/

news media even counted the number of occasions when Trump made false or misleading statements. For example, the *Washington Post* calculated that Trump made 30,573 false statements over 4 years of his presidency.[1] The idea to curate and even censor Trump's media appearance was substantiated by his behaviour at the beginning of the COVID pandemic. During the darkest days of the coronavirus spread in the USA, he either praised himself for doing "such a good job," sometimes obviously campaigning, or suggested exploring the potential of disinfectant injections.[2] The shift in reporting on Trump acquired an additional supportive argument: the pundits and the news media who took anti-Trump positions suggested that the live airing of Trump can be dangerous or even deadly for people. After heated debates[3], *CNN* and *MSNBC* stopped airing what they considered to be unrelated parts of the White House's briefings: for example, when a campaign-style video[4] was run or when a "success" in border wall building[5] was discussed during a formal coronavirus task force briefing.

The calls for not covering Trump brought no visible results. The news media could not allow themselves not to cover Trump, as Trump remained the trigger for readership and served the best for soliciting subscriptions as donations to the cause of protecting democracy. But this

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[1] Kessler, Glenn, Rizzo, Salvator, Kelly, Meg. (2021, January 24). "Trump's false or misleading claims total 30,573 over 4 years." *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/01/24/trumps-false-or-misleading-claims-total-30573-over-four-years/

[2] *NBC News*. (2020, April 24). "Trump suggests 'injection' of disinfectant to beat coronavirus and 'clean' the lungs." https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/trump-suggests-injection-disinfectant-beat-coronavirus-clean-lungs-n1191216

[3] Bauder, David. (2020, 17 April). "To air or not air Trump briefings? Pressure on at networks." *ABC News*. https://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/wireStory/air-air-trump-briefings-pressure-networks-70210701

[4] Concha, Joe. (2020, April 13). "CNN cuts away from 'propaganda' briefing as Trump plays video hitting press." *The Hill*. https://thehill.com/homenews/media/492612-cnn-cuts-away-from-propaganda-briefing-as-trump-plays-video-hitting-press

[5] Da Silva, Chantal. (2020, April 4). "CNN, MSNBC cut away from Trump's coronavirus briefing as Americans call for end to continuous coverage." *Newsweek*. https://www.newsweek.com/cnn-msnbc-cut-away-trump-coronavirus-briefing-americans-call-end-continuous-coverage-1495754

debate has changed the perception of journalist standards, having additionally pushed journalists to take a side in the political struggle.

Another post-election motive for reconsidering journalist impartiality appeared after the #MeToo movement. It has become acknowledged that there is no "other side" in covering violence and sexual abuse. This acknowledgment has been extended to other areas of reporting, catching up with Zeitgeist.

Since 2016–2017, the active rejection of 'bothsidesism' in the media has begun. The very appearance of term "bothsidesism," used as a pejorative, is a precise linguistic signal of these debates in journalism. The term emerged during Trump's tenure as president. The phenomenon was actively discussed in 2018–2020, as shown in Google Trends (Figure 16).

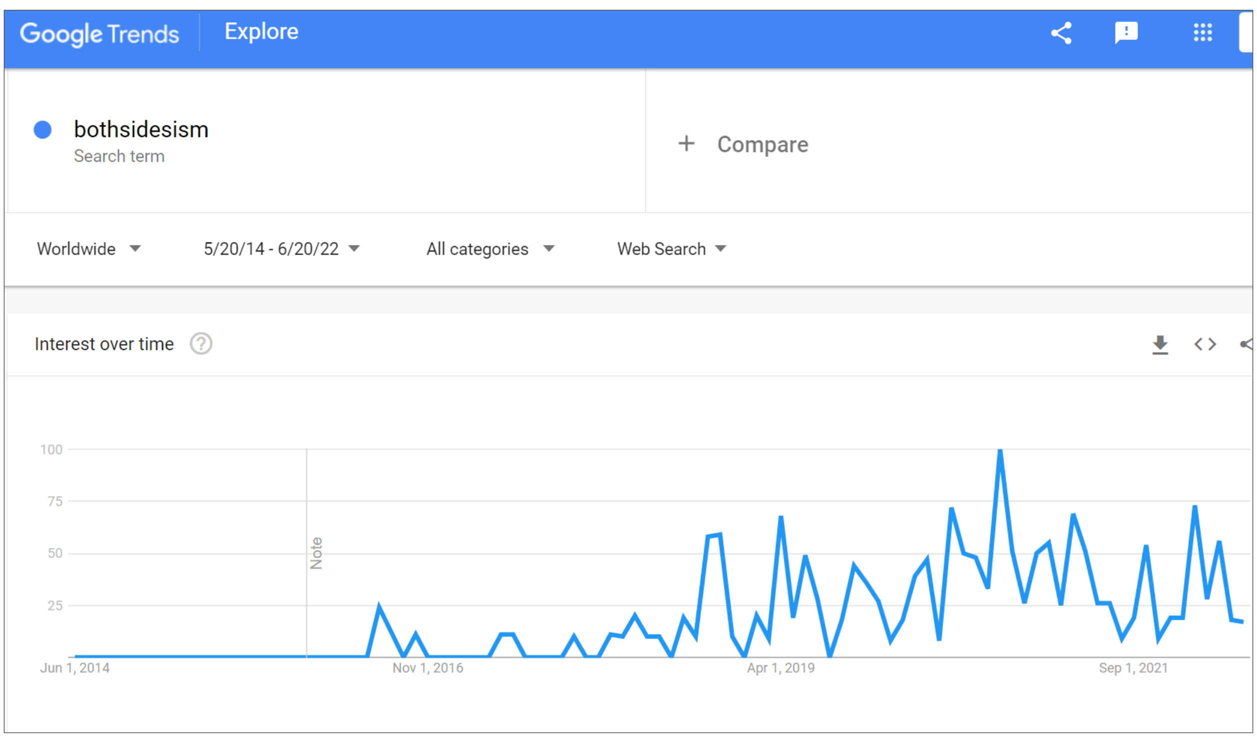

Figure 16. "Bothsidesism" in Google Trends, retrieved on June 20, 2022.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary subtitled its article on bothsidesing "When equal coverage leads to uneven results." The definition says that,

> *Bothsidesing* and its related noun *bothsidesism* turn up in critiques of the news media when a journalist or pundit seems to give extra credence to a cause, action, or idea that on the surface seems objectionable, thereby establishing a sort of moral equivalence that allows said cause, action, or idea to be weighed seriously.
>
> By giving credence to the other side, the media gives an impression of being fair to its subject, but in doing so often provides credibility to an idea that most might view as unmerited.[1]

At first, the term "bothsidesism" aimed to reject the moral equivalence of arguments of both sides when one side was acknowledged as being wrong. The article on bothsidesism in Wikipedia is called "false balance" and identifies bothsidesism as a bias, a trick in journalism's representations of political debates. But eventually "bothsidesism" became a pejorative condemning any attempt to weigh the matter from opposite views. "'Bothsidesism' is poisoning America," wrote some authors.[2] As a pejorative, "bothsidesism" has become a verdict aimed to disprove and reject the old standard of reporting contentious issues from both sides. As journalist Wesley Lowery summed it up,

> American view-from-nowhere, "objectivity"-obsessed, both-sides journalism is a failed experiment. We need to fundamentally reset the norms of our field. The old way must go. We need to rebuild our industry as one that operates from a place of moral clarity.[3]

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[1] The Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Looking at 'Bothsidesing' When equal coverage leads to uneven results. https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/bothsidesing-bothsidesism-new-words-were-watching

[2] Lalami, Laila. (2019, December 17). "'Bothsidesism' Is Poisoning America." *The Nation*. https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/trump-impeachment-journalism/

[3] Rosen, Jay. (2020, June 8). "Battleship Newspaper." *PressThink*. https://pressthink.org/2020/06/battleship-newspaper/

Steadily, the rejection of bothsidesism has turned into a demand for journalists and the news media to unequivocally take one side, implying the right side, and thus provide "moral clarity" in reporting.

Noticeably, there have not been many debates on bothsidesism in the conservative media. This, perhaps, indicates that "journalism" on the political right has either never bothered with the standard of all-sides consideration or is not bothered to change it now. Therefore, the revision of professional standards occurred in the liberal media, the former bastion of classical journalist standards. As Faris et al. noted in 2017 when studying asymmetric polarization in the American media,

> The leading media on the right and left are rooted in different traditions and journalistic practices. On the conservative side, more attention was paid to pro-Trump, highly partisan media outlets. On the liberal side, by contrast, the center of gravity was made up largely of long-standing media organizations steeped in the traditions and practices of objective journalism. (Faris et al., 2017)

Watchdog journalism and accountability journalism always aimed to control the powerful in general, most likely regardless of their political affiliation. Holding the powerful accountable could be a risky venture. Impartiality and other qualities of good media practice strengthened the power of journalism. Under the ad-driven business model, the media bore the risk of being "disciplined" by institutional flak – retribution from powerful organizations for the wrong representation of facts or the positions of the parties involved. Legal retribution was a part of institutional flak, and so the news media had to maintain standards of objectivity in their representation of facts and positions. Therefore, the principles of accuracy and impartiality helped journalists stay strong against such accusations. That is why journalists developed rigorous procedures and considered matters from various perspectives in news coverage, reporting, and investigation. This shows that one of the functions of professional standards was to protect journalists from flak. Journalists have special rights, even in court, as long as they are journalists, meaning as long as they follow their professional standards. Another example of the protective function of standards is one of the main principles of war correspondents – they do not touch weapons. Those carrying guns are not journalists and cannot count on special treatment; they will be treated as combatants.

With the change in the business model (from ad to reader revenue), the nature of flak has changed – and the protective function of standards has also been redirected accordingly. Now, the professional standards aim to protect journalists not from legal flak or other forms of institutional flak from elites but from the grassroots flak of the *Twitterati*, whose platform power is now equal to, or even exceeds, the platform power of the elites and the news media. Therefore, the standards of journalism must comply with this flak. The shift in the protective function of standards additionally makes them less professional and more ideological, a factor that, in its turn, may contribute to the decline of trust in the media.

The ideological shift of professional standards particularly transpired in the case study involving the debate about *resistance journalism* commenced by *New York Times* media critic Ben Smith regarding the professional approach of Ronan Farrow of the *New Yorker* in 2020. To set up the context: with the move of the news media onto the digital and their struggle to appeal to the digital public in the early 2010s, watchdog journalism and accountability journalism morphed into *advocacy journalism* and *activist journalism*. Based on this tendency, Ben Smith coined the term *resistance journalism* to describe the writing of Ronan Farrow of the *New Yorker,* whose reporting on Harvey Weinstein and other powerful persons won him a Pulitzer and contributed to the tectonic shift in the cultural landscape. In his 2020 article “Is Ronan

Farrow too good to be true?" Smith questioned the reporting methods of "highly visible, generational star." He wrote,

> Mr. Farrow, 32, is not a fabulist. His reporting can be misleading but he does not make things up. His work, though, reveals the weakness of a kind of resistance journalism that has thrived in the age of Donald Trump: That if reporters swim ably along with the tides of social media and produce damaging reporting about public figures most disliked by the loudest voices, the old rules of fairness and open-mindedness can seem more like impediments than essential journalistic imperatives.
>
> That can be a dangerous approach, particularly in a moment when the idea of truth and a shared set of facts is under assault.[1]

"It appears Mr. Farrow was making a narrative virtue of a reporting liability, and the results were ultimately damaging," suggested Smith. He scrutinized some episodes in Farrow's writing that, he believed, were not always properly fact-checked because they were *too good*, and this was enough to put them into a narrative, as is implied in the title "…too good to be true." Smith continued:

> We are living in an era of conspiracies and dangerous untruths – many pushed by President Trump, but others hyped by his enemies – that have lured ordinary Americans into passionately believing wild and unfounded theories and fiercely rejecting evidence to the contrary. The best reporting tries to capture the most attainable version of the truth, with clarity and humility about what we don't know. Instead, Mr. Farrow told us what we wanted to believe about the way power works, and now, it seems, he and his publicity team are not even pretending to know if it's true.[2]

The article caused a Tweetstorm. Experts and the public discussed the emerging discrepancy between the necessity to resist evil (Trump) and adherence to the former standards of journalist rigor. "The most menacing attribute of what Smith calls 'Resistance Journalism' is

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[1] Smith, Ben. (2020, May 17). "Is Ronan Farrow too good to be true?" *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/17/business/media/ronan-farrow.html

[2] Ibid.

that it permits and tolerates no dissent and questioning: perhaps the single most destructive path journalism can take," wrote Glenn Greenwald. He supported Smith's observation by stating that,

> With young journalists watching jobs disappearing en masse, the last thing they are going to want to do is question or challenge prevailing orthodoxies within their news outlet or, using Smith's "Resistance Journalism" formulation, to "swim against the tides of social media" or question the evidence amassed against those "most disliked by the loudest voices." <...>
>
> Affirming those orthodoxies can be career-promoting, while questioning them can be job-destroying. <...>
>
> When journalists know they will thrive by affirming pleasing falsehoods, and suffer when they insist on unpopular truths, journalism not only loses its societal value but becomes just another instrument for societal manipulation, deceit, and coercion.[1]

In the following debates, Farrow, however, won the support of many. The *New Yorker* stood by its star reporter. Michael Luo, editor of newyorker.com, wrote on Twitter that "In his column on @ronanfarrow, @benyt, whom I have respect for, does the same thing he accuses Ronan of – sanding the inconvenient edges off of facts in order to suit the narrative he wants to deliver."[2]

Slate turned Smith's accusations on himself, scrutinizing his arguments in the same way as he did to Farrow. *Slate* concluded that, "Smith chose to perform broad-mindedness, sacrificing accuracy for some vague, centrist perception of fairness."[3] In this quote, interesting is the very implication that the "centrist perception of fairness" is something reprehensible, a sort of bias.

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[1] Greenwald, Glenn. (2020, May 18). "Ben Smith's NYT critique of Ronan Farrow describes a toxic, corrosive, and still-vibrant Trump-Era pathology: 'Resistance Journalism'." *The Intercept*. https://theintercept.com/2020/05/18/ben-smiths-nyt-critique-of-ronan-farrow-describes-a-toxic-corrosive-and-still-vibrant-trump-era-pathology-resistance-journalism/

[2] Michael Luo on Twitter. (2020, May 18). @michaelluo. https://twitter.com/michaelluo/status/1262388538412347392

[3] Feinberg, Ashley. (2020. May 21). "Is Ben Smith's column about Ronan Farrow too good to be true?" Slate. https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2020/05/is-ben-smiths-column-about-ronan-farrow-too-good-to-be-true.html

This characterizes well that the turn away from impartiality had already happened and the professional standards had already changed. From the point of view of activist journalism or, more so, resistance journalism, centrism is the same sin as the "false equivalency" of both political sides.

As Emily Bell noted regarding the debates on Farrow and resistance journalism, "...there hasn't been a week like this in media criticism since the days of Dewey and Lippmann."[1] She was referring to the debates of the 1920s when the advertising model of funding the media was gaining prominence, prompting journalists to reflect on their professional standards and defend their autonomy. A hundred years later, the business model changed, and the standards came under revision.

The revision of professional standards impacted the standards of impartiality and objectivity first. The media that still hold on to those standards have the least chance for success in the competition of soliciting subscriptions-donations. Other standards are under review, too. For example, one of the standards of classical journalism was harm limitation; however, in conditions of journalism proclaiming and defending a cause, reporting, on the contrary, *must* harm opponents, as it must pursue the dominance of "good" values and parties over "bad" ones.

The media are realigning their entire set of standards not solely due to deliberate decisions, but also in response to environmental changes – though human agency must also be taken into account. However, within the larger picture (in the ground, to use McLuhan's figure/ground dichotomy), someone's decisions to reconsider professional standards are a part of

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[1] Emily Bell on Twitter. (2020, May 18). @emilybell https://twitter.com/emilybell/status/1262531463926427658

the human reaction to the changes in the media environment and the new conditions of the media business. This is why integrating a media-ecological view with the framework of the political economy of communication enables us to observe the connection between the digitalization of media consumption, the shift in the news-gathering business model, and the revision of the principles of discourse formation, as evidenced by the evolution of the professional standards of journalism.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has integrated the approaches of media ecology and the political economy of communication to analyze changes that have occurred in the news media and journalism over the past decade.

To provide context, the dissertation began by noting the recent decline in trust in the news media alongside the decline of the media business. These declines reflect society's increasingly negative attitude towards the news media, encompassing the evaluation of both the changing role of news media and the quality of journalistic output. Behind these changes, there should be some causes determining either the attitude of the public or the actually decreasing quality of the news media and journalism. It is widely acknowledged that the advent of the internet and social media has profoundly impacted news media. But how exactly have the internet and social media affected news production? The internet has enhanced societal connectivity and improved the technical capabilities of news gathering and delivery. So, why has its advent been so detrimental to the news media and journalism?

The dissertation suggests that the decline of the news media has both media-ecological and political-economic origins. First, digital media has created a new technological environment for news consumption. Within this environment, the opportunities and restraints – the affordances – of news demand and supply have changed, leading to changes in the political-economic conditions for news production. The new technological affordances have not only altered the news business but also transformed the cultural context of news production and consumption. The news media have attempted to adapt to new environmental and business conditions. Consequently, new forms and standards of journalism have emerged, which, in turn, started playing a role in reshaping societal, political, and cultural practices.

This chain of events represents a typical cascading effect, akin to those observed in ecology: the introduction of a new significant factor in a niche disrupts or even destroys the previously existing equilibrium, compelling the elements within the niche to readjust or face extinction. The relationship between business and discourse formation in the news media has traditionally been viewed through the lens of the political economy of communication; however, the recent changes in this relationship are influenced by the environmental factor – the introduction of digital media. Therefore, integrating media-ecological and political-economic approaches allows for insightful and comprehensive analysis of the transformations occurring in the news media and journalism under the influence of digital media.

The ecological concept of affordances introduced by Gibson in 1979 aligns with the political-economic concept of allocative control introduced by Murdock in 1982. According to Gibson, specific natural environments enable certain types of actions while limiting or excluding others. Murdock's concept of allocative control represents a similar idea when applied to political-economic relations: the selectivity of funding predefines the "behaviour" of a funded organization and its subsequent impact on its environment. When applied to the news media, the allocation of funds towards specific types or formats of news coverage amplifies the coverage of certain topics while neglecting and thus disadvantaging others.

The similarity between environmental affordance and allocative control was the first prompt leading this research to combine media ecology and the political economy of communication for analysis of the news media and journalism. Then, news coverage and, broadly, the business and professional activity of media organizations during Trump's 2016–2020 presidency make it possible to apply McLuhan's concept of figure/ground. While Trump certainly was the salient "figure," there was media-ecological and political-economic "ground" behind the “figure” that shaped the relationship between Trump and the media. The employment of McLuhan’s “figure/ground” analysis allows “decentering” attention from the towering figure of Trump, as similar disturbing and polarising figures, be it politics, parties or political forces, emerged everywhere around the same time, likely synchronized by the dynamic of media development. This was the “ground,” the environmental conditions, that determined the emergence of such “figures.” This was another merging point between media ecology and the political economy of communication.

Finally, the Propaganda Model introduced by Herman and Chomsky in 1988 represents one of the most environmentally rooted concepts within the field of the political economy of mass media. Herman and Chomsky demonstrated how the business and cultural contexts of mass media influenced news coverage. While the application of certain filters in the Propaganda Model can be subject to debate and revision, the principles of linking business conditions with discourse formation in the news media, as revealed by Herman and Chomsky, have remained highly valuable, if complemented by consideration of the effects of new digital media.

The application of these concepts and the integration of the approaches of media ecology and the political economy of communication formed the methodological foundation of this dissertation. This methodological combination represents the novelty of this research and aims to contribute to the advancement of methodological approaches in communication and cultural studies, in general.

Equipped with media-ecological and political-economic frameworks, the dissertation delves into the history of news media and journalism to identify patterns in the relationships between technological innovations, news business, and discourse formation. Unlike the North American tradition of journalism, which primarily focuses on the history of American newspapers and their British predecessors, this dissertation follows the older European tradition and traces the origins of journalism to German and Dutch newsletters, news bureaus, and newssheets of the 17th century. Furthermore, it delves even deeper into history, exploring the handwritten Venetian *avvisi* of the early 16th century. This approach enables the identification of cultural and technological factors that shaped society's demand for news production from the very beginning. Tracing the technological, political-economic, and discursive evolution of the news media and journalism over its 500-year history, the dissertation introduces the concept of two modes of funding news production by society. These modes are payment *from below*, by those who consume news, and payment *from above*, by those who have an agenda and want certain news to be delivered to others.

By the end of the 20th century, the news media and journalism reached their most advanced and profitable form while also serving as one of the essential institutions of representative democracy. The dissertation establishes a connection between this state of the news media and journalism and the business model that emerged within the context of industrial capitalism. Throughout the 20th century, the news media were primarily funded by advertising, and this fostered an alliance between the media and capitalist and political elites. However, this also allowed for a certain degree of independence for the news media, as their influence was a part of their business model. The influence of the news media was guarded by professional standards of journalism, such as objectivity, impartiality, investigative rigor, all-sides consideration of circumstances, and a strict separation between advertising and content production.

The emergence of digital media, however, disrupted the equilibrium in the niche of news consumption and, on a broader scale, discourse formation in society. This presented a challenge for the political economy of communication. The discipline began to reexamine its core principles as the very subject it studied, communication, underwent a transformation into digital multimedia communication. In its turn, media ecology always focuses primarily on changes in media and the associated societal transformations. This provides an additional rationale for combining these two approaches. Media ecology examines environmental changes and provides supplementary viewpoints and resources for the political economy of communication to analyze the influence of digital transformations on discourse formation.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 focus on how the internet altered the political-economic landscape and discursive practices of the news media. The internet disrupted the news media's monopoly over news supply and advertising delivery. Audiences migrated to digital platforms, and advertisers followed suit. Digital platforms provided more efficient advertising mechanisms, leading to a sharp decline in the news media's advertising revenue. News became increasingly difficult to monetize, as the digital audience largely generates and shares news content itself. Even when professional media outlets contribute to this news ecosystem, their content is often delivered to users for free, depriving the media of revenue for their contributions.

The internet disrupted old business niches and compelled the news media to seek out new ones. The pursuit of survival strategies led them in various directions, including ancillary businesses, funding by billionaires, philanthro-journalism, the membership model, and the hybrid subscription-membership model. While these models have not provided adequate alternatives to the previously abundant advertising revenue, the media had no other viable paths for adaptation, necessitating their adjustment to these models.

At the same time, the new environment presented new opportunities. On one hand, the abundance of news supply on social media led to oversupply, causing news to be perceived as overwhelming and unreliable. On the other hand, news media began leveraging their previous social credibility in supplying news to take on the new role of validating news. The niche and business of news validation have created entirely new relationships between journalism funding and news production and discourse. New dependencies and biases in editorial practices have emerged that are distinct from those formed under the advertising model in the past.

The news media have increasingly become paid *from below*, by the "people formerly known as the audience" (Rosen[1]). But the motives behind such payment are rather motives *from above* – for the validation of already-known news and the delivery of the right news to others, which are features of marketing and propaganda. The dissertation hypothesizes that this confusion of payments *from below* and *from above*, unprecedented in the history of journalism, may be a primary source of declining trust and growing polarization in the news media.

Thus, the interplay of media-ecological factors and political-economic conditions created, through the allocative control of money, an environmental effect that has changed discourse production and the role of the news media in society.

Finally, Chapter 5 analyzes how the principles of discourse formation in the news media have readjusted amidst the new environmental and political-economic conditions. The chapter shows how the management of news media and professional journalists have reassessed the standards of newsroom autonomy and professional standards of journalism established in the 20th century.

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[1] Rosen, Jay. (2006, June 27). "The people formerly known as the audience." *PressThink*. http://archive.pressthink.org/2006/06/27/ppl_frmr.html

APPENDIX 1. ELITES AND DISCOURSE FORMATION

News media are traditionally seen as affiliated with elites. This historical affiliation has taken different forms over time—ranging from direct control through royal patents, censorship, or other forms of patronage and licensing, to indirect influence through ideological alignment or allocative control of advertising money. This dissertation does not aim to define the concept of elites or their role in discourse production, but establishing a framework for placing elites in the equation can be useful, especially since the political economy of communication only tangentially engages with the notion of elites, while media ecology lacks this concept in its framework entirely.

The classical elitist theory (Pareto, 1935; Mosca, 1939) views elites as a minority with outstanding skills, qualities, or resources that enable them to control society through direct institutional governance and/or discourse production. According to Pareto and Mosca, the concentration and maintenance of power represent the 'true motives' of elites, while the other part of their social activity relates to the "rhetoric of legitimation," or "façade legitimation" (Damele and Campos, 2022). The "rhetoric of legitimation" clearly involves the media and can also be described by the concept of "agenda setting," introduced by McCombs and Shaw in 1972. In this dissertation, this inherently elitist function is described as discourse formation or discourse production.

Interestingly, even though media ecology is not specifically concerned with elitist theory, Harold Innis, a prominent forerunner of both media ecology and the political economy of communication, explored a similar function of ancient elites – the class of temple priests-scribes – through a concept he called the "monopoly of knowledge." The skill of writing, combined with the need to maintain and reproduce control over society, granted this monopoly to the “intellectual” elites of priests who were closely affiliated with the divine authority of god-like rulers.

> The old magic was transformed into a new and more potent record of the written word. Priests and scribes interpreted a slowly changing tradition and provided a justification for established authority. An extended social structure strengthened the position of an individual leader with military power who gave orders to agents who received and executed them. The sword and pen worked together. (Innis, 1950, p. 11.)

From a certain angle, the monopoly of knowledge was a media effect: the mere possession of writing skills and the first media of recording (hieroglyphs, tablets) granted the priestly class this unique monopoly of knowledge, which surpassed the shamanic knowledge of preceding oral cultures and underpinned the rise and incredible longevity (centuries and even millennia) of the temple civilizations in the Near East.

A couple of decades before Innis, Walter Lippmann also highlighted the role of knowledge production and reproduction in establishing and maintaining the governing power of elites. Notably, Lippmann made his observations during the period when the theory of “classical elitism,” conceived by Pareto and Mosca, was transforming into “democratic elitism,” according to Damele and Campos (2022). Criticizing the romantic notion of democracy that relied on ‘omnicompetent’ citizens who supposedly knew which policy choices needed to be made, Lippmann directly linked the skills and knowledge required to maintain power to a special class of experts, who would advise the ruling class and “manufacture consent” among the ruled, with media serving as one of the key instruments of this expert-elitist alliance.

Eventually, Bacon’s “knowledge is power” (to be precise, *ipsa scientia potestas est*) completed its conceptual association with elites as their power-producing function in the writings of Michel Foucault (see, for example, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other*

Writings 1972-1977 – Foucault, 1980). Not only did Foucault show how power produces knowledge and vice versa, but he also opened the knowledge/power dynamic (specifically, the rules of "discursive formations") to critical analysis and possible deconstruction as a way to disrupt oppression and dominant power relations.

While the power dynamic or elitist theory in their connection to knowledge/discourse formation is not the focus of this dissertation, studying the effect of new media on news media through the combined framework of media ecology and the political economy of communication may also open additional opportunities for examining the relationship between power/elites and knowledge/discourse production, especially in the new (digital) media environment.

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