

Abstract book

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Panel: “Struggles and Conditions of Possibility of Democratic Media”

Chair: Vito Laterza, University of Agder

Political struggles over media’s democratic roles: A discursive- material Approach

Nico Carpentier, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University & Tallinn University

Conditions of possibility for democratic media in Europe

Vaia Doudaki, Charles University; Nico Carpentier, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University & Tallinn University; Kirill Filimonov, Uppsala University

Decentralisation, disclosure and collectiveness: Discursive- material characteristics of Mastodon as a contemporary example of a counter-hegemonic platform

Jeffrey Wimmer, Augsburg University & Charles University

Panel abstract

This panel proposal is grounded in the work of the MeDeMAP (Mapping Media for Future Democracies) research consortium, and in particular in the development of MeDeMAP’s theoretical framework by Carpentier and Wimmer (2025) and its first confrontations with empirical research (Doudaki and Filimonov, 2024).

This framework produced a theoretical reflection about the intersection of the fields of democracy and media through a constructionist lens. This focus allowed to grasp the struggles over democracy, and over the roles that media play within democracy, ranging from the traditional support for an informed citizenry, over the organization of agonistic debate, to the facilitation of maximalist participation in politics and media. Moreover, the framework’s reconciliation of democratic theory and media theory brought out a detailed theoretical analysis of the core characteristics, the conditions of possibility, and the threats to democracy, in relation to media and beyond, providing in-depth reflections about the different positions that can be taken when it comes to the performance of democracy in intersection with the multitude of media that have gained a presence in the 21st century.

The three presentations in this panel cover different aspects of this theoretical framework. The first paper sets the stage of the panel, through a (theoretical) discussion of the political struggles over media’s democratic roles. The second presentation focuses on the condition of possibility concept, which has only been rarely used in Communication and Media Studies. The authors’ re-reading of existing empirical literature (of the last 25 decades) allows showing the importance of engaging with the conditions of possibility of democratic media. Finally, the third paper uses a case study on Mastodon to show the political struggle between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic

social media, and the latter's attempts to counter the colonisation of the public sphere.

Paper abstracts

Political struggles over media's democratic roles: A discursive-material approach

Grounded in a discourse-material approach (Carpentier, 2017), this presentation approaches the democratic roles of media (and democracy in general) as a location of political struggle, which renders these roles contested and contingent (see Carpentier and Wimmer, 2025). More specifically, the objective of this theoretical presentation is to investigate the consequences of defining democracy itself, and its relationship to media, as object of political struggles. Arguably, the value-discourses of freedom, equality and pluralism—and dignity, but less prominently—play key roles in these struggles, as their discursive articulations and their relationship (and balance) remains contested. For instance, in contemporary Western societies, freedom tends to become privileged over the other value-discourses—this is why Nancy (1994: 68) writes that “Freedom is not”: Freedom has become so omnipresent and dominant, that it has no clear particular meaning anymore. Another way to capture freedom's discursive omnipresence is to label it an empty signifier (see, e.g., Carpentier, 2022). Not surprisingly, freedom thus features prominently in articulations of media's democratic roles. Still, also equality and pluralism are implicated in the struggles over media's democratic roles, which also have material components, given the threats, for instance, arising from ownership concentration for pluralism, and the importance of having a multiplicity of media organizations—discursive-material assemblages in their own right—to ensure pluralism. Also, the processes of journalistic curation have, in the end, many material dimensions, with their sources, procedures and infrastructures. In this presentation, apart from the more general political struggle over which democratic roles are considered legitimate, four particular political struggles will be discussed, linked to how media pluralism and media freedom is organized, and how the pluriformity of representations and participatory intensities are constructed.

Conditions of possibility for democratic media in Europe

Studies pertaining to the media's democratic roles, and the challenges and threats they are faced with in serving those roles, are abundant. They span a wide range of genres and types, ranging from theory-based and normative treatises to purely empirical surveys and reports. The theoretical, conceptual and methodological tools for these explorations also vary, driven in most cases by implicit or explicit normative assumptions and expectations, about media's roles in societies. A recent literature review pertaining to the body of empirical research in Europe addressing the connections of media and democracy, identified preferences and absences in empirical research pertaining to democracy and media in Europe today, in terms of areas of study, themes, concepts and methodologies (Doudaki & Filimonov, 2024). One of the identified gaps concerns the scarcity of empirical research that looks into the ‘conditions of possibility’ of the media's democratic roles and more broadly the democracy-media nexus. The term condition of possibility has its roots in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, where he critiqued pure empiricism in science and argued that cognition and knowledge presuppose certain ‘a priori’ principles or conditions (Kant, 2016). For Deleuze (2015) and his reading of Kant, conditions of possibility situate processes and societal phenomena in given grounds, which render them specific.

Recently, Carpentier and Wimmer (2025) have brought this concept into the Field of Communication and Media Studies, as part of a broad theoretical model to study the democracy-media nexus from a discursive-material standpoint. They suggest that the conditions of possibility for democratic media can be understood as the enabling (discursive and material) processes located outside media themselves, which are still conducive towards the existence and functioning of media's democratic roles (Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025). In addition, they also argue that the conditions of possibility of democracy shall "not be seen as 'pure', 'original' or determining outsides, but as enabling assemblages, whose fluid existence remains nevertheless necessary for the democratic assemblage to exist". Our study, guided by Carpentier and Wimmer's (2025) model, is a re-reading of existing empirical literature (from 2000 onward) to see how this literature can contribute to a discussion about the conditions of possibility lens for democratic media in Europe. For the purposes of the research, an adjusted version of the integrative literature review method was applied (see Cronin & George, 2020; Fan et al., 2022; Torraco, 2016)— supported by the relevant components of Carpentier and Wimmer's (2025) framework—to study the conditions of possibility for democratic media. The four main conditions of possibility, as discussed in Carpentier and Wimmer's (2025) framework and adjusted for the purposes of our study, are: technology, economic resources, democratic media culture and the legitimacy of democratic regulation. The exploration of media's democratic function through a conditions of possibility prism allows, we believe, to pay attention to both the rigidity and fluidity of social processes and the multitude of intersecting internal and external forces that impact on these processes, and to engage in an inclusive approach to the complex and contingent relationships of media and democracy.

Decentralisation, disclosure and collectiveness: Discursive-material characteristics of Mastodon as a contemporary example of a counter-hegemonic platform

This presentation uses a discursive-material approach to analyse a particular struggle within the media field, but also the threats to democratic media (and democracy as a whole) (Carpentier and Wimmer, 2025). In particular, it empirically examines how far decentralized material articulations of social networks struggle to create alternative discursive and material practices to counter the threat of large-scale commodification processes of the internet through the 'big tech's' platforms. Since it became known that Twitter was to be taken over by the entrepreneur and billionaire Elon Musk, so-called alternative social media (ASM) (Gehl, 2015) and the Fediverse (Anderlini and Milani, 2022) have (at least briefly) gained in popularity. The term Fediverse refers to the combination of different, independent systems that connect various non-profit social media services and communities and express a specific set of values related to open source (Kammerer, 2023). The best-known and most-used ASM platform is the microblogging service Mastodon, which is a decentralised platform without advertising or algorithms, and which is clearly distinct from commercial social media, especially X. The platform enables users to interact in so-called instances that represent specific interests or communities.

The aim of this qualitative case study was to gain insights into how the use of Mastodon fits into the everyday lives of users, how interactions are shaped, and which topics, community norms and values characterize this use. The interviews focused on how users employ Mastodon to express themselves and build connections with other users. For the study, a total of 24 qualitative interviews were conducted with German-speaking

Mastodon users and administrators in 2023. The case selection was based on the principle of 'theoretical sampling' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to characterise both typical and atypical users, especially regarding their level of experience, degree of participation and attitude. The results reveal a complex interweaving of technical conditions, the peculiarities of the medium, and the users' own lives, which ultimately constitute very specific usage practices. Based on the interviews, the media practices prevalent on Mastodon can be summarised in four categories: Habitual, representative, informational and social practices. These practices are to be understood not only as individual actions but also as collective efforts to establish alternative forms of communication and social exchange and, thus to publicly represent specific values. As the following user statement exemplifies: "Politicisation depends on the use. But yes, if you are part of the debate, as a medium of debate, it is indispensable. It has a certain significance. You can't really say that it is apolitical. I would say that it is also part of net politics, ultimately against the big corporations."

Beacons in unknown territory? How codes of ethics can (and cannot) safeguard free and responsible media

Erik Uszkiewicz, Hungarian Europe Society; Tobias Eberwein, Marie Rathmann & Krisztina Rozgonyi, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Austria

Media systems in Europe (and beyond) are facing profound challenges due to recent technological advancements. Trends such as the platformization and algorithmization of public communication not only put the normative framework of professional journalism to the test; they also affect many other stakeholders, including advertisers, PR professionals, corporate communicators, public institutions, citizen media, and media users. In the changing media landscapes of today, the quest for shared norms and values of public communication resembles an exploration into unknown territory – which different stakeholders' approach with dissimilar strategies, as previous research shows (Puppis et al., 2024): While, for example, audiovisual media in Europe are traditionally regulated by national media laws, most printed media still uphold the principle of self-regulation, pointing to ethics codes and similar documents to define good communication practices. Whereas large online platforms find a new regulatory framework in the European Digital Services Act, smaller user-centered media still seem far away from a benchmark to claim common standards. Our ongoing comparative study explores these issues by reference to concepts of media accountability. Following Fengler et al. (2022, p. 40), media accountability includes all kinds of instruments that "uphold a notion of media freedom and pluralism in their intent to monitor, comment on, and criticize journalism". As indicated by Bardoel and d'Haenens (2004), who differentiate varying frames of accountability, this does not only involve media professionals (such as journalists), but also actors related to the political sphere, the market, and the public.

In our paper, we intend to present results from an empirical study focusing on ethical codes as one of the key types of media accountability instruments. Which role do codes of ethics play for different stakeholders of public communication in Europe? Which themes are highlighted in the various documents in practice and in how far do they relate to current technological challenges? An eventually: In how far are the recommendations in these documents actually implemented and enforced? The study uses a sample of 435 ethics codes from eight European countries (Austria, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, the Netherlands, Lithuania, Slovenia, and Switzerland), representing all kinds of public communication, to explore these questions in detail. The analysis of the documents followed a two-step procedure: While the initial quantitative analysis evaluated a number

pre-defined basic categories (such as type of code, frame of accountability, legal and regulatory context, implementation and enforcement, relevance for AI/automation), the following qualitative coding allowed for an in-depth analysis of good practices. Our study shows that the analyzed codes have a limited capacity to address current (technological) challenges in the media systems of Europe. While a majority of codes is journalism-focused or targeted at public institutions, documents that are tailored to the particular needs of media users remain an exception. The current media transformation is a recurring theme, but – for example – ethical issues related to AI are rarely highlighted. More than two-thirds of the documents were developed in voluntary processes – leaving doubts with regards to effective implementation. Nevertheless, several good practices offer valuable suggestions for possible ways forward.

Different Notions of Democracy as Determinants of Social Media's Role in Participation and Information Usage Behaviour

Maren B. M. Beaufort, Austrian Academy of Sciences

Ongoing social transformations are reshaping the understanding and practice of democracy, giving rise to alternative democratic concepts that complement the status quo and emphasize inclusive, autonomous participation in societal processes. Alongside authoritarian reinterpretations, these models incorporate particularly participatory elements that enhance individuality and increase responsibility in shaping personal and material environments. They foster the articulation and networking of personal concerns, thereby encouraging continuous civic engagement and posing specific challenges for information providers. (Held 2006; Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018; Dahlgren 2014; Inglehart 2020; Castells 2018; Esser & Strömbäck 2014). Different concepts of democracy align with distinct normative perspectives on public spheres, profoundly effecting a change in the roles of news media and democratic practices since the differences in the notions of democracy shape both the democratic function of content and citizens' news media expectations and use. Consequently, these varying roles result in distinct sets of requirements for the framing, presentation, style, and mode of delivery of information content, influenced by both the normative dimension on the one hand and the usage dimension on the other. In liberal-representative dynamics, news media are expected to support collective action (Olson, 1989; Verba et al., 1995; Boulianne, 2022) and thus the "informed citizen" (Patterson & Seib 2005) by acting as societal monitors, disseminators, and intermediaries. In participatory dynamics, they should support the "empowered" or "networked citizen" (Porto 2007; Navarra 2019), serving as access providers, connectors, and mobilizers. (Schudson 1998; Hallin & Mancini 2004; Hanitzsch & Vos 2018; Bennett & Segerberg 2013; author 2020; Curran 2023; Ferree et al 2002; Pateman 2012; Urban & Schweiger 2014). Author (2020) showed empirically that information users primarily aligned with a participatory conception of democracy often lack sufficient content in a country's information environment that meets their needs in terms of content preparation, style, and mode of delivery. However, they still maintain broad information repertoires or diets, mainly consisting of online content.

These dynamics relate to Bennett and Segerbergs' (2013) 'logic of connective action', which **highlights social online networks as organizational units for participatory action. Their structure alone promotes corresponding democratic practices (such as civic engagement through the articulation and networking of personal concerns, along with related news use behaviour), whereas traditional mass media tends to support liberal-representative action (including involvement in institutional politics and corresponding news use behaviour).** Longitudinal empirical findings

supporting this perspective comparing 27 EU-countries will be presented. As a consequence, if information disseminated through social online networks is required to meet certain standards to fulfill its democratic role, this has significant implications for platform regulation. This contribution aims to critically examine these implications. The key question is alongside how well content meets theoretically grounded normative criteria and how well it contributes to a public sphere that enables users to engage according to their values and democratic notions. It is essential that their individual expectations are met in their specificity, reflecting their dominant concept of democracy, as any shortfall undermines the media's functional capacity in a democratic system and with this its ability to meet the evolving needs of a diverse citizenry: If there is a gap between citizens' needs and actual supply, this may be filled by alternative information content, including anti-democratic material.

Panel: "Transformation and Accountability in the Media Landscape: Trauma, Technology and Legislation in the Digital Era"

Chair: Mercedes Medina, University of Navarra

Healing trauma: peculiarities of journalistic communication with people who have experienced traumatic events

Solomiya Onufriv, Ivan Franko National University of Lviv

Since the open military invasion of Donbas and the annexation of Crimea in March 2014, and especially during the period of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, contemporary Ukrainian journalism has faced new challenges: in particular, how to communicate competently with the military, veterans of the Russian-Ukrainian war, internally displaced persons, volunteers and other respondents who have experienced traumatic events. As a result, journalists have increasingly begun to use the term 'trauma journalism' or Trauma-Informed Journalism, as noted by researchers at The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma at Columbia University School of Journalism (USA). Trauma-Informed Journalism is a multidisciplinary approach to working with people who have had potentially traumatic experiences that have changed their perception of the world, themselves and their trust in people.

First of all, it is about competent, attentive, correct professional communication between a journalist and a hero/respondent, which implies: - knowledge of how traumatic experience works; - what are its consequences; - how to minimise one's own (journalistic) influence; - attention and respect for the subject of the conversation; - to avoid despondency, disappointment, and retraumatisation after the conversation with the journalist. One of the main tasks of a journalist when communicating with people who have experienced traumatic events is to do no harm. When preparing a media publication, a journalist should clearly understand who the material is addressed to - that is, the target audience - as well as what exactly and how they want to inform their audience in order to avoid traumatising readers/viewers/listeners. An important rule in professional communication with the military and other respondents is to be predictable in the journalist's behaviour. Journalists who work (or plan to work) with people who have experienced traumatic events should learn first aid skills. First of all, in order to be self-reliant and be able to provide support to their heroes/respondents, those who need it, not to burn out emotionally, and to remain effective in the profession.

The article analyzes the peculiarities of journalistic communication with people who have experienced trauma, in particular with military personnel and veterans of the Russian-Ukrainian war, as well as with representatives of other focus groups: internally displaced persons, volunteers, journalists, representatives of the public sector. The main emphasis is on how journalists can competently communicate with the military, how not to retraumatize the heroes of journalistic materials and the audience. It is emphasized that competent professional work of a journalist can be a therapeutic resource for overcoming war trauma in Ukrainian society.

From newspaper pages to bookshelves: promoting books by journalists

Galyna Vyshnevska, Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University

At today's stage of diagnosing news, we never forget the original source, which is a book. Books have always been respected and occupied a significant place in a person's life. For a long time, they passed their wisdom from hand to hand and improved each time. Only thanks to the skills and abilities of our ancestors, who wrote everything down, today we have an intellectual, developed and capable of improvement society. Books have specific directions and genres. The skills of writing truly worthy works need to be improved every day, because the manuscript must interest its circle of readers. The real artists of such work can be called journalists, because these are the people who are called "masters of the pen". They have a special perspective on events and are able to successfully and clearly convey their vision. Often, in order to promote their work, journalists resort to encouraging the distribution and popularization of their books through mass media, because PR is of great importance in modern realities. An equally important component is the reputation of the author-journalist himself in the media space. Mass media is an important and reliable way to promote journalists' books, because current realities tell us that publishing houses and bookstores need to cooperate with mass media to increase demand for their products and distribute them in the world. It should be noted that the promotion of books was studied by: A. Bezdizha, E. Volodina, S. Vololazka, V. Kapitan, I. Chulivska, Yu. Finkler. The relevance of the study is to increase the distribution and popularity of journalists' books through their promotion in the mass media. The purpose of the work is to investigate and show how the mass media can help promote the books of journalists in the media space.

This is precisely what involves the implementation of the following tasks:

- To characterize mass media approaches to promoting books.
- Get acquainted with the successful cooperation of mass media with a book written by a journalist.
- To analyze the characteristic signs of demand for book publishing products, after their promotion in mass media.
- Compare successful and unsuccessful methods of media in promoting journalists' books.
- To offer recommendations and ways to improve submission and implementation in the promotion of journalists' books.
- The subject of the work is a study of the features of the modern presentation and promotion of journalists' books with the help of mass media on the example of books written by journalists. The object of the work is book publishing products written by journalists, published in the mass media with the involvement of modern publishing houses. During the research of this work, the following methods were used:
 1. Descriptive: to explain and define the terminology used in the work.

2. General scientific: which consists in induction, analysis and deduction in relation to the theoretical basis of this study on the example of selected methods of promoting books in the media.

3. Comparative: to analyze similar and different qualities of text design in the news, on the radio, on the Internet and in social networks.

4. Analytical-semantic: for processing special literature (scientific reference books, reference literature, scientific works).

5. Generalization: to form the results of this work.

Scientific novelty of the research. For the first time, the material is examined, which examines the methods and methods of distribution and promotion of journalists' books with the help of mass media in the modern market of book publishing products. The theoretical significance of the research. It consists in studying the understanding of the evolution of the creation of books, their significance, their relevance, and their modern importance in the life of society. The practical significance of the research. These observations will be relevant for students studying in the "Publishing and Editing", "Journalism" and "Advertising and Public Relations" specialties, and can also be used when studying the above-listed specialties.

Social Media Platform Policies as a Message to their Users

Olena Goroshko & Yulia Germanova, National Technical University Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute

The notions of information and communication always played an extremely important role in any war in human history. But a significant increase of the information and communication importance made this role even more significant and fundamental particularly in the current war between Russia and Ukraine. Simultaneously the introduction of Web 2.0 technology has led to revolutionary changes in mass communication. Technological and new media breakthroughs and a rise in user participation blurs the line between production and consumption news activities, when consumer becomes prosumer (Toffler, 1970; 1980). In Ukraine, since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion, new media have overtaken traditional media as the most popular source of up-to-date information (Opora, 2022). Therefore, these media present the main tools in the Russian-Ukrainian information war. Social networks are mostly positioned as a space of freedom of speech, democracy and opportunities for self-expression. But with freedom comes the temptation to abuse. In the context of a full-scale war it becomes necessary to impose restrictions on certain freedoms for the sake of state security. M. McLuhan in the 60th emphasized that "the medium is the message" (McLuhan, 1964). L. Manovich paraphrased and modernized McLuhan's thesis - "the software is the message" (Manovich, 2014). In the context of social media, the following formulation seems appropriate: platform policy is the message. Thus, knowledge of the social media platform's policy by itself provides the user with the information on how critically to perceive the information in this media. For the purposes of this study, the policy of a social media platform is to be rendered as a system that includes the following elements: - communicative design (how platform functions); - content; - advertising; - bots. Plus, the country of origin of software as an important criterion for trusting or distrusting it. For our research three social media platforms are selected: Facebook, Telegram and TikTok (taking in mind the country of software origin).

Hypothesis: the policy of the social network can determine how easy it is possible to use for psychological operations (abbr: PSYOP). The research objective is to determine what specific policy features of platforms are used in the information war (including PSYOP)

and their impact. The main research tool includes in-depth interviews and content analysis of social media users' profiles and activities. The sample covers active Ukrainian users of platforms, 18+) registered on these three platforms. There are 20 interviews obtained. Each social platform can be used as a tool of PSYOP, but the involvement of social media in spreading fakes depends, in particular, on the specifics of its policy connected with moderation, communicative design, users' behavior, etc. In the context of a full-scale war, when information becomes a powerful weapon, awareness about the threats is more important than ever. Forewarned is forearmed - this is exactly concerning the war situation.

SHIFTING PARADIGMS: Technological Disruption, Market Concentration, and the Evolution of European Audiovisual Media

Mira Moshe, Ariel University

The European audiovisual media landscape is undergoing a profound transformation driven by technological disruption and the rapid concentration of market power. The shift towards digital platforms and on-demand services, exemplified by the rise of streaming giants like Netflix and YouTube, has challenged traditional media, leading to a re-evaluation of existing regulatory frameworks (Budzinski et al., 2021; Meir, 2021). In this context, the European Audiovisual Observatory plays a pivotal role in shaping the discourse and policies surrounding these changes. Amongst, it provides critical data and analysis and informs stakeholders about market trends (Grece, 2021; Trappel & Meier, 2022); its analysis ensures that regulatory approaches remain relevant in an increasingly platform-driven market (Vlassis, 2023) and much more. "Thus, this study seeks to illustrate the evolving trends in the EU audiovisual market, drawing on insights from the European Audiovisual Observatory's 2023-2024 reports. The findings reveal that:

1. **A Growth Shift on Concentration in the AV Sector** - The European audiovisual (AV) market has seen transformative growth from 2016 to 2022, driven by technological advancements and strategic consolidations. The top 100 AV companies, which saw revenues increase by 23%, outpaced the broader market, highlighting the dominance of key players such as Warner Bros. Discovery, Paramount, and Disney. Despite this growth, the SVOD segment remains the most concentrated, with the top 10 platforms controlling 90% of subscriptions.

2. **Diverse National Media Ecosystems** - The European AV sector is characterized by its diverse national ecosystems, comprising 12,703 audiovisual media services and video-sharing platforms by December 2023. These services include 9,434 TV channels (mostly regional and local) and 3,269 VOD services. The content offered reveals a divide between linear services, which are dominated by thematic channels (56%), and non-linear services, where a significant portion (24%) focuses on entertainment, film, and TV fiction.

3. **Market Structure and Ownership** - Ownership in the European AV market is divided between public and private sectors. Public sector TV channels, primarily generalist and supported by digital terrestrial television (DTT) networks, contrast with the private sector's dominance in thematic cable, IPTV, and satellite channels. US companies exert substantial influence, owning 23% of all private TV channels and 8% of on-demand services in Europe.

4. **Pan-European Players and Establishment Strategies** - Pan-European AV players

employ various strategies to target multiple markets. Multi-brand players like Comcast operate across both TV and VOD markets, while single-brand streamers like Netflix focus on on-demand services. These players often build their presence in markets where they already have a strong TV foothold. To conclude, the European AV market faces ongoing challenges, including regulatory adaptation to hybrid models that blend linear and on-demand content. The Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) and other regulatory frameworks must evolve to address these complexities. Meanwhile, production trends show varied growth across Europe, with countries like Italy and Spain experiencing significant increases in film output, contrasted by declines in France and Greece. The TV production market remains less concentrated, with public service broadcasters playing a crucial role in maintaining diversity and quality in content production.

Regulating the Digital Media Frontier: Adapting Legislation to the Evolving Landscape of Ownership and Distribution

Deepika, Indraprastha College for Women, University of Delhi; Rinki Dahiya & Priya Dahiya, Sri Guru Nanak Dev Khalsa College, University of Delhi

The landscape of media ownership and content distribution has undergone transformative changes over the past few decades, driven by rapid technological advancements and shifting consumer behaviors. As traditional media conglomerates and emerging digital platforms vie for dominance, the need for robust legislative frameworks to regulate these dynamics has become increasingly apparent. Historically, media ownership regulations were designed to prevent monopolies and ensure a diversity of voices within the public sphere. In many jurisdictions, these regulations included ownership caps, cross-ownership bans, and public interest obligations aimed at promoting a pluralistic media environment. For instance, the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) historically imposed restrictions on the number of media outlets a single entity could own in a market to foster competition and safeguard democratic discourse. Similarly, the European Union has implemented directives to curb undue concentration of media ownership and to protect editorial independence.

With the advent of the digital age, the traditional legislative approaches to media ownership and content distribution have been challenged by the rise of internet-based platforms. Digital giants such as Google, Facebook, and Amazon have become significant players in media distribution, often bypassing conventional regulatory structures. The dominance of these platforms has led to new regulatory concerns, including issues of data privacy, algorithmic transparency, and the spread of misinformation. In response to these challenges, recent legislative efforts have focused on adapting existing frameworks and introducing new regulations to address the unique dynamics of digital media. For example, the European Union's Digital Services Act (DSA) and Digital Markets Act (DMA) are pivotal in regulating the behavior of large online platforms, imposing requirements for content moderation and competition, respectively. Similarly, the proposed American Innovation and Choice Online Act aims to prevent tech monopolies and enhance market fairness by imposing restrictions on dominant digital platforms.

Despite these advancements, legislative frameworks continue to face significant hurdles. One major challenge is the global nature of digital media, which complicates the enforcement of national regulations and necessitates international cooperation. Furthermore, the rapid pace of technological innovation often outstrips the ability of lawmakers to devise effective regulations, leading to gaps and inconsistencies in the legal landscape. The rise of artificial intelligence and machine learning presents additional

complexities, as these technologies impact content creation, distribution, and consumption in ways that current regulations may not fully address.

The aim of this abstract is to provide a comprehensive overview of the legislative frameworks governing media ownership and content distribution, examining both traditional and contemporary approaches. It seeks to highlight the evolution of these frameworks in response to technological advancements and shifting market dynamics, assess their effectiveness in addressing current challenges, and identify areas for future reform. By exploring the interplay between established regulations and emerging digital realities, these abstract aims to offer insights into how legislation can adapt to ensure a diverse, competitive, and fair media environment in the digital age.

Panel: “Digital Democracy in the Age of Algorithms: The Role of the Media in Shaping Public Affairs”

Chair: Giulia Ferri & Andrea Miconi, IULM University, Italy

Irish audiences’ navigation of news platforms and their understanding of democracy today

Rosemary Day & Jude McInerney, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick

Defending democracy in social media: evidence from Italy

Giulia Ferri, Andrea Miconi, & Elisabetta Risi, IULM University

Research from Portugal endorses an EU Media Act establishing a legal framework that protects and sustains media pluralism and the ethos of journalism

Nuno Cintra Torres, Tatiana Chervyakova, & Manuel José Damásio, Lusófona University

In media we (sort of) trust: Audience perceptions of media and democracy in Estonia

Alessandro Nanì & Kristiina Raud, Tallinn University

Citizens and the media: information practices and democratic participation, the case of France

Romain Billot, Morgane Le Guyader, & Inna Lyubareva, IMT Atlantique

Panel Abstract

The proposed panel relies on the first data we collected through qualitative analysis, in the context of the Horizon Europe project Mapping Media for Future Democracies-MEDEMAM. The research has been conducted by means of both semi-structured individual interviews and focus groups, for a total of 400 people interviewed in ten countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, and Slovenia). With respect to the conference call, we will refer to the following thread:

This conference aims to explore the complexities of regulating these platforms and analyze the challenges and opportunities, focusing on algorithmization, legislation and legislature, and the preservation of democratic principles in the digital environment.

In this sense, the relation between media and democracy has been investigated, which encompasses a wide series of topics: people's trust in legacy and digital media and in the institutions; the nexus between users' agency and participation; the perception of national states and the EU; and the role played by social media in favoring or dismantling political engagement. The preservation of democracy in a digitized society has been addressed, with respect to such challenges as polarization, spread of fake news and disinformation campaigns, but also reliability and trustworthiness of the official news outlets. In particular, in all the papers we will focus on two distinct, albeit symmetrical and interconnected dimensions: participation *in* the media; and participation *through* the media. In both cases, we will zoom in onto the idea of social media as a battlefield, where the main issue at stake is the redistribution of power: either in terms of defense against the algorithms and their polarization effects; or in terms of political proposition for societal affairs at large.

Panel: "Freedom of expression versus controlled content moderation: Legal and human rights challenges"

Chair: Anna Shavit, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Moderating Misinformation: A Framework for Human Rights Compatibility

Ethan Shattock, Queens University Belfast School of Law

The spread of online misinformation in elections has become a widely debated problem in Europe. Responding to this problem, European Union (EU) institutions have steadily intensified legislative initiatives with a view to establishing responsibilities for technological intermediaries to mitigate the spread of misleading communications that threaten to undermine electoral processes. In particular, this is evident under several key provisions of the EU's recently introduced Digital Services Act (DSA). Acknowledging these critical developments, the purpose of this article is to identify how the moderation of content containing election misinformation can maintain compatibility with human rights. Various academic commentators persistently query how the moderation of online misinformation—including lawful forms—could undermine the right to freedom of expression. However, there has been a dearth of academic inquiry on how election falsehoods undermine the right to free and fair elections and how this should inform efforts to mitigate election misinformation online. Addressing this vital gap, this article proposes a template to identify how the moderation of content containing misinformation can ensure compatibility with the right to freedom of expression and the right to free elections under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECtHR) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (CFR). Developing a framework to inform this template for content moderation, this article adopts a doctrinal methodology and draws extensively from relevant jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU). As will be demonstrated, the analysis conducted in this article has immediate and timely policy relevance. Crucially, it provides a necessary analytical framework to examine how relevant DSA content moderation provisions can be applied to the problem of election misinformation while remaining compatible with the right to freedom of expression and the right to free elections under the ECHR and CFR systems.

Systemic Risk Assessments and Media Pluralism: Independent Media and the DSA's Regulatory Framework

Niklas Eder, Oxford University, Law Faculty

The Digital Services Act (DSA) introduces a regulatory framework that compels very large online platforms (VLOPs) to assess and mitigate systemic risks, particularly those that affect civic discourse and media pluralism. Article 34 of the DSA requires platforms to examine how their algorithmic content moderation and recommendation systems impact democratic processes, including risks to media pluralism. Article 35 further mandates platforms to adopt effective mitigation measures to address these risks, particularly those stemming from algorithmic amplification and personalized content curation.

This presentation draws on a mini-ethnography involving citizens, independent media producers, and journalists, revealing a notable trend: users are increasingly distrusting algorithmically curated content from large platforms. Instead, they are turning to independent media curators, such as podcasters and newsletter producers, who have built personal brands and are perceived as trusted arbiters of quality information. These independent producers are seen as reliable sources who offer an alternative to the opaque algorithms of VLOPs, contributing to a more diverse and pluralistic media ecosystem.

The growing reliance on independent media highlights a tension between platform-driven algorithmic content and audience preferences for curated, trusted sources. This shift is particularly relevant in the context of Article 34 of the DSA, which obliges platforms to assess how their recommender systems might contribute to the narrowing of media plurality. Moreover, Article 35 tasks platforms with implementing effective mitigation measures to address these systemic risks, including potential distortions in the diversity of content available to users.

This presentation will argue that the obligations under Articles 34 and 35 of the DSA offer a significant opportunity to rethink how platforms can better align their algorithmic systems with the needs of a pluralistic media landscape. A potential solution lies in multi-stakeholder initiatives that foster collaboration between platforms, independent media, and civil society. These initiatives could further investigate how independent content curation channels can enhance trust and mitigate systemic risks posed by algorithmic content curation. By leveraging such collaborations, the DSA's framework could promote a more balanced approach to media pluralism, ultimately strengthening civic discourse in the digital age.

Towards Delegated Prior Restraint of Free Speech: Can an obligation of intermediaries to regulate end-users' free speech ex- ante be constitutionally permissible?

Jakub Hodulík, Faculty of Law, Charles University

The contemporary digital information landscape is characterised by a triangular relationship between the speakers, such as private individuals or media, so-called intermediaries conveying an increasing amount of their free speech, and the state. A concomitant of this new distribution of power is the omnipresent threat of state pressure

on intermediaries, associated with delegating the free-speech regulation to them, and the phenomena of so-called over-blocking as well as delegated³ or collateral censorship. Acknowledging intermediaries' specific position by exempting them from liability for illegal user-generated content, the so-called safe harbour principle, has always been a defining concept in the regulation field. However, considering the dangers associated with unlawful content, threatening either the rights of individuals or the public interest (by spreading misinformation or promoting terrorism), legislators and courts tend to gradually expand the range of situations in which intermediaries are obliged to take action against end-user content. Although action has traditionally been required after the publication of illegal content (notice-and-takedown), recently, legislation and case law have moved much further. This paper will examine the shift towards establishing the obligation of intermediaries to review and regulate end-user content ex-ante. Attention will be paid to how the boundaries of the permissible are gradually being pushed, and how the prohibition of a general monitoring obligation - another key guarantee of freedom of expression typical of this area of law - is gradually being eroded (or even negated) in the case law of the CJEU and the ECtHR. In many constitutional systems, prior restraint is seen as an essentially inadmissible method of restricting free speech that paralyses public discourse. In some jurisdictions, censorship is prohibited regardless of any justification. Materially, ex-ante regulation and automated content filtering by intermediaries closely resemble censorship and prior restraint. However, these traditional constitutional guarantees are typically not applicable to non-state actors. As states do not have sufficient tools to block the information uploaded online ex-ante, it is the application of strict liability for content created by end-users that has led to the de facto introduction of an obligation to automatically filter all end-user content. Moreover, with the advance of AI technologies, such a mechanism becomes increasingly efficient and precise, but not necessarily less dangerous to fundamental rights, which cannot be overlooked.

This paper will analyse the constitutional limits that the current legislative and jurisprudential developments must not cross while allowing the ex-ante regulation of free speech. Attention will be given to whether contemporary case law and legislation adequately reflect the constitutional dimension of the issue, including the fundamental premises formulated in relation to state prior restraint during the past centuries. The paper will also discuss whether the introduction of an intermediaries' obligation to subject end-user content to ex-ante regulation (by preventing reuploads or publication of certain information) could be seen as indirectly enforced (delegated) state restriction, and thus an impermissible circumvention of the constitutional state-addressed guarantees.

How laws come and go in the digital age: Austria's anticipation of the DSA

Josef Trappel & Tales Tomaz, University of Salzburg

Since the Brexit and Trump's election in 2016, concerns on disinformation spread through digital platforms have gained prominence in political and communication science, leading to regulatory developments across the world (Flew et al., 2019). In 2020, the EU announced a package of general regulations to platforms, including the Digital Services Act (DSA), with the intention to increase responsibility and accountability in platforms' speech curation (DSA, 2022). After the regular procedure, the DSA finally entered into force in February 2024.

However, before that, many EU countries have experimented with national regulatory solutions, the most famous one being the German NetzDG (Griffin, 2022). A less known response was the Austrian Communications Platforms Act (KoPl-G), passed in 2020 and entered into force in 2021 (KoPl-G, 2020). With this piece, Austrian policymakers attempted to anticipate the EU intervention and establish provisional rules for the fight against disinformation. An analysis of this case study can illuminate the challenges of communication policy in changing sociotechnical conditions and intertwining roles of national and EU-level regulation (Trappel et al., forthcoming).

The law targeted both domestic and foreign service providers of communication platforms that had more than 100,000 Austrian users annually and earned over €500,000 in revenue. KoPl-G required these platforms to establish effective, transparent procedures for handling reports of allegedly illegal content (§ 3 Para. 1 KoPl-G). Content deemed obviously illegal by legal laypersons had to be removed or blocked within 24 hours, while less clear cases required action within seven days (§ 3 Para. 3 lit 1a). Illegal content included offences such as coercion, threats, defamation, child pornography, incitement to terrorism, and hate speech, as outlined in the Penal Code (§ 2 lit. 8 KoPl-G). Platforms had to submit biannual reports on their content moderation practices to the regulatory body, KommAustria, and violations of the law could result in fines of up to €10 million (§ 4 Para. 1 KoPl-G).

With the introduction of the EU-wide Digital Services Act (DSA) in February 2024, the KoPl-G was repealed. The DSA brought new regulations for platform operators across the EU, maintaining the requirement for platforms to implement a "notice and action" mechanism for reporting illegal content (art. 16). However, the DSA no longer required action within 24 hours. Platforms must still make decisions on flagged content promptly, without arbitrariness, and must communicate these decisions without delay. The DSA introduced "Trusted Flaggers," specialized entities with expertise in identifying illegal content, giving them preferential treatment in reporting processes (art. 22). Both the KoPl-G and the DSA share a strong component of reporting, but the EU regulation reduced its frequency to an annual publication. The penalties under the DSA, however, can be more severe, with fines reaching up to six percent of the global annual revenue of the platform provider for non-compliance. By adopting the DSA, Austria aligned with EU law, ending its individual approach to regulating illegal content on communication platforms, while still retaining core regulatory principles from the KoPl-G.

Local Blocking, Global Deletion: Comparing ECtHR Internet Blocking Standards and Social Media Content Takedown Policies

Petr Gangur, Faculty of Law, Charles University

The rapid evolution of digital platforms has raised pressing legal and ethical challenges surrounding freedom of expression and the regulation of online content. While the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has developed key jurisprudence on internet blocking, notably in cases such as *Ahmet Yildirim v. Turkey*, *Kablis v. Russia* or *Kharitonov v. Russia*, the rise of social media platforms presents new complexities in regulating online speech. This paper explores whether the ECtHR's case law on internet blocking can be applied or adapted to the context of social media content regulation, which often relies on ex ante measures, such as artificial intelligence-driven content moderation or notice-and-takedown systems, rather than ex post blocking by public authorities. However, the regulatory landscape is evolving, especially in the European Union, with the introduction of the Digital Services Act (DSA). The DSA creates a framework that enhances the role of

public authorities in overseeing and regulating online platforms, reintroducing a stronger state presence in content moderation decisions. While social media companies remain key actors in enforcing standards, the DSA imposes greater obligations on them to ensure accountability, and thus bringing the process closer to a public regulatory framework.

The paper will analyze the key differences between internet blocking and social media content regulation, highlighting that while internet blocking is often a localized, social media regulation tends to be proactive, targeted, and transnational in its effects. Furthermore, the actors involved—public authorities versus private companies—introduce different legal and human rights considerations, with the DSA serving as a bridge between these two spheres of governance. Through a critical examination of the ECtHR’s internet blocking case law conclusions such as necessity to publish whole decision ordering seizure of internet content⁶ or necessity to give operator of the website time to bring the content into compliance with the law, the paper argues that these standards could offer valuable guidance for regulating content on social media. However, significant challenges arise due to the decentralized and private nature of platform governance, as well as the role of AI in decision-making or the possible further development of ECtHR case law since the pilot judgment on social networks regulation *Delfi AS v. Estonia*, which, however, did not clarify the relationship to the case law on the internet blocking. Ultimately, this paper seeks to offer a legal solution that balances the need for protecting freedom of expression with the growing demand for effective content moderation on social media platforms.

Panel: “Media as a tool of democracy or manipulation? Perspectives on fact-checking and content regulation”

Chair: Suchibrata Roy, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Platformisation and regulation in the hybrid media system: how key actors are responding to the EU Digital Services Act

Vito Laterza & Abit Hoxha, University of Agder

The DSA has been hailed by many as a bold regulatory initiative and probably the first transnational legal framework that regulates the workings of large-scale social media platforms and search engines such as X, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Google and Bing, among others. Given the central role of these platforms in the production, distribution and consumption of news and other socially and politically relevant media, the DSA’s actual and potential effects on what Chadwick (2017) calls the “hybrid media system” are of great interest, to academics in media, communication and journalism studies and policy-makers alike.

While academic research on these emerging topics is growing, there is a specific need to understand what key actors in the media system are thinking about and how they are responding and adapting to the DSA – this is essential to begin an evaluation of the potential future effects of the DSA. This paper innovatively explores these issues by building on exploratory in-depth qualitative interviews and participant observation that are being carried out with 16 professional journalists, 15 alternative media content producers and 16 citizens in eight European countries (Spain, Czech Republic, Germany, Ireland, Belgium, Austria, Norway and UK). These research activities are part of the ongoing Horizon Europe project “Resilient Media for Democracy in the Digital Age” (ReMeD)

At the time of submission, we are finalizing data collection and carrying out the analysis, so findings have not yet been finalized. Also, given the early stage of implementation of the DSA itself, our focus is more on how participants perceive the DSA, what they know about it and how they react to what they understand of the regulation, and less on a detailed account of how the DSA will affect their practices. Emerging themes include: the balance between freedom of expression and regulation to prevent harm (e.g. hate speech and other online harm connected to media production, distribution and consumption); actors' understanding of the workings of social media platforms and search engines and how this shapes their views of the DSA; and the gap between participants' often limited awareness of algorithms and their work and the DSA's focus on these socio-technical dimensions of platformisation.

Perspectives on journalists' roles and possible content regulation among Czech professional journalists, alternative media content producers and citizens

Alice Němcová Tejkalová, Victoria Nainová, Anna Shavit, Kateřina Turková, Charles University

Our paper focuses on particular results of mini-ethnographic research conducted for Phase 2 of a Horizon EUROPE project, Resilient Media for Democracy in the Digital Age in the Czech Republic, between March and August 2024. In this qualitative research with six research participants (2 professional journalists, two alternative media content producers and two citizens), we conducted 2-3 interviews with each research participant and the observation of their online information gathering and information processing routines. With the position of professional journalism being repeatedly contested by various peripheral actors, including alternative media content producers, we were interested in their changing role self-perception as well as the journalists' role perception by the peripheral actors and citizens. In this context, our research focus was not only on the role of journalists themselves but also on journalism itself.

After the intense spreading of disinformation surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, and particularly after the beginning of the war in Ukraine, a theme of online media content moderation and possible legislative regulation have been repeatedly brought to the centre of political discussions in Czechia. There are both the strong supporters of the stricter regulation, ideally on the pan-European level, as well as the strong opponents of it. Both sides of the conflict talk about threats to liberal democracy, only from a distinct point of view.

In this paper, we present the arguments our participants have to all the mentioned issues concerning the qualitative basis of our research. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized; on the other hand, they offer an engaging, in-depth perspective of the individuals of various generations and ideological views on the highly controversial topic and can be linked to broader societal discussions.

Puppets or Players? The Legal Consciousness of Fact-Checkers

Margarita Amaxopoulou & Nicole Stremlau, Faculty of Law, University of Oxford

Across borders, fact-checking has grown rapidly as a movement, forming a new transnational field. Leading practitioners, elites and key organisations, like the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), have played a pivotal role in field-building and governance frameworks design (Lauer and Graves, 2024). Equally growing is the

scholarly interest in the socio-legal phenomenon of the fact-checking field, its inner operations, and external interactions. Fact checking organisations are often juxtaposed with traditional news organisations and established journalistic institutions. Interestingly, some scholars have found that fact-checking organisations have different working methods than traditional news operators and ultimately understand and assess 'accuracy' in different ways (Cavaliere, 2020). Empirical studies involving fact-checkers have identified several problems faced by the latter in their daily practices.

In these empirical studies, scholars have claimed that platform governance - that is, the rules and policies by which platforms operate - is entirely owned and managed by tech companies, resulting in fact-checking actors lacking agency over what they can do, what constitutes a legitimate fact-checking and over what content (Westlund, Belair-Gagnon, Graves, Larsen and Steensen, 2024). Other studies corroborate that fact-checkers feel that platform policies pre-empt their options as to what to prioritise and whom to hold to account (Vinhas and Bastos, 2023). Both of these views reflect a deterministic outlook on the agency of fact-checkers.

Indeed, this deterministic view presents fact-checkers almost as automata, lacking any substantive power over the way they exercise their duties and contrasts with the complicated and sophisticated way in which agents receive and react to norms in the legal consciousness scholarship (Ewick and Silbey, 1998; Silbey, 2005; Hertogh, 2018). It also contrasts with recent studies on content moderation and fact-checking, which show the crucial role of human intervention, the contextual character of falsehoods and the ad-hoc sociality in situated practices of automation; this also seems to disregard the crucial role of the dialogue between fact-checkers and their potentially demanding or pressuring citizen audience (Katzenbach, Pentzold, Viejo Otero, 2024; Vinhas and Bastos, 2023; Lopez-Marcos and Vicente-Fernandez, 2021).

This paper, drawing on original empirical data of fact-checking actors, elaborates on the legal consciousness of fact-checkers. It contributes a more nuanced and less determinist depiction of their agency as social actors. The paper shows under which conditions fact-checkers adopt different approaches to the law (i.e., three legal layers, including formal law, community rules of platforms and fact-checking organisation's rules) to pursue their organisational and individual purposes.

Examining Claim Selection and Debunking Processes in Fact- Checking: A Mixed Methods Study on Two Different Fact- Checking Models in the UK

Nursi ER, Cardiff University

Fact-checking has gained significant importance in recent years as a response to and remedy for the spread of disinformation. By conducting content analysis of 86 fact-checks and a critical discourse analysis of ten fact-checking articles, produced by Full Fact and Channel 4's FactCheck, this study critically assessed the claim selection and debunking practices of two major fact-checking websites in the United Kingdom over a one-year period and sought to analyse the discursive construction of politicians in fact-checking articles. The findings from a content analysis of two fact-checkers show that although there were some similarities, there were also some major differences between fact-checking websites. The results reveal that the newsworthiness of the claim was an important factor in the claim selection of fact-checkers. The results also show that both fact-checkers were unable to maintain party balance in their claim selections. Another important result of the study was that both fact-checkers rely on a predetermined list of

reliable sources to investigate claims. The findings indicate that major differences among fact-checking websites can be attributed to the differing types of organisations engaged in fact-checking. Finally, critical discourse analysis yielded results that fact-checking articles utilised discourses of accountability, transparency, and accuracy to shape the portrayal of politicians. These discourses appeared to align with the normative roles of fact-checkers they assigned to fact-checking, and the findings therefore point to the fact that political fact-checking has largely moved away from 'he said, she said' reporting and evolved towards fulfilling important normative roles, such as holding politicians accountable for their false claims.

Spectacle of Intimacy: Analyzing the Public Display of Private Lives on Social Media Through Baudrillard's Lens

Deniz Katiel Kurt, Marmara University

In the contemporary digital age, the pervasive use of social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok has transformed the ways in which individuals and couples engage with and perform their everyday lives. This phenomenon, characterized by the constant recording and broadcasting of personal moments—ranging from mundane activities to intimate encounters and conflicts—reflects a broader cultural shift towards a society deeply entrenched in voyeurism and exhibitionism. In this context, Jean Baudrillard's concept of the "society of the spectacle" serves as a critical framework for understanding the implications of this trend. Baudrillard argued that in the spectacle society, the boundaries between reality and representation become increasingly blurred, leading to a world where images and simulations dominate human experience. Social media amplifies this by encouraging individuals to curate and stage their lives for public consumption, transforming private moments into commodified spectacles. The desire to be seen and validated through likes, shares, and comments drives this performative behavior, creating a feedback loop where the spectacle becomes the reality. Furthermore, the act of documenting and sharing personal experiences online fosters a culture of surveillance, where individuals not only participate in their own self-exposure but also engage in the consumption of others' lives. This dual role of performer and spectator perpetuates a cycle of mutual observation, reinforcing the societal obsession with visibility and appearance. This paper aims to explore the intersections between Baudrillard's theoretical insights and the contemporary practices of social media users, particularly focusing on the implications for interpersonal relationships and individual identity. By analyzing the ways in which couples publicly navigate their private lives, this study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the impact of digital technologies on social interaction and the construction of self in the 21st century.

Panel: "Digital Media, Algorithms, and Political Communication: Regulation, Disinformation, and Societal Impacts"

Chair: Kateřina Turková, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

The regulation of the media and very large online platforms (VLOPs) in the European Union offers insights for Ukraine

Oleh Dzholos, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv

The European Union has recently adopted the laws regulating media, digital online platforms and media services. Ukraine, as a candidate country for EU membership, is

confidently modernizing its legislation to regulate both analogue and digital media services, in line with the European Union's laws. The country firmly adheres to the principles of media freedom and freedom of speech, while also demonstrating its competence in protecting against disinformation and negative external information influences. In 2023, Ukraine implemented the Law on Media, which aligns Ukrainian legislation with the EU Audiovisual Media Services Directive. However, it is important to note that global online platforms and social media activities remain unregulated in Ukraine.

Telegram is not as prevalent in Europe. However, it is important to point out that the Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act only establish regulations for 'very large' networks, or VLOPs, which include Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Tik Tok, Twitter, Amazon, AliExpress, and Booking.com, among others. As Telegram is not included in this list, it is not a subject to these regulations. Telegram has fewer than 45 million active users per month in the EU, which is a critical threshold for large platforms according to the EU's definition. If the European Commission determines that the platform has a significant social impact, the threshold may be lowered. Were Telegram to be designated a 'very large online platform' under the DSA it would be obliged to take measures against the spread of disinformation and put in place tougher content moderation protocols.

As a candidate country for the EU, Ukraine must modernise its legislation in accordance with EU directives and laws. It is necessary to limit the ability of large digital online platforms to influence the market for information and media services, as Ukrainian media experts and lawyers, like their European counterparts, have pointed out. The regulation of digital services should also counteract disinformation on the Internet, among other things. The Digital Markets Act and the Digital Services Act are the first but not the last laws to regulate the media industry in the European Union. The EU is developing regulations for artificial intelligence and digital privacy protection. Ukraine is also pursuing similar regulations while safeguarding media freedom and countering disinformation and negative influences. The European integration path is absolutely crucial and essential for Ukraine. However, the state's existence is not only threatened, but also imperiled by modern security challenges, including those in the information sphere.

IA, elections and Media. An inquiry on the use of bots for political marketing in Mexico

David Ramírez-Plascencia, Álvaro Ochoa-Zuno, Universidad de Guadalajara; Rosa María Alonzo-González, Universidad Autónoma de Baja California

In recent years, presidential elections in the United States, Mexico, Venezuela and India have captured national and international attention, particularly regarding the impact of information technology in the voting outcome. Due to the disruptive advances in artificial intelligence and the development of apps such as ChatGPT, there are expectations on how AI, mainly bots and deepfake materials, could be a potential risk for democratic electoral processes. As electoral wins depend mostly on an extensive use of social media to raise candidates' popularity and recruit followers, political parties and candidates haven't been reluctant to employ whichever tactic, ethical or not, that enhances their possibilities to beat their adversaries. This includes the spread of false information and the use of bots to increase the public approval of their candidates. This work stands on the interception of artificial intelligence, disinformation, and politics. We approach the study of the impact of digital media on politics, particularly the use of bots as virtual partisans to influence

national politics in Mexico. We focus on the analysis on newspaper coverage on the use of bots to understand how parties and politics employed these automatic accounts to obtain a political advantage against their adversaries. This work covers a length of time of eight years, from 2016 and 2023, before the 2024 presidential election. Its objectives are (a) to study, using the methodology of content analysis, the media coverage of bots, their appearance and proliferation in Mexico, and (b) the consolidation of a prospective bot market, a supply and demand system, in which bots are rented for political propaganda, particularly during elections. As final outcomes will show, the analysis of the Mexican case allows us to understand the popularization of bots as “digital partisans”, an activity that, besides their clandestine nature, is gaining a key role in actual politics.

Digital Society and Political Communication in Italy: Between Polarized Emotions and Neutrality

Daniele Battista, University of Salerno; Francesca Cubeddu, Irpps CNR Rome

The aim of this work is to analyze the positive and negative emotions elicited by political speeches and statements, with a particular focus on the two main leaders of Italian politics: Giorgia Meloni and Elly Schlein. The analysis begins with the complex relationship between individuals' perception of social reality and how this is shaped by the media. Political narrative is, in fact, a form of objectification of human expressiveness, in which the media play a crucial role as vehicles for ideas, concepts, and images. Media not only disseminate information but also generate and amplify individual and collective emotions. Political communication, by influencing public opinion, has the power to provoke different emotional reactions depending on the target audience and the narrative framework used. The analysis of the emotional dynamics conveyed by the speeches of the two political leaders will be conducted through narrative analysis of the content of their speeches concerning two major social and media issues: immigration and the LGBTQIA+ community. In the first phase, using T-LAB software, thematic nodes and indicators will be selected to understand the emotional dimension conveyed in Meloni and Schlein's speeches. This will allow for the construction of a specific vocabulary to identify emotions such as anger, joy (or satisfaction), and trust (security and hope), thereby building the sentiment analysis. Subsequently, the public's reaction will be observed by analyzing the interactions on the official social media accounts of the two leaders to verify any phenomena of viralization of the transmitted emotions. This second phase is crucial for understanding how digital platforms, through the creation of information bubbles, filter and amplify certain emotional messages, thereby contributing to the polarization of public debate. Therefore, the proposed analysis explores the role of the media, particularly social media, in generating and conveying political emotions, highlighting the differences and similarities in the speeches and reactions elicited by the two leaders. The purpose of this work is to contribute to a better understanding of how contemporary political communication, in a highly mediated context, influences collective and individual emotions, and how these emotions, in turn, shape political participation and public opinion.

Tackling online disinformation: blockchain-based journalism for accountable and transparent media ecosystems

Adriana Mutu, ESIC Business & Marketing School, Barcelona

Blockchain technology as a game changer in strengthening the democratic functions of the media and fighting against online disinformation is a relatively novel theme that is consistently gaining scholarly attention. Prior research examined the use of blockchain

technology in e-government operations, international development in fragile states, European technological sovereignty and global AI governance, among others. Proponents of cryptographic technology advance that blockchain and other types of distributed ledger technology (DLT) help institutions and governments to enhance democratic legitimacy, facilitating financial transactions, contending with the proliferation of deepfakes, advancing justice, and reducing the risk of election tampering.

The role of blockchain technology in the media sector and the use of decentralized online based communications services to combat disinformation are scarcely analyzed in prior research. Advocates of digital technologies claim that the cryptographic security of blockchain technology can improve the detection of fake media, creating ecosystems to support fact-based information, thereby enhancing public trust. This technology allows for the validation of media authenticity and the tracing of digital content back to its source. By recording original media documents on the blockchain, it becomes possible to expose forgeries and manipulation, as the data is rendered mathematically immutable, preventing any tampering or destruction. Because blockchain is decentralized, it allows multiple participants to collaborate to fact-check and verify information in a transparent manner. Smart contracts, secure, tamper-proof, and transparent self-executing agreements are increasingly being adopted in context of combating fake news, to enforce rules and standards for sharing and distributing information. Evidence shows that blockchains and smart contracts can be used in deepfake (fake footage, images, audios, and videos) detection, analyzing the metadata within a video back to the original computer source, determining if the video is real or fake.

This paper introduces a systematic interdisciplinary literature review on blockchain-based journalism and the potential for decentralized content governance to enhance accountable information ecosystems aligned with the principles of media pluralism. It provides a qualitative assessment of the relationship between technological innovation and journalistic practices, emphasizing blockchain's potential as a data verification tool that incentivizes the creation of a self-regulated journalism marketplace. The findings suggest that blockchain technology holds significant promise for enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of media professionals in combating false information. The study also addresses the limitations, opportunities and possible beneficial impacts of regulatory oversight of blockchain technology. Overcoming technology adoption barriers requires concerted efforts from policymakers, including developing regulatory frameworks and fostering collaboration between key stakeholders in tackling online disinformation.

The People at the Margins of Journalism: Peripheral Journalists and their (Semi-) Professional Aspirations in Eight European Countries

Andreas A. Riedl & Thomas Hanitzsch, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich

For decades, the proper functioning of democracy has been closely tied to professional journalism and its role in creating a space for public debate and thus enabling processes of democratic reasoning (Schudson, 2008). The shifting boundaries of institutional journalism (Carlson & Lewis, 2015) and the emergence of 'new' platforms, actors, and forms of public communication raise questions about how these entrants to the field aim to contribute to the public interest. In the literature, such quasi-journalistic actors are usually conceptualized as peripheral journalists; these actors are seen as populating a periphery around journalism's 'traditional' core (Eldridge, 2019). Core and periphery are demarcated along multiple axes, including the autonomy/heteronomy of actors and their

alignment with established institutional norms in a hetero- or orthodox manner (Maares & Hanusch, 2022). Despite these theoretical considerations, it is widely unclear how peripheral journalists conceive their (semi-)professional aspirations compared to traditional journalists. We address this research gap by systematically comparing the attitudes and perceptions of both groups across eight European countries: Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Ireland, Norway, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

The comparative perspective allows us to identify commonalities and differences beyond the constraints of individual media systems. In line with the core vs. periphery concept, we operationalize peripheral journalists into five subgroups, which allows us to compare analogous groups despite the structural differences of the media systems. These subgroups include political 'alternative' media proclaiming to represent a necessary corrective towards the 'mainstream' media (Holt et al., 2019), fact-checkers embracing traditional journalistic values around factuality (Graves, 2016), news start-ups challenging conventional understandings of how news production is organized and funded (Usher, 2017), corporate journalism producing journalism-like products on behalf of business enterprises from other sectors (Koch et al., 2023), and influencers building personal brands and engaging with a significant number of followers (Borchers, 2019). To assess their contribution to the public interest, we explore the working realities of peripheral journalists, including perceived autonomy and influences on their work and their aspirations, encompassing role orientations, epistemologies, ethics, and political views (Hanitzsch et al., 2019). Empirically, we build our comparison on a recent (2021-23) standardized survey among traditional journalists in the eight countries ($n \geq 5,200$) and an ongoing survey among peripheral journalists, targeting 100 peripheral journalists in each country. The latter survey is completed for the first countries, with data collection ongoing in some others. At the conference, we will be able to present a comprehensive comparison of traditional and peripheral journalists in the selected European countries. Through this study, we hope to enhance our understanding of hybrid media systems' ecology and evaluate the extent to which our theoretical assumptions about peripheral journalism align with empirical reality.

Panel: "Navigating the Digital World: Regulation, Trust and User Behavior in the Media Environment"

Chair: Victoria Nainová, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Journalists' perceived threats to their profession from (far-right) populism in Italy and Spain: disintermediation, hostility, and lack of access

Carlo Berti, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, Carlota M. Moragas Fernández & Arantxa Capdevila, Universitat Rovira i Virgili

Journalists have been confronted, recently, by a political arena characterized by the growing presence of populist forces. In Europe, populism (predominantly of the far right) is often characterized by hostility toward journalists, considered part of the "corrupt elites". Populists' affinity with social media, moreover, has fueled political communication styles characterized by polarization and disintermediation, partially undermining the journalists' role as gatekeepers and watchdogs. Drawing from semi-structured interviews conducted in Italy and Spain in 2023-24, we explore how journalists perceive the influence of populism on their profession. We focus particularly on far-right populism, interviewing journalists who have covered these forces with a critical stance. Our results

highlight several challenges in journalists' relationship with far-right populist forces, such as increased hostility, difficulties of access, and a disruptive role of digital affordances. According to some interviewees, these difficulties are brought about not only by populists but more broadly by changes in political communication linked to digital technologies. We discuss the implications of these issues for journalism practice and democracy.

What is the Regulatory Framework for Social Media Influencers and Celebrities in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Reza John Vedadi, Loughborough University London

This study addresses the regulatory framework for social media influencers and celebrities in the Islamic Republic of Iran, examining the challenges and gaps in the interaction between the Iranian system and these influential figures. Given their significant impact on public discourse and cultural trends, the Iranian government believes developing a regulatory mechanism aligned with the country's cultural and religious values is crucial. Balancing freedom of expression with the preservation of social values within Iran's socio-cultural context, the Iranian government believes an approach that respects Iranian and Islamic principles while allowing influencers to contribute positively to cultural and social development is required.

The research aims to analyse the solutions provided to mitigate challenges and leverage the social influence of these figures through a proposed regulatory framework. Employing a qualitative research method and thematic analysis, the study's population comprises media managers, program developers, and experts. Sixteen participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview technique. Considering the research topic's integration of regulation, celebrity culture, and media management, interviewees were selected from experts, officials, and researchers in these fields. The content analysis yielded 409 codes, which were refined into 48 codes under six main categories: "Harms from social media influencers' activities," "Constructive capacities of social media influencers," "Characteristics of the regulatory body for social media influencers," "Regulatory mechanisms for social media influencers," "Challenges in regulating social media influencers," and "Requirements for regulating social media influencers."

Furthermore, the research categorises the impacts and activities of social media influencers into six main areas: harms caused by their activities, constructive capacities, characteristics of the regulatory body, regulatory mechanisms, challenges in regulation, and requirements for effective regulation. This comprehensive categorisation provides a structured approach to addressing the various dimensions of influencer regulation. The findings suggest that the Iranian government believes with a well-designed regulatory framework, the authorities can balance freedom of expression with social values, ensuring influencers contribute positively to cultural and social development while mitigating potential negative impacts.

On digital fetishism. A critique of the Big Data paradigm

Andrea Miconi, IULM

That the advent of Big Data would mark a historical turnaround has been repeatedly stated, ranging from computational sociology to digital humanities, to the very idea of "data deluge" making scientific method obsolete, according to Chris Anderson's maximalist thesis. We will interpret this tendency as a form of *fetishism*, by tracing it back

to the two constitutive dimensions of the phenomenon: the *discourse* and the *material*, in application of Nico Carpentier's framework of the "discourse-material knot". In the first case, we will focus on the reification of data in public discourse – where they are presented *as if they existed per se* - by drawing on the interpretation laid out in Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* and fine-tuned by its critical readers (Honneth in particular). In the second case, we will deal with the original Marxist notion of fetishism, and namely with the propension to put the emphasis on the final output of the production process – the data – with no attention placed to the social processes by which they are generated (i.e., unwaged labor, quantified self).

In both cases, we will review the current literature in the field – and the public discourse around big data, automated data, and data capitalism - from the perspective of the critical internet theory. Particular attention will be placed to the ideas of data exploitation and raw data (particularly in Couldry & Mejias, Van Dijck, Zuboff, and Mayer-Schönberger and his co-authors) which will prove to betray the same form of digital fetishism: again, the focus on the final results of the process, rather than on the social practices – or relations of production, in Marx's words - by which the very same process is fueled. Marx's distinction between labor time and production time will be eventually called to action as an overarching explanation of exploitation in the age of Big Data and digital platforms.

We will eventually discuss two main implications of this trend. The first one is the over-emphasizing of the novelty with the previous stages in the evolution of capitalism – akin to the separation of the discourse from its premises, in Honneth's definition of reification - which will require the retrieval of post-Fordist theories of accumulation. The second, and related aspect, is the under-estimation of the role played by human labor, bases on the idea of synthetical data taking over, which is the clearest example of what Marx defined fetishism. Additionally, we will argue that the current discourse around the surveillance capitalism is falling short, as it does not reckon the already existing evidence of capitalism exploiting human life, as brilliantly put forward by the Italian *operaismo*, and namely by Mario Tronti and Antonio Negri.

Disinformation in Spain: Mapping Public Perception, Political Discourse, and Media Trust in a Polarized Landscape

Aurken Sierra, Jordi Rodríguez-Virgili & Mercedes Medina, Universidad de Navarra

Spain's media environment is characterized by acute political polarization, making it particularly vulnerable to disinformation. Recent studies indicate that over 80% of Spaniards view disinformation as a significant problem, with television and social media serving as primary vectors for spreading misleading content (Bennett and Livingston, 2020; European Commission, 2024; Nielsen and Selva, 2019). This polarization reinforces confirmation bias, making citizens more susceptible to misinformation that aligns with their preexisting beliefs and encouraging them to share and spread such content (Klayman, 1995; Knobloch-Westerwick and Kleinman, 2012). The phenomenon has intensified since the 2017 Catalan independence referendum and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (García-Marín, 2020; Salaverría et al., 2020), potentially undermining democratic processes and institutional trust (Bergmann et al., 2021).

This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the disinformation landscape in Spain, examining public perception, media consumption trends, and political discourse surrounding this issue. We seek to understand how disinformation is perceived as a threat

to democracy by citizens and politicians, how these perceptions have evolved over time, and whether political alignment influences concern regarding disinformation.

Our research questions are:

1. How does Spain's disinformation situation compare to other European countries in terms of public concern and media trust?
2. How have public perceptions of disinformation and media consumption patterns in Spain changed over the past seven years?
3. How is the issue of disinformation framed and discussed in Spanish parliamentary debates, and how does this impact public perception of the problem?
4. To what extent does political alignment influence concern about disinformation among Spanish citizens?

To address these questions, we employ a mixed-methods approach:

1. Quantitative analysis of Eurobarometer 101 (Spring 2024) data, comparing Spain's disinformation concerns with other European countries.
2. Longitudinal analysis of Digital News Report data on Spain from 2017-2024, tracking changes in media consumption, trust, and disinformation perceptions.
3. Content analysis of Spanish parliamentary speeches from 2020-2024, focusing on disinformation-related terminology and rhetoric, and examining how partisan dynamics may trivialize the gravity of disinformation campaigns.
4. Statistical analysis using SPSS to examine the relationship between political alignment and disinformation concern, controlling for demographic variables.

This multi-faceted approach will provide insights into the interplay between public perception, media trends, and political discourse surrounding disinformation in Spain. By incorporating political alignment as a variable, we aim to uncover potential partisan differences in disinformation perception, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the issue. Our findings will inform ongoing academic and policy discussions on media transformation, its impact on democratic functions, and strategies to combat disinformation in polarized media environments. Based on our findings, the study will conclude with recommendations for improving journalistic practices and strengthening media companies' resilience against disinformation challenges. We will also address the importance of selecting appropriate actors for media literacy initiatives, considering that polarization can contaminate some, such as government entities, potentially reducing the effectiveness of their efforts. Our goal is to provide a framework to help Spanish media navigate the disinformation landscape, reinforcing their role in maintaining a healthy democracy.

Information-Seeking Using ChatGPT: Factors that Influence the Behavioural Intention of Media Students Using ChatGPT

Mohammad Mafizul Islam (Mafi), Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences

Students' Information-seeking behaviour has been transformed too quickly since natural language processing models like ChatGPT entered the market. While the current research focused on ChatGPT's text-generation capability, grading of students' assignments, etc., ChatGPT's information-seeking feature has been ignored in scientific research. Although the current studies are conducted in multi-disciplinary contexts, little is known about the information-seeking behaviour of media students, potential journalists, researchers, and academicians. Against this background, this study investigated how media students seek information through ChatGPT and their level of trust in this tool's generated information. A

concurrent mixed-method approach was applied to identify the nuances, while qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews, and quantitative data was gathered via a survey. The result shows that ChatGPT's information-seeking function is highly competitive with its established competitor, Google. Even though it is new in the market, ChatGPT obtained 50% priority as an information-seeking tool (IST) by the students, meaning that they use the tool as an IST as many times as they use Google for the same purpose. Moreover, students like ChatGPT because it is free, available across various devices, and can be used to understand multiple languages. The findings also revealed that some students feel like they are talking to a person when using ChatGPT. But they do not always trust it. They expressed frustration over the lack of reliable information that ChatGPT is prone to provide. After finding information using ChatGPT, students verify the reliability of information through Google. To conduct the study, three major constructs, performance expectancy (PE), effort expectancy (EE), and Hedonic motivation (HM), adapted from Venkatesh and Thong et al. (2012) unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT2) model is employed. Even though EE is widely validated as a key driver of technology acceptance, surprisingly, in this study, EE appears to have a negative, non-significant relationship with the behavioral intention of students to use ChatGPT. Most importantly, this study invented two new determinants—perceived humanness (PH) and availability (AV), which complement the UTAUT2 model.

The State of the Algorithm: A scientometric analysis of the knowledge production concerning algorithmic influence and bias in the social sciences

Gergely Ferenc Lendvai, University of Richmond

The way material is produced, shared, and consumed has changed dramatically as a result of social media platforms' incorporation of algorithms, which has led to serious questions regarding responsibility and regulation in the modern hybrid media system. As algorithms shape what information reaches users more each day, issues of algorithmic influence and bias have come to the forefront of both academic and policy discussions. These algorithms are not neutral, nor are they objective (Stinson, 2022) and they often reinforce preexisting power dynamics, creating significant challenges for media pluralism, democratic engagement, and content governance. Though the work on such polemics is growing, research on algorithmic regulation is unevenly distributed, with scholars from the Global North disproportionately leading the conversation and with different disciplines hardly crossing intersections. From a scholarly viewpoint, this imbalance threatens to obscure the unique issues faced by countries or regions in the Global South, where regulatory frameworks may need to account for different political, social, and technological contexts.

The present paper aims to diverge from theoretical approaches and aims to propose a “research on research” theme (Merton, 1968). To do this, the study provides a scientometric analysis of global research on the algorithmic influence and bias inherent in social media platforms, with the dual goal of mapping existing scholarship and identifying critical gaps for future agenda. Specifically, the analysis addresses two research questions:

1. RQ1: What are the dominant themes and trends in research on algorithmic influence over the past decade (2013-2023) in social sciences?

2. RQ2: What is the global distribution of research on these topics, with a particular focus on the underrepresentation of scholars from the Global South?
3. RQ3: What are topics that require more consideration, with particular attention to non-Global North issues?

Drawing on data from Scopus and Web of Science, the paper uses bibliometric analysis to track the growth and geographic spread of publications focused on algorithmic governance, influence, and bias. Co-citation and network analysis identify the key scholars, institutions, and collaborations driving the conversation, while topic modeling techniques and clustering (CiteSpace and latent Dirichlet allocation) are used to trace the evolution of themes like algorithmic accountability, algorithmic transparency, and the ethical challenges posed by algorithmic decision-making. Preliminary findings highlight several critical trends: first, the academic conversation is heavily centered around the Global North, particularly Western Europe and North America, however, countries like China are becoming lead players in knowledge production. Second, discussions of algorithmic bias, especially in terms of its ethical implications and its impact on media pluralism, remain underexplored in research from regions most affected by biased content distribution. These preliminaries accentuate as well as suggest that current frameworks proposed in scholarly work may be insufficiently equipped to address the unique needs of media ecosystems in diverse global contexts.

This work contributes to ongoing debates about how best to regulate the social media platforms that increasingly shape public discourse, with a focus on addressing algorithmic bias to ensure fair, equitable media environments for all regions.

Panel: “The Construction of the Future of Platforms”

Chair: Alice Němcová Tejkalová, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Techno-pessimistic and techno-optimistic visions of surveillance and resistance in Europe

Vaia Doudaki, Charles University

Futures of algorithms and choices: Structuration of algorithmic imaginaries and digital platforms in Europe

Miloš Hroch, Charles University

Imaginings of the Future of Conflict and Communication Technologies: A Map of Four Anxiety and Two Hope Driven Scenarios

Nico Carpentier, Charles University & Tallinn University

Panel proposal

This panel, originating from the Horizon 2020 EUMEPLAT project, reflects about the social construction of the future of platforms (and communication technologies). As there are numerous technological assemblages, fields in which they become activated and interact with, processes that take place within them, phenomena that are affiliated with them, and of future imaginings about all of these aspects, three thematic areas were selected-at the expense of many other options. These thematic areas cover issues such as algorithms and choice, surveillance and resistance, and destructive technologies and war.

Techno-pessimistic and techno-optimistic visions of surveillance and resistance in Europe

This study explores peoples' visions of surveillance and resistance to surveillance, enabled through communication and digital platforms in Europe. The research involves future scenario development and analysis, which allows us to sketch out future outlooks concerning surveillance/resistance in Europe, examining how these visions reflect the main assumptions, fears and hopes about the future of societies in Europe. The analysis, which is anchored in surveillance studies, shows how the visions of surveillance and resistance are informed by people's dispositions towards technology, which centre around techno-optimism and techno-pessimism, focusing either on the empowering or liberating forces of technology or on technology's disabling and destructive power. These dispositions instruct ideas about the futures of Europe, seeing Europe as either a regulator or protector of people's privacy and freedoms or as a surveillant apparatus, curtailing peoples' freedom and democratic rights.

Futures of algorithms and choices: Structuration of algorithmic imaginaries and digital platforms in Europe

The increasing impact of algorithmically driven processes on human societies, which can exacerbate political, economic, and cultural asymmetries, raises questions about reducing human agency by constraining platform structures. We draw on the theoretical concept of algorithmic imaginary, which captures users' appropriations and ideas of these processes. In this paper, we focus on the dynamics between agency and structure in algorithmic imaginaries regarding the future of digital media platforms in Europe. The paper takes structuration theory as a theoretical starting point and employs methods of futures studies to analyze how the future is constructed in scenarios developed by a diversity of experts participating in a series of workshops. The future scenarios analysis is mapped around four actors, namely platform users, platform corporations, algorithms and institutions. By considering the role of various actors, particularly institutions, and their interdependencies this paper contributes to more balanced conceptualizations of algorithmic imaginaries, which tend to be centered around users' perspectives.

Imaginings of the Future of Conflict and Communication Technologies: A Map of Four Anxiety and Two Hope Driven Scenarios

This study presents an analysis of the construction of future scenarios in relation to conflict and communication technologies (CTs), on the basis of Delphi+ workshops and essay-writing sessions. Grounded in a theoretical reflection on the various forms of conflict—distinguishing between armed, grey zone and democratic conflict—in combination with theoretical reflections on the role of CTs in conflict, and the future imaginings of (communication) technologies, the analysis discusses six future imaginaries. Four of these future scenarios are negative as in a power take-over, the intensification of both an armed conflict, and of democratic conflict, and the harm inflicted on the environment and society in general. The two positive scenarios are the protective role of supranational organizations and cultural change. Together, these six scenarios form a map of how European experts are concerned about media/technology and military/technology assemblages, and how they place their hope in supranational political institutions and cultural change.

A horde of elephants in the room: Perceived threats to Czech media landscape

Karolina Simkova, Charles University & Jeffrey Wimmer, Augsburg University/Charles University

The relationship between democracy and media is strong, important and contingent. The diversity of media, constituting the Czech media landscape, has a central role in contemporary democracy. Czechia's media landscape is a blend of traditional and digital platforms, with public broadcasters maintaining a strong presence alongside a competitive private sector. The influence of media ownership by powerful business figures with political ties remains a significant issue, affecting public trust and media independence. In Czechia, the level of trust in the news is among the lowest in the world (Eurobarometer 2023).

This study is grounded on a discursive-material framework by Carpentier and Wimmer (2025), which allows us to pay attention to the material(ist) dimensions of democracy and media, without neglecting the discursive dimensions (Carpentier 2017). They identify five threats to the media's democratic roles and the possible implications of these threats for democracy. These threats all have their discursive and material components, although some threats, namely economic sustainability and the colonization of the public sphere, have stronger material components, while the other three – disenchantment and lack of trust, the transformation of political knowledge and the increase of symbolic violence and polarization, have stronger discursive components. Using the case of Czechia, we wanted to confront this model with empirical research (following Doudaki and Filimonov, 2024). In doing so, this study – which is part of Horizon project MeDeMap – triangulates the perceived threats from the perspectives of media regulation, news organizations, and citizens: (1) Four interviews with the representatives of main national media authorities and the Czech press council, (2) twelve interviews with main news media outlets (print, TV, radio, and online) and (3) four group discussions in Prague and Olomouc with media users from four different socio-demographic backgrounds. Besides some specific materialist characteristics like price increases, which worry both the media makers and the audience, the findings point to the more discursive (symbolic) and affective dimensions of the threats.

The following similarities can be identified for all three groups of respondents all of whom perceive major threats but find it difficult to precisely identify their causes, characteristics and implications: (1) Each respondent has the feeling of moving in their own 'bubble'. Collective efforts among the media or civil society to counter the threats are not really sought, as there are no perceived time or material resources for them, and they are no longer expected to be successful. (2) The role of the large online platforms in the threats is seen by everyone as extremely important, even if none of the interviewees felt able to specify this role precisely – even more: the European or even global level of the threat situation is ignored. (3) Especially on the part of the audience, there is not only a great loss of trust in the media but also in social media and political actors. Building on these findings, this study finally discusses possible strategies, such as promoting community or local media in Czechia to break a deadlock felt by all actors.

Accountability and Generative AI in Small Media Markets: A Case Study of Legacy Media in French-Speaking Belgium

Lavinia Rotili, Charlotte Van Breusegem, Antonin Descampe, UCLouvain

The integration of AI and automation in newsrooms (Broussard et al., 2019) raises ethical concerns, as shown by research on AI policies in newsrooms and press councils (Porlezza, 2023). However, few studies have analyzed how media accountability is implemented in the use of generative AI in small media markets. Complementing studies on the perils and opportunities of generative AI (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2024) and ethical guidelines (Becker, 2023), this research investigates (1) how legacy print media in French-speaking Belgium balance the ethical demands of journalism with financial imperatives; (2) how self-regulation systems within newsrooms ensure accountability in the use of generative AI.

Our theoretical framework is based on literature on media accountability, journalism ethics and small media markets. Building on the notion of media accountability (Bertrand, 2000) and its evolution (Kreutler & Fengler, 2024), the study explores which accountability instruments are implemented - notably self-regulation - in six French-speaking print outlets. Research on AI's ethical challenges in journalism (Jones et al., 2023; Dörr & Hollnbuchner, 2017) helps reveal how media accountability is operationalized in ethical guidelines and the journalistic values it reflects. As Simon (2024) notes, the interest in generative AI in newsrooms is also driven by financial considerations tied to profitability and efficiency. In small markets like French-speaking Belgium, strong media concentration creates a duopoly where pluralism may be at risk (Standaert, 2024). Audience and revenue declines affect local newsrooms (Guimerà et al., 2018; Badillo & Bourgeois, 2016). Therefore, tensions between financial constraints and journalism's democratic role may explain certain regulatory responses.

This theoretical background helps interpret professional discourses (Carlson, 2016) on AI-related challenges and how accountability is guaranteed with AI integration. Using an inductive approach, this study is based on a thematic analysis of ethical guidelines from six media outlets in French-speaking Belgium, along with nine semi-structured interviews. Interviews are conducted with journalists, editors responsible for AI tools, and innovation managers. Given the region's media concentration, our sample includes two major groups, IPM and Rossel, each owning a quality paper and at least one regional or popular publication. We also include the financial daily L'Echo (Rossel-Mediafin), which has completed its digital transition, offering a valuable comparison. Our results show that (1) media strategies for accountability vary from top-down to bottom-up approaches across news groups, with journalists' roles in shaping AI accountability differing by newsroom. Additionally, (2) editors show greater concern than managers about automation's impact on journalistic work. Regarding values, (3) while transparency, independence, and autonomy are upheld, they are operationalized differently in the guidelines. Lastly, (4) human and environmental sustainability are not prioritized in ethical discussions. The research also suggests future research avenues, such as exploring AI's ethical implications in audiovisual journalism to expand the comparative framework.