



Ranking of Innovations in Journalism

Development of methods for classifying seminal media-projects.
An international research-cooperation of Medienhaus Wien.

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Report about the project

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Deutscher Projekttitle: Ranking von Innovationen im Journalismus. Entwicklung von Methoden zur Klassifizierung zukunftsweisender Medienprojekte. Eine internationale Forschungskoooperation von Medienhaus Wien

Team:

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1. Introduction

The task of this one-year research project with international cooperation was to develop the theoretical basis for assessing innovation in journalism which could serve as the starting point for large-scale further international comparative studies on the quality of innovation in journalism, taking into account country-specific political and cultural characteristics.

The research questions we asked ourselves in an international research consortium focused on concrete innovation processes and projects:

- What is innovation in journalism?
- What categories can be used to analyse innovation in journalism?
- How can the degree of journalism innovation be determined on the basis of quantitative and qualitative analysis of concrete media (projects)?
- How can an innovation index/innovation ranking for journalistic work be created that is internationally compatible?

The aim was to define innovation in journalism, to develop appropriate categories and multivariate survey methods for studies of (new) journalism concepts and projects in European markets.

The reason and starting point for this research work were the great upheavals of the past two decades in the media ecosystem under the conditions of digitisation and globalisation, which demand completely new, innovative answers and mostly far-reaching changes in their organisational forms, especially from traditional media companies such as newspaper and magazine publishers, in order to be able to implement such innovation processes. A permanent excitement about "shiny new things" (Küng 2017: 21) misjudges and neglects the need for deeper analysis of what benchmarks can be for own, longer-term and sustainable innovation processes. However, such innovations are prerequisites for maintaining journalism, which in democracies is seen as an important fourth power. It is therefore necessary to systematically record and evaluate innovation in journalism.

While international innovation rankings are already common in business, industry and economy, an assessment of the specific quality of innovation in journalism is almost completely lacking throughout Europe. Before our study, there was only one research report in Spain on this subject: researchers of the Universidad Miguel Hernández in Elche, a long-standing cooperation partner of Medienhaus Wien, had developed an Innovation-Ranking for Spanish journalism (García-Avilés et al. 2016; Lara-González et al. 2015).

The Austrian research team initiated a research cooperation for the entire German-speaking area and with the Spanish team, whereby also other European and international research work and innovation experiences were integrated. From the beginning, the international team set the following requirements for the categories to be developed for measuring innovation in journalism:

- the analysis must be guided by theory in order to be able to orientate itself to practice;
- the criteria must be meaningful and transparent;
- the results must be presented in such a way that they are accessible to those interested in the subject, who have a basic understanding of change management and practical experience with innovation processes, but do not necessarily have a relevant research training and understanding of methods.

2. Procedure and Methodology

The research work focused on various areas and was divided into several phases accordingly:

Phase 1

- Preliminary discussions and definition of the research focus journalism and innovation by the national teams at meetings with the Austrian project management in Germany, Switzerland, Spain and Vienna.
- Desk-Study (literature research, evaluation of studies on innovation and journalism – in particular English, German and Spanish specialist literature).
- Workshop of all national research teams at a meeting at the Universidad Miguel Hernández (UMH) in Spain in May 2018 (presentation of the research bases for the European pioneer project of a national innovation ranking, discussion of the criteria).

Phase 2

- Evaluation of national focal points in the development of a catalogue of criteria for innovation processes in media and journalism. Preparation of national working papers (Austria, Germany, Switzerland). Definition of criteria for measuring innovation in journalism.
- pre-tests on the applicability of such innovation criteria to national projects
- Workshop of all national project leaders with the Medienhaus Wien team in Vienna in October 2018 (comparison of national results, discussion of criteria and evaluations, definition of possible external expert groups – "Innovation Peer Review" – for expert evaluations in the countries according to Spanish example).
- Identification of possible international benchmarks/case studies on the basis of research reports and personal expert interviews according to the distribution of country research among the research teams from A, D, CH, E (especially for Scandinavia and Great Britain).

- Creation of a first ranking matrix with areas of journalism innovation and international case-studies.
- Preparation of further international research work to measure innovation in media companies and journalism projects, establishment of the international research team, application for European research funding.

3. What is innovation in journalism?

Before the development of categories and criteria for measuring journalism innovation could begin, it was important to define the common basis: What is innovation in journalism?

A distinction must be made between media innovation and journalism innovation. “The media” encompass creative and entertainment industries (e.g. books, art, film, radio, television, video), social platforms (instant messaging, social media) and technological companies. Thus, media innovation takes a broader approach to analyse all kinds of processes that deal with creation and delivery of content, and content sale to users and advertisers. Storsul & Krumsvik (2013) list ten key factors which influence media innovation: (1) technology, (2) market opportunities and user behaviour, (3) behaviour of competitors, (4) regulation, (5) industry norms, (6) company strategy, (7) leadership and vision, (8) organizational structure, (9) capacity and resources, and (10) culture and creativity.

Journalism innovation is a narrower term, it refers to several aspects of the news media landscape regarding the performance of journalism – from the development of new media platforms to ways of producing media content. Francis & Bessant (2005) identified four ways of targeting innovation: Product, Process, Position and Paradigmatic Innovation. These four innovation viewpoints are not tight categories and they have fuzzy boundaries. Nor are they alternatives: companies can pursue all four at the same time.

According to Wagemans & Witschge (2019) journalism innovation is related to the process of producing, distributing, organizing and commercializing news content in any kind of media (print, broadcast, online). To be economically sustainable, journalistic organizations must generate sustainable innovativeness, so that they connect users to relevant information in a new and meaningful way (Pavlik 2013). Journalists’ professional identity interacts with other organizational factors such as leadership, organizational structure and resource allocation, influencing organizational innovativeness. As John (Pavlik 2013: 183) argues, journalism innovation refers to “the process of taking new approaches to media practices and forms while maintaining a commitment to quality and high ethical standards”.

This overview shows that even though the different studies do not relate to a unifying framework of journalism innovation within existing insights in this field of research, they still

refer to a limited set of factors and they provided a valuable framework to define our research.

Following this evaluation of the literature – and taking into account especially the definitions by O'Sullivan & Dooley (2009: 5) and García Avilés et al. (2018: 27) –, we established the following definition as a working basis: Journalism innovation is *the performance of reactions to changes in news products, processes and services in a large or small, radical or incremental way through the use of creative skills that allow a problem or need to be identified, and to solve it through a solution that results in the introduction of something new that adds value to customers and/or to the news organisation itself.*

4. Categories and first Case Studies

According to this definition, journalism innovation could enhance or harm the quality of journalistic output and have an impact on society by improving or jeopardising the public debate. To analyse these complex interdependencies, the field of journalism innovation requires a combination of normative theories of the media (Christians et al. 2009) and “theoretical and empirical approaches from economic and social innovation theory as well as media-specific frameworks” (Dogruel 2014: 62). The thesis that news media with their innovations are only viable in the long term if they contribute to the quality of journalism (Pavlik 2013) has not yet been sufficiently empirically tested. In our view, journalism innovation should no longer focus only on product and technology-related aspects, but also on news quality and social impact. Following Mumford (2002: 253) social innovations cover “the generation and implementation of new ideas about how people should organise interpersonal activities, or social interactions, to meet one or more common goals”. In short, social innovations are new ideas that enhance society’s capacity to act (Loader & Mercea 2011). Besides their economic value, media innovations mainly impact a society’s, an organisation’s, as well as an individual’s communication capacities.

From this perspective, the study of journalism innovations as societal change becomes a considerably more profound challenge, if we consider journalism innovations to be more than simply changes in the practices and technologies which determine the uses of specific media.

In order to investigate journalism innovation in this complexity and on an international level, we have developed a multivariate methodology and prepared a further research project (see points 5 and 6).

Within the framework of this study, we also have already set basic categories to identify innovation – news production, organisation, distribution and commercialisation – and cited initial international examples as benchmarks. Such examples were also analysed and

compared alongside our tools to qualify the research categories and to synchronise our common understanding of journalism innovation in different media- and journalism-cultures for the intended in-depth research of dozens of examples in five countries.

Table 1 gives an outline about structure of our analysis and some national examples collated to the categories of innovation we included in this preliminary research for methodological refinement:

Table 1. Examples of journalism innovations

	Production	Organisation	Distribution	Commercialisation
Type of innovation	Fact checking content	Interdisciplinary labs	Social media unit	Donations model
<i>Examples</i>	Faktenfinder Tagesschau (Germany)	El Confidencial (Spain) The Guardian (United Kingdom) APA –Medialab (Austria) IMI (Switzerland)	BBC News (United Kingdom) Der Standard (Austria) FUNK ARD and ZDF (Germany)	Correctiv (Germany) Civio (Spain) Dossier (Austria)
Type of innovation	Newsgames	Data department	Chatbots	Branded content
<i>Examples</i>	ARTE (Germany-France) RTVE Lab (Spain)	<i>Tagesspiegel</i> (Germany) Bayerischer Rundfunk (Germany)	Politibot (Spain)	WeblogsSL (Spain)
Type of innovation	Newsletters	Under 30 executive board	WhatsApp Channel	Subscription/membership model
<i>Examples</i>	El Español (Spain) Vlbg. Nachrichten Podcast-NL (Austria) Der Standard WhatsApp-NL (Austria)	<i>Axel Springer</i> (Germany)	Deutsche Welle (Germany)	Republik (Switzerland) Eldiario.es (Spain) Perspective Daily (Germany)

Source: Authors.

5. Multivariate Methodology for Innovation Measurement

For further research and evaluation of innovation in journalism on an international level and its correlation with journalism quality and ethics, we have developed a multi-stage, multivariate procedure. The methodology is primarily qualitative but combines qualitative with quantitative techniques in a triangulation. The plan developed envisages research cooperation between five countries.

Step 1. Qualitative and quantitative index of the 100 most relevant journalism innovations in five countries

We identify the 20 most innovative journalistic initiatives launched in each of the participating countries during the last ten years, all in all 100 initiatives: initiatives with product, process and/or service innovations. The explorative finding process has no restriction in terms of media (newspapers, magazines, broadcasters, digital-only media; in established media organisations as well as digital native media outlets, niche initiatives and start-ups), but all the initiatives must be within commonly agreed definitions of journalism innovation and journalism. In spite of a convergent cross-media understanding of innovation processes main focus can be different according to national specifics, e.g. in Austria on journalism innovation with print-editorial origin, where still more than half of national journalists are working.

In order to ensure professional relevance, two empirical steps for an initial selection of the sample innovative case studies are planned:

- A diverse panel of 20 experts from the profession and academia are interviewed: They are each expected to name and justify 20 journalism innovations of the last ten years that they consider to be the most important.
- Tracking of databases with suitable secondary sources (magazines and websites on media and journalism) for a more in-depth research of the named initiatives and in order to supplement the experts' choices.

The 20 most frequently mentioned initiatives in each country are selected as case studies for the next research steps.

For typifying and measuring the cases, we refer to and adapt the methodology of our Spanish partner (García Avilés et al. 2018). A coding sheet will be applied to all 100 cases, with parameters such as whether its basis is technological or non-technological, the degree of disruption it represents, the area of innovation, its strategic purpose, the problem it solves, and its object.

Step 2. Exploring the case studies: preconditions, quality aims and quality management, influences on the quality of the public debate

The 100 cases will be explored using a qualitative and quantitative methodology based on:

- open-ended qualitative interviews with one professional in each case (20 interviews per country),
- a quantitative online survey of the staff who are involved in the development of the innovation project (in all cases).

The final step of the second research stage is a quantitative online survey of experts to gather their feedback: They should evaluate the self-disclosure of the initiatives, the suggested influence on the quality of the public debate as well as the perceived preconditions.

Step 3. Interdependencies and interplays between preconditions, types of journalism innovation and their impact on the quality of journalism and the democratic society

First, a qualitative comparison on the different regulations, laws, normative principles and market indicators in each country will be carried out. This work will be based on a literature review and analysis of the publicly available documents. Then we will match these preconditions with the results of our previous research stages in order to identify interdependencies and interplays: within the countries as well as between countries with similar media systems and countries having different models.

Step 4. Lessons learned for media policy or the strategy of media organisations and newsrooms

From the analysis of interdependencies and interplays we will draw conclusions that may be helpful for media policy or the strategy of media organisations and newsrooms. According to van Cuilenburg & McQuail (2003), three main values of a new communication policy can be stated and distinguished: *political welfare* based on the freedom of expression and publication, access, diversity, accountability, control, equality and participation; *social welfare* referring to choice, identity, interaction, quality and cohesion; *economic welfare* as composed of competition, development, employment, consumerism and innovation. We anticipate results in all the three areas, although the focus will be on diversity, accountability, participation, quality and innovation. For the strategy of media organisations and newsrooms, we expect conclusions on how innovations can be made possible and implemented in everyday journalistic life.

6. Further research and presentations

The basic principles and findings developed in this project as well as the methodology for measuring innovation in journalism described above serve, as planned, as a theoretical framework and basis for a further research project in an extended international consortium whose application is currently being submitted for a D-A-CH project. Research teams in five

countries – Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Spain and Great Britain – will cooperate in this project. The research partners for Germany, Austria and Switzerland each submit research proposals in their countries to finance their ongoing own research tasks for a first ranking of 20 examples in each country.

Preliminary results of our research will be presented and discussed in scientific and journalistic communities and events such as the annual “Media Innovation Day” in Vienna, in training programmes for digital journalism, as part of the activities of the research network innovamedia.net which brings together scholars and media-practitioners from a dozen countries.

The aim of the ongoing project is to further investigate the connection between the changed functions of journalism and journalism quality. Previous studies had focussed mainly on the manifold economic and technological influences on journalism and they deal with the question of whether and how legacy and novel media organisations are economically viable. Yet, our new research already has showed us, that a correlation with the change in functions and quality of journalism is hardly investigated, especially in international comparison.

With our recent work in a first step we have laid the theoretical frameworks how to approach and evaluate the impact of journalism innovations on the quality of news and, in a broader sense, its influence on the public debate in the democratic society remain. The interplay between innovations and their impact is always driven or hindered by the specific preconditions: the media system, media policy, media organizations, media culture and journalism culture. In this respect, these conditions must be examined and taken into account, what has not happened in relevant research so far. Our research on journalism innovations considers the challenges for an open and transparent democratic society in the contemporary era of “post-factuality” (McNair 2017), “disrupted” public spheres (Bennett & Pfetsch 2018) and “fractured” democracies (Entman & Usher 2018).

If next (international) funding can be acquired, based on 100 selected case studies in Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Spain and United Kingdom, we are going to investigate this impact of innovation in legacy and novel news media on the quality of journalism and its role in the democratic society.

Based on our previous work, incentivized also with support of the Austrian Presseförderung, the international research team will submit an extensive funding-proposal for an ongoing project to the national science-funds of the D-A-CH-region (organisations: DFG, FWF, SNF) in May 2019. An acceptance of funding after positive peer-reviewing would allow large-scale research in the five fore-mentioned countries as described above, starting 2020. For the Austrian media industry, especially for media-houses with traditional print-origin this ranking can give (international) orientation about promising innovation strategies and models for safeguarding quality-journalism.

Irrespective of the final outcome of the international proposal, the Medienhaus Wien team is collecting further materials for case studies about journalism innovation on the national

level – using the structure, tools and recent findings of the specialized international team and its broad experience we had the chance to assemble.

7. Research team of the present project

Project leader

Dr. Andy Kaltenbrunner: Studied political science, from 1981 he worked as journalist, editor and media-developer. Journalism State Prize Winner (BMUK) 1982 and 1985. In the 1990s he worked as head of the politics department of profil, editor-in-chief and founder of new print and digital media of the trend/profil/Orac magazine group.

Parallel since 1990 teaching and researching, among others at the Universities of Vienna and Klagenfurt, the Academy of Journalism in Hamburg, in the guest faculty of the Poynter Institute/USA, since 2011 honorary professor of the Universidad Miguel Hernández in Elche/Spain, since 2016 visiting professor of the Summer School "European Studies" of the University of Vienna. He was the development manager of several education and training curricula, including the Vienna University of Applied Sciences degree programme "Journalism and Media Management" (FH der Wirtschaft) and the executive MA programme "International Media Innovation Management" (Deutsche Universität für Weiterbildung/Steinbeis-Hochschule).

Kaltenbrunner was co-founder in 2005 of Medienhaus Wien. He is co-editor of the study series "Journalisten-Report/Journalism Report". He is also currently leading the basic research project on "Journalism in Transition" at the CMC Institute of the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

Team members

- Prof. Dr. Klaus Meier:

Klaus Meier holds the chair for "Journalism I" at the Catholic University Eichstätt-Ingolstadt (Germany). His research focuses on editorial management, innovation in newsrooms, convergence, online journalism and journalist training in the digital age, as well as numerous publications. In 2017 he received the German Ars Legendi Award for Excellence in Higher Education. From 2009 to 2010, he held the chair for cross-media developments in journalism at the Technical University of Dortmund; from 2001 to 2009, he was professor of journalism at the University of Applied Sciences Darmstadt, where he was also head of the programs "Online Journalism" (2003 to 2005) and "Science Journalism" (2005 to 2007) as well as Dean of Media Studies (2007 to 2008). He has worked as a coach and consultant in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Singapore and Bangkok.

- Prof. Dr. José Garcia-Avilés:

José Garcia-Avilés is Professor of Journalism and Information Theory at the University of Miguel Hernández in Elche (Valencia/Spain) and Director of the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences since 2015. He studied communication and journalism at the University of Navarre (doctorate), BA in Liberal Arts at the University of Dublin. Visiting Professor at the Media Studies Center, Journalism Institute, Columbia University, New York (1992/93). Worked as a journalist and consultant for media companies in the USA and Spain. He participated in several EU-funded journalism research projects and was a member of the Spanish Ministry of Education-funded working group on Digital Convergence in the Media. He leads the project "Ranking de innovación periodística en España" and teaches also at the UMH-Master-programme "Innovación en Periodismo".

- Dr. Colin Porlezza:

Colin Porlezza was Head of the Journalism Innovation Research Team at the University of Zurich until autumn 2018. He is now principal investigator of a team of researchers at City University, London, that has been given financing by Google Digital News Initiative to build a software which combines machine learning and artificial intelligence technologies to help journalists fact-check and verify data and information. Until 2018 he was Senior Researcher and Senior Assistant at the Institute for Communication Science and Media Research at the University of Zurich. Since 2013 he has taught at the Department of Journalism at City University London. He studied and earned his doctorate at the Università della Svizzera italiana in Lugano. Porlezza was a founding member of the European Journalism Observatory (EJO) in 2004 and worked there until 2013.

- Prof. DDr. Matthias Karmasin:

Matthias Karmasin is partner of Medienhaus Wien and director of the Institute for Comparative Media and Communication Research of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and the Alpen Adria University Klagenfurt, since 2011 corresponding member of the philosophical-historical class of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. Professor at the Institute for Media and Communication Studies at the University of Klagenfurt. He has taught at WU Vienna, University of Vermont/Burlington, University of Tampa/Florida and TU Ilmenau/D, among others. Karmasin is chairman of the advisory board for the promotion of journalism, chairman of the advisory board for the award of the scientific promotion prize of the VÖZ and member of the ORF Audience Council. He is the author/editor of more than 30 books, has written more than 100 scientific essays and given more than 150 scientific lectures in Austria and abroad.

- Mag. Renée Lugschitz:

Renée Lugschitz, researcher at Medienhaus Wien, worked for the news magazine profil from 1989, after graduating in history in 1995 as an editor and Cvd at profil extra, from 2000 to 2002 at Der Standard. Since 2003 she has worked as a historian, freelance author and media researcher in projects at the Academy of Sciences and others. In 2012 she was awarded the "Bruno Kreisky Prize for the Political Book" for her book "Spanienkämpferinnen". At Medienhaus Wien she worked on numerous studies, in particular from 2007 to 2017 on "Journalisten Report I-V".

- Mag. Sonja Luef:

Sonja Luef, recently research-coordinator at Medienhaus Wien and junior researcher at the Academy of Sciences, studied Journalism and Communication Science and German Philology at the University of Vienna. From 1999 to 2009 she worked as a journalist for the NÖ Rundschau, then for the NÖ Pressehaus. Since 2011 she has been working at Medienhaus Wien as a research assistant and in the organisation and quality control of research projects, most recently with a focus on newsroom integration, digitisation and local journalism. She is a researcher in the FWF project "Journalism in Transition" at the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

6. Contact and further information

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Medienhaus Wien is a private organisation which focuses towards enhancing professionalism and quality management in the media. Partners Andy Kaltenbrunner, Matthias Karmasin, Alfred J. Noll and Astrid Zimmermann work with the Medienhaus Wien team in the fields of research, development and consulting.

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