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Abstract

Where does innovation in journalism come from, how is it implemented, and what factors drive or hinder its development? Scholars have explored these questions from different perspectives for over two decades. Our research holistically considers the broader factors that influence the development of journalistic innovation at the macro, meso, and micro levels, and whether it is internally or externally driven. In a three-year international research project, we have unpacked innovation with this multidimensional approach, looking at the most important innovations in journalism in Austria, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and the UK. Our study focuses on the mutual interplay between journalists, media organizations, and society. We investigated 100 case studies with 137 guided interviews with senior managers or project leaders. The results show that the focus of supporting and obstructive factors is internal and on the meso level and that many parallels exist between media systems. Internal factors are the intrinsic motivation of individuals, which need the support of open-minded management, allowing a culture of experimentation without economic pressure and assembling interdisciplinary teams. Across countries and independent of the respective media system, three external key drivers of innovation in journalism can be identified: technology, societal change, and change in the digital media universe. The study confirms once again as if through a magnifying glass that journalism is primarily a public service, especially for those innovations that strengthen the role of journalism in a democratic society.

1. Introduction: Innovation in Journalism

Innovation is based on processes that identify the existing problems in an organization and solve them in a successful way, often using technological tools (Chesbrough, 2003). The implementation of innovation in media organizations usually accounts for the interplay of different actors, such as professionals, processes, practices, technologies, products, and achievements (Evans, 2018). Innovation dynamics might shape not only the production of journalistic content, but many other fields like organizational structures, business models, role expectations, and news quality assessments (Bélair-Gagnon & Steinke, 2020).

Despite a general view that innovation is crucial to the survival of news organizations (Hermida & Young, 2021), scholars have found that individual journalists play an important role in the maintenance or transformation of organizational culture and norms (Bunce, 2019), and implementing change in newsrooms is difficult and is often resisted by media workers (Ekdale et al., 2015). Some studies have expressed misgivings about the growing interest in innovation, demanding more reflection on the nature of change and technological adoption (Peters & Carlson, 2019). Areas of concern include the weakening of leadership and journalistic culture (Küng, 2020), the consequences of failed projects (Bossio & Nelson, 2021), a fascination with technology and short-term experimentation without strategic purpose (Posetti, 2018), and perceived challenges to journalistic standards and practices (Ferrucci & Perreault, 2021).

On the other hand, some studies have highlighted positive aspects of the implementation of innovation such as the increase in collaboration among departments, the role of interdisciplinary teams (Koivula et al., 2023; Westlund et al., 2021), or its contribution to achieving news organizations' sustainability and success in terms of audience engagement or financial income (Klaß, 2020). A strategy of innovation both by legacy media companies and digital-only news players even in times of crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic was also noted (García-Avilés et al., 2022; Olsen & Furseth, 2023).

Where does innovation come from, how is it implemented, and what factors drive or hinder its development in media outlets? Scholars have explored these questions from different perspectives for over two decades, through a diverse and often limited framework of analysis (Bélair-Gagnon & Steinke, 2020). Some studies attach a decisive role to technology and the use of tools to implement innovations, often falling into a determinism that downplays the contribution of other non-technological factors such as productive processes, work organization, and the creative and intellectual contributions of individuals (Pavlik, 2021). Our research aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of the sources of innovation in a cross-national comparison. Although news organizations have distinct features in each country, scholars have tended to investigate media companies, audiences, and outputs in their own markets, often neglecting the value of comparative studies (Livingstone, 2012). Large-scale comparative projects have increased in the last decades in the field of media studies, promoted by universities, funding agencies, and professional associations. However, few studies have compared the state of journalism innovation across countries in depth (Job, 2017; Meier et al., 2022).

2. Innovation and the Interplay Between Journalists, News Organizations, and Society

According to the literature, diverse types of companies might have different innovation objectives due to the structural changes in the environment in which they operate (Leiponen & Helfat, 2010). Every innovation brings about positive or negative consequences, which might span the intra-firm level, the sectoral level, and, ultimately, the social sphere. In this regard, Guan et al. (2009) found significant differences in the relevance of innovation objectives according to company status (high-tech versus generic companies), ownership (public versus private firms), innovation resources (having an R&D department or not), and size (small- and medium-sized firms versus large firms and conglomerates).

Macro-level analysis of innovation explores institutional laws and regulations, market factors, and the socio-economical context to examine the impact of innovation policies in specific countries or regions (van Kranenburg, 2017). Medium-level analysis focuses on companies as agents of innovation, including management, organizational factors, strategies, and the diffusion of innovations (Evans, 2018; Nel et al., 2020). Micro-level analysis deals with individual agents and units of innovation such as newsrooms, labs, start-ups, etc. (Bisso-Nunes & Mills, 2022; Borges-Rey, 2020; Hogh-Janovsky & Meier, 2021). It is rare to find studies that combine all three levels of analysis.

From an institutional perspective, innovation processes are seen as the result of a complex interplay of structural factors related to organizational strategies, available resources, as well as news organizations' own professional practices, standards, and culture (Koivula et al., 2023). However, the institutional perspective alone is not sufficient to understand the implementation of innovation processes. Shifting the focus from the institutional to the individual level helps to identify the agents of change in an organization and to explore the different ways in which innovation processes are developed. Individuals known as "innovation champions" (Shea, 2021) also play an important role in driving organizational growth to pull innovation through the system by exercising influence over strategy, resources, and decision-making (Kriz et al., 2013). Thus, innovation champions include professionals who hold managerial positions, rank-and-file staff members, or those involved in entrepreneurial activities within their organizations, and thus they emerge at lower and middle levels to "'push' the innovation upward" (Kriz et al., 2013, p. 123).

Innovation in journalistic practices can add depth to news coverage; improve the processes of capturing, editing, design, and publishing; expand users' access to more complete and diverse information; and enhance the abilities of journalists (Álvarez-Macías, 2022). According to this study, by reconfiguring their practices and attitudes, journalists also changed how they valued the profession, which eventually resulted in an improvement in journalistic quality.

The existence of a wide diversity of innovation processes in different types of media (legacy, digital natives, start-ups, public service media, etc.) suggests that there are structural barriers to innovation that can be avoided or mitigated by individual or corporate actions (Bossio & Nelson, 2021). In this way, the processes of change in the media are influenced by how structural elements are accomplished or renegotiated through professional practices in the newsroom (Nel et al., 2020). As media practices and social practices are inherently entwined in journalism's public service role, innovation in news organizations could also be a source of societal change (Bruns, 2014, p. 19). These innovations might enhance the democratic function of journalism, by promoting a critical monitoring of day-to-day events, launching products that help explain complex issues, stimulating debate in the public arena, and fighting misinformation (Meier et al., 2022).

3. Drivers and Barriers of Innovation in News Organizations

Media innovations emerge not only as a response to the threats from technological disruption, the instability of the market, and industry competition, but also the prominence of social media and interactive audiences are increasingly playing a decisive role in fostering early adoption (Atkin et al., 2015). Innovative processes can arise from the grassroots, i.e., through the involvement of employees who propose and develop new ideas; from the top, through strategies implemented by management; or from both directions, with a cross-cutting initiative from above and below that strengthens the diffusion of innovation and its reach throughout the company (Ekdale et al., 2015).

Typically, diffusion of innovations theory has been applied to the spread of a particular technology or practice rather than the interplay of a cluster of innovations and it suggests technological change faces the fewest hurdles, as journalists recognize the need to adapt their practices to newer capabilities (García-Avilés, 2020). Many factors, including the availability of information concerning technology, adopters' past experiences, management support, the input of change agents, and internal communication strategies, contribute to the adoption decisions in news organizations which might help advance or hinder innovation processes.

Drivers of innovation encompass both internal and external indicators that influence how innovations are implemented in different areas of the organization. Internal drivers refer to aspects such as available human, financial, and technological resources, work processes, company practices, knowledge and talent, and professional culture (Meroño-Cerdan & López-Nicolas, 2013). External drivers are related to the regulatory framework, the characteristics of the market, the economic situation, and audiences' consumption habits (Ferrucci & Perreault, 2021). Process innovation objectives include goals such as reduction of labor costs, use of tools, and manufacturing flexibility, while product innovation objectives may relate to improving product quality, expanding product assortment, entering new markets, or increasing market share (Leiponen & Helfat, 2010).

In addition, innovation processes can be implemented internally, within the inner structure of an organization, or externally, by promoting collaboration with different organizations and creating innovation networks that might generate open innovation so that valuable ideas can come from outside the company (Chesbrough, 2003). This approach places both external ideas and paths to market on the same level of importance as that reserved for internal ideas and paths.

Research should holistically consider the broader factors that influence the development of journalistic innovation at the macro, meso, and micro levels. To date, few studies have been devoted to understanding the drivers for the adoption of organizational innovations within news organizations (Atkin et al., 2015; Klaß, 2020; Meier, 2007). Furthermore, there is a pressing need for comparative research that sheds light on innovation in diverse contexts and markets. This work attempts to fill these gaps. In the three-year international research Journalism Innovation in Democratic Societies: Index, Impact and Prerequisites in International Comparison (JoIn-DemoS), we unpack innovation with a holistic approach, not only looking at digital novelty. Earlier, we identified the most important innovations in journalism in Austria, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and the UK (Meier et al., 2022). Now, this study focuses on the mutual interplay of these innovations between journalists, media organizations, and ultimately, society. It also attempts to identify the

drivers and barriers of journalistic innovations in five countries with similar (Austria, Germany, and Switzerland) and different media systems (Spain and the UK). According to Hallin and Mancini (2004), media in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland (DACH countries) correspond to a "democratic corporatist model" which is characterized by a high degree of system stability, with strong public service media and legacy media houses under comparatively less pressure to initiate and unleash innovation processes. Both in the UK and Spain which belong to the North Atlantic "liberal model" and the "bipolarized pluralist model," media innovated earlier than in the DACH countries to meet the challenges of the digital era. The research questions are:

RQ1: What are the supportive factors of innovations in journalism?

RQ2: What are the obstructive factors of innovations in journalism?

RQ3: Are there patterns and commonalities in countries with different and/or similar media systems?

4. Method

To address these questions, we investigated 100 case studies of the most important innovations in the five selected countries. As already mentioned, we first identified the 20 most important innovations in journalism in Austria, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and the UK in the decade 2010–2020. This initial empirical step, whose methodology is explained in detail by Meier et al. (2022), serves as the starting point for the second study presented here. In each country, journalistic media organizations have been selected for the respective 20 innovations to shed light on the questions of how innovations are implemented and realised in journalism and which drivers support and impend the implementation. For this purpose, we applied a multiple case-study approach involving best practice examples which have played a formative and influential role in the respective field of innovation in the different countries. For example, in Germany, for the innovation area of social media, the *tagesschau* was chosen because it was one of the first journalistic formats to experiment in this field and is today considered to be one of the most successful German players with a journalistic background in social media. Furthermore, media organizations could be selected for more than one innovation area if they had been identified as pioneers in different areas. ORF in Austria, for example, was not only chosen as a case for social media but also for data journalism. Table 1 gives an overview of the top 20 innovation areas in the five countries and the case studies selected for each.

In each of the selected cases, we interviewed people directly involved in the implementation process of the innovation. Overall, interviews were conducted with 137 persons (Austria: 23 persons interviewed; Germany: 35; Spain: 32; Switzerland: 28; UK: 19), with one to three interviews per innovation/case. The interviews were conducted between November 2021 and September 2022, and they lasted one hour on average. In most cases, due to the pandemic, digital conference tools (Zoom, Teams, Google Meet) were used. To compare the interviews, a common category system was designed for all countries. Among other aspects, the interview guideline asked for the strategic goals of the innovation, supportive and obstructive framework conditions, and the impact on society. The interviews were then transcribed and examined with content analysis methods, developing a uniform coding sheet that was used as a template and adopted by all countries. Following Mayring's (2022, pp. 96–103) strategy of structuring within the framework of qualitative content analysis, the central variables (aims of innovation, supportive and obstructive factors, and

societal impact) were deductively derived from the guideline. This strategy of structuring includes developing categories before analyzing the data material to then systematically record all those text elements that can be subsumed and clustered under those categories (Mayring, 2022, p. 96) both at a national level to identify country-specific characteristics and at an international level for comparative purposes. The analysis software MAXQDA and Microsoft Excel were used for the coding process. To be able to compare the data across countries, the codes were subsequently transferred into a uniform Excel data mask. In this way, the researchers were able to compare the data and identify similarities and differences, for example, relative to the aims of the innovation. In each country team, the most important findings from the interviews were summarized and enriched with general information about the selected media organization.

In summary, the complex methodological approach, especially the inductive formation of innovation categories (or the supportive and obstructive factors in this article) based on the experts' explanations, was an essential condition to operationalize the concept of innovation, to cluster all the elements, and to tackle the RQs.

Table 1. Top 20 innovations in journalism in the five countries Austria, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and the UK between 2010–2020 and the selected case studies for the respective innovation areas.

Top 20 innovation and selected cases				
Austria	Germany	Spain	Switzerland	UK
Collaborative/ investigative: *Dossier*	Collaborative/ investigative: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*	Data journalism: *Datadista*	Journalism start-ups: *Bajour*	Data journalism: *Our World in Data*
Mobile journalism: *Der Standard*	Engagement (data): Ippen Verlag	Storytelling: RTVE	Citizen participation: *20 Minuten*	Storytelling: BBC
Data journalism: *ORF*	Social media: *tagesschau*	Fact-checking: *Maldita.es*	New organizational teams: *Südostschweiz*	Engagement (data): *Financial Times*
Paywalls/paid content: *Kleine Zeitung*	Citizen participation: *Westfalenpost*	Social media: *Sphera Sports*	Data journalism: *NZZ Visuals Team*	Collaborative/ investigative: *Bellingcat*
Diversity: *Biber academy*	Data journalism: BR Data	Mobile journalism: *Diari Ara*	Targeting: *RSI*	Fact-checking: *Fullfact*
Audio/podcast: *Erklär mir die Welt*	Storytelling: *Der SPIEGEL*	Membership models: *elDiario.es*	Storytelling: *Reflekt*	Local journalism: *The Bureau Local*
Journalism start-ups: *Die Tagespresse*	Constructive journalism: *Perspective Daily*	Audio/podcast: *Podium Podcast*	Automation: Software LENA (Keystone SDA)	Remote work: TBD
Tools discourse quality: *Der Standard*	Audio/podcast: *Die Zeit*	Newsletter: *Kloshletter*	Social media: *SRF Tagesschau*	Citizen participation: *Bristol Cable*
Personal/digital meetings: *Der Standard*	Membership models: *Steady*	Remote work: *Heraldo de Aragón*	Engagement (data): *Ringier*	Diversity: *Black Ballad*
New organizational teams: *Kleine Zeitung*	Diversity: *Auf Klo*	Paywalls/paid content: *El Mundo*	Local journalism: *Tsüri*	Automation: *Urbs Media*

Table 1. (Cont.) Top 20 innovations in journalism in the five countries Austria, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and the UK between 2010–2020 and the selected case studies for the respective innovation areas.

Top 20 innovation and selected cases				
Austria	Germany	Spain	Switzerland	UK
Automation: *APA*	Fact-checking: *BR Faktenfuchs*	Para-journalism: *Mr Underdog*	Collaborative/ investigative: *Tamedia*	Mobile journalism: *The Times*
Social media: *Zeit im Bild* (ORF)	Paywalls/paid content: *BILD*	Engagement (data): *El Español*	Para-journalism: Tamara Wernli (individual company)	Constructive journalism: *Tortoise*
Citizen participation: *Regionauten*	New organizational teams: *Mainpost*	Automation: *Newtral*	Quality management: *Radio Central/Sunshine*	Paywalls/paid content: *Financial Times*
Newsletter: *Falter.morgen*	Science journalism: Science Media Center	Foundation funding: *porCausa*	Remote work: *We.Publish*	Niche media: *On Our Radar*
News-only TV channel: Puls24	Mobile journalism: *ntv*	Collaborative/ investigative: *Civio*	Diversity: *SRF*	Foundation funding: *The Conversation*
Engagement (data): *Ländlepunkte*	Automation: *Rheinische Post*	Diversity: *Píkara Magazine*	Audio/podcast: Science Podcast *Durchblick* (Ringier)	Media labs: BBC
Video by print media: *krone.tv*	Remote work: VRM	Media labs: *El Confidencial*	Paywalls/paid content: *Tamedia*	Other financing models: *Axate*
Media labs: *APA Media Lab*	Crowdfunding: *Correctiv*	Science journalism: *Materia*	Newsletter: *Heidi.news*	Membership models: *The Economist*
Entrepreneurial journalism: *diesubstanz.at*	Other financing models: *Relevanzreporter*	New organizational teams: *El País*	Niche media: *Babanews*	New organizational teams: The Bureau of Investigative Journalism
Crowdfunding: *Dossier*	Corporate Culture: SWR X-Lab	Branded content: Vocento	Crowdfunding: *Hauptstadt*	Social media: BBC

Source: Authors' work based on Meier et al. (2022).

5. Results

To present the results, we first structure the answers to the first two research questions by country. We then highlight similarities and differences according to the three levels elaborated in theory: micro, meso, and macro. In addition, the results show that it is useful to distinguish between internal and external factors. Due to the limited length of this article, we focus on the most essential factors.

5.1. Supportive and Obstructive Factors in Austria

The 25 interviewees of the Austrian case studies consider internal factors at the company level as the most relevant for innovation. An open-minded management that is receptive to experimentation and allows trial-and-error as well as a motivated team were mentioned most frequently. Moreover, according to some

interviewees from large media houses, it is an advantage to have the backing and the name of such a company, for example when applying for licenses. The breaking up of old structures and the cooperation of different departments and hierarchies are also emphasized. Thus, the head of the reader/user market at the *Kleine Zeitung* highlights the role of eye-to-eye communication and the inclusion of young colleagues. "You suddenly saw the energy and innovative power that is in the company," he explains. Also, the micro level, which means personal relationships within the news organization, should not be underestimated: Individuals who persistently drive the project forward and/or protect it internally due to a certain standing may play a crucial role.

The obstructive framework conditions show the counter image. Thus, apart from the usual complaints about a lack of money and personnel, it is above all cumbersome apparatuses, rigid structures, and colleagues who are suspicious of anything new that are counted among the—again mainly internal—factors that are hostile to innovation. However, this emphasis on internal factors at the company level needs some contextualization. Most of the Austrian case studies involve, in line with the interviews in the first project study (Meier et al., 2022), legacy media. It is striking, although plausible, that it is primarily these legacy media that place internal factors in the foreground and external factors are mentioned less frequently. The tendency is reversed in the case of smaller, independent start-ups without a long-standing apparatus and persistent structures. Here, external factors from the macro perspective, such as zeitgeist ("that society is ready for it," as the head of the *Biber* academy puts it) or subsidies, are more often mentioned as positive framework conditions and, for example, the intertwining of politics and media as an obstacle.

However, sometimes the differences are only in the details: Interviewees of both legacy media and start-ups consider looking to others and learning from best practices to be a conducive factor for successful innovation. Thus, big media companies seek and pay for external consulting, and less wealthy young initiatives rely on imitation.

5.2. Supportive and Obstructive Factors in Germany

For Germany, it is striking that the 35 interviewees particularly emphasize factors at the internal organizational level as drivers of innovations: The interviewees define an open-minded leader and support from management, great decision-making freedoms, an open failure culture, the principle of learning by doing to gain experience, and trust of colleagues as factors that support a positive culture of innovation. In addition, the formation of new organizational forms through new positions and departments linked to the innovation is seen as an important booster. The integration of new external employees with different competencies and perspectives is mentioned several times in this context as conducive to the development of innovations. At the micro level, the interviewees highlight a necessary intrinsic motivation of the employees involved, who drive the innovation forward even against the resistance of colleagues. Factors outside the organization itself also support innovation and relate especially to collaboration: The interviewees named the exchange within the industry with colleagues working in the same innovation areas as well as the collaboration with external partners outside journalism, who have expertise primarily in the technical area, as key drivers of innovation.

Technological progress is also seen as a push factor by some interviewees. More often, however, it is specified as a challenge because the dynamics of technical change are happening faster than the German media industry

is reacting to. In this context, lack of technical equipment and lack of technical know-how in the organizations are mentioned repeatedly as the main barriers to innovation growth. It is also striking that the interviewees refer more often to the macro level in the case of obstructive conditions, in contrast to supportive conditions: Lack of political support and the fossilized structures in the media system, which hardly allow new financing models, are viewed as obstacles to innovation in the German media sector. Furthermore, the relationship with the audience is seen as a hindering rather than a supporting factor: The interviewees argue that a lot of persuasion is needed to convince a skeptical audience of the benefits of new innovations. Mistrust from colleagues is also perceived as an obstructive factor at the organizational level, as well as the rigid existing structures and long or missing coordination processes. Finally, it is a question of resources in economically difficult times: High costs, large amounts of time and staff needed, and a non-guaranteed success obstruct the willingness to develop innovations.

5.3. Supportive and Obstructive Factors in Spain

The analysis of the 32 interviews in the Spanish case studies reveals some patterns concerning the drivers of innovation. Most interviewees agree that the staff's commitment to trying new formulas and products is crucial for the emergence of innovation. Some highlight the input of grassroots innovation and personal initiative. In several instances, the development of innovations by a member of the news organization, regardless of their function or seniority, is essential. According to the head of innovation at *El Español*: "Innovation is quite a cross-cutting job. People are willing to try new things and take the initiative." At the fact-checking organization *Newtral*, they also emphasize the horizontality of the process: "*Newtral* is very flat. By this, I mean that a trainee who has just come in can talk directly to the CEO. Innovations might arise very much from the bottom up."

Other external supportive conditions are underscored. At least three interviewees mention the importance of open innovations, where valuable ideas come from other industry environments, such as advertising or the videogame sector. Five interviewees refer to audience demands for content diversity, especially in areas related to gender equality and migration, or products adapted to new formats and channels. Besides, practitioners give importance to the role of managers, especially in terms of providing time and financial resources for the staff to implement innovations.

Regarding the obstructive conditions, almost half of the interviewees argue that barriers to innovation stem from journalism's own internal culture and pre-existing structures and routines of the print industry. "It is very difficult to introduce a change of flow in most newsrooms. The culture of old journalism is still prominent," says the head of AI at *Newtral*. A member of *El Confidencial*'s media lab explicitly mentions the stiffness of some legacy media editors, who are not open to listening to new ideas or taking risks.

The shortage of resources and the lack of time to focus on new projects are considered the greatest barriers to innovation. A manager at *Civio*, a start-up specialized in investigative data journalism, describes the difficulties due to the country's own framework conditions:

> Survival promotes innovation in the Spanish market. You must be very innovative to survive as a news organization in Spain. And what holds it back is the lack of money. I think there is a big shortage of resources, not only in innovation but in the media in general.

5.4. Supportive and Obstructive Factors in Switzerland

The results of the 20 interviews in Switzerland indicate that predominantly internal, organizational aspects positively influence the implementation of innovations. Nearly half of all case studies emphasize the importance of experimental freedom which consists of aspects like the permission to test and fail, move forward in small increments, work in interdisciplinary teams and not have the pressure to be commercially profitable as quickly as possible. This freedom of experimentation is the most frequently mentioned aspect among the supporting criteria and is particularly pronounced in legacy media where often more resources are available than in start-ups. For such experimental phases, the organizational institutionalization of innovation is considered useful, for example in the form of dedicated innovation teams, commissioning boards, or data and technology units. Cooperation with all hierarchical levels in the organization as well as an exchange with other industry companies are also noted as inspiring. Furthermore, both journalistic start-ups and legacy media agree that an agile, solution-oriented, and open-minded management that leads teams in a competence-oriented manner is essential. Such innovation management can be understood as a form of change management, requiring a strategy, accompanying change communication.

However, for various start-ups, external influences like third-party funds through crowdfunding or media foundations, available infrastructure like social media channels or free content management systems, as well as journalism awards and journalism training at educational institutions play an important role. In the case of the obstructive factors, the micro level is significantly more involved than in the case of the supporting conditions, and external factors on a macro level represent a more significant influence in addition to internal hurdles. The dominant aspect represents internal animosities or mistrust of employees, especially with legacy media. Older journalists and print journalists, who intervene particularly against new, automated processes, are highlighted. An in-house culture inertia when it comes to change management, missing institutionalization of innovation, insufficient collaboration between organizational department teams, as well as an elaborate hierarchical structure and an inadequate culture of mistakes and learning in the journalism industry are named as further stumbling blocks.

The numerous external influencing factors include developments in society, such as digitization, shifts in values through public discourse, and the change in culture among the public, additionally reinforced by the pandemic. The datafication of the media industry makes numerous data-driven innovations difficult due to restrictive Swiss data protection laws and a prevailing national narrative that the collection of user data is "evil." An increased anti-media attitude among the population as well as professionalized, legal resistance to journalistic reporting are further problem areas.

5.5. Supportive and Obstructive Factors in the UK

In the case of the UK, the 20 interviews show that the main supportive conditions for the realization of innovations can be found both at the meso as well as the macro level. Overall, the most supportive conditions can be identified at the organizational level in terms of the availability of financial resources, well-orchestrated team management, and the ability to come up with new and innovative ideas. Among these elements, money plays a dominant role given that it represents the make-it-or-break-it variable when it comes to the realization of innovations: It allows innovations to be realized and implemented, it can help to get the right people on board, and it can contribute to further developing already existing infrastructures. Besides the organizational

level, media structures in the form of contextual factors are as important as money. In relation to these specific external factors, the case studies show that outlets need to be able to adapt quickly to changing contexts (e.g., the pandemic) and to what competitors—in particular the large publishing houses—are coming up with. Sometimes, supportive conditions also include the ability to implement new approaches and concepts that are uncommon in journalism and the news, such as a culture of sharing.

There is a certain parallelism between supportive and obstructive factors when it comes to the capability of realizing innovative projects. Money is not only one of the main supportive conditions (if you manage to get enough funding), but it is also the main obstructive factor, especially if you are unable to secure enough financial resources. Money issues are particularly frequent in the case of journalism start-ups: If people do not know a new brand, and this is often the case for entrepreneurial journalism, it is hard to convince funders, investors, and even the public at large. Another serious obstructive factor (equally mentioned as central to the implementation of innovations) is related to newsroom culture: Journalists are often rooted in a traditional professional mindset, which is why they can feel threatened by innovation such as, for example, automation. Sometimes, the issue can also be located at the executive level, as senior management is unable to perceive the usefulness of novelties. Or company policies about experimentation can be off-putting. Moreover, cultural aspects are often intertwined with organizational issues: Sometimes organizational structures and decision-making processes obstruct tinkering and the implementation of agile structures intended for innovative thinking. As a result, some news outlets show a certain inertia connected to innovation.

5.6. Comparison

When comparing countries and levels, three core results can be noted (Table 2): First, it appears at first glance that the focus of the supporting and the obstructive factors are in the internal area and on the meso level. Second, there are many parallels between the media systems. Third, supporting and obstructive factors are often formulated in a contrary complementary way: If certain support is missing, this absence is noted as an obstacle.

Table 2. Comparison of countries, levels, and internal and external factors.

	Internal factors	External factors
Micro level		
Supportive	AUT: Personal relationships within the news organization	
	GER: Intrinsic motivation of the employees	
	ESP: Staff's commitment (grassroots innovation and personal initiative)	
Obstructive	AUT: Suspicious colleagues	
	GER: Mistrust from colleagues	
	ESP: Stiffness of some legacy media editors	
	SUI: Animosities or mistrust of employees; missing institutionalization of innovation	

Table 2. (Cont.) Comparison of countries, levels, and internal and external factors.

	Internal factors	External factors
Meso level		
Supportive	AUT: Open-minded management and committed teams (experimentation, trial and error, breaking up of old structures)	AUT: Looking at others, learning from best practices
	GER: Open-minded leadership, support from management, decision-making freedoms, open failure culture; formation of new organizational forms (new departments, new external employees with different competencies and perspectives)	GER: Collaboration within the industry and expertise outside of journalism
	ESP: Managers' role in providing time and financial resources	ESP: Ideas come from other industry environments
	SUI: Experimental freedom (trial and error, small increments, interdisciplinary teams, no pressure to be commercially profitable as quickly as possible); dedicated innovation teams, innovation funds, and innovation platforms; agile, solution-oriented, and open-minded management	SUI: Exchange with other industry companies
	UK: Availability of financial resources, well-orchestrated team management, getting the right people on board and further developing infrastructures, implementing new concepts (e.g., culture of sharing)	
Obstructive	AUT: Lack of resources (money, personnel), persistent structures	
	GER: Lack of technical equipment and lack of technical know-how; long or missing coordination processes; high costs, large amount of time, and staff needed	
	ESP: Internal culture, pre-existing structures and routines of the print industry, shortage of resources and the lack of time	
	UK: Start-ups' money issues (hard to convince funders, investors, and even the public at large), newsroom culture (traditional professional mindset), organizational structures and decision-making processes obstruct tinkering and the implementation of agile structures	

Table 2. (Cont.) Comparison of countries, levels, and internal and external factors.

	Internal factors	External factors
Macro level		
Supportive	AUT: Well-known brand	AUT: Start-ups' zeitgeist (that society is ready for it) and subsidies
	SUI: Start-ups' third-party funds (crowdfunding, foundations)	SUI: Zeitgeist, developments in society as a whole; for start-ups, journalism awards and journalism training
	ESP: Audience demands for content diversity	
Obstructive	GER: Relationship with (often skeptical) audience	AUT: Start-ups' intertwining of politics and media
		GER: Dynamics of technical change, lack of political support, and fossilized structures in the media system
		SUI: Insufficient culture of mistakes and learning in the journalism industry, restrictive Swiss data protection laws, increased anti-media attitude among the population, start-ups' insufficient options for third-party funding, generalist nature of many journalism degree programs (without focus on start-ups)

Note: AUT = Austria, GER = Germany, ESP = Spain, and SUI = Switzerland.

As external factors, looking, learning, and networking with others play a central role both at the micro level of individuals and at the meso level of the organization. Competitiveness through concurrence is hardly mentioned, which is probably due to the lack of resources: In the media industry, one simply cannot afford to engage in fierce competition for innovation. Opportunities therefore lie in collaboration and imitation. Innovations in journalism rarely bring competitive advantages, for example, as in other industries in the form of patents or economic leadership. Journalistic added value through innovation rarely brings economic added value, but sometimes costs more money than it brings in. Thus, social and political support, especially subsidies, but also funding by foundations, is a central desideratum at the macro level, especially in the DACH countries. It is noteworthy that in Austria and Switzerland, developments in society are seen as essential supportive conditions: the right idea at the right time.

As internal factors, the intrinsically motivated drivers of innovation are confronted at the micro level with distrustful colleagues who throw a spanner in the works to prevent innovation. At the meso level, they need the support of open-minded management, which allows and implements a culture of experimentation and freedom without economic pressure and assembles interdisciplinary teams. Lack of internal funding is seen as one of the main problems in all countries.

6. Conclusion: Drivers and Concepts of Innovation at the Intersection Between Journalism and Society

The international comparison of factors supporting and obstructing innovation in journalism has shown the mutual interplay between journalists, media organizations, and society: Despite different media systems, many

common drivers of innovation in journalism exist on the micro, meso, and macro levels. Although the individual levels do help to systematize the impact of innovations on journalism, they cannot be considered as being completely separate, because our results have shown that each level can influence the others in some way. This is in line with García-Avilés' (2021) literature review on media innovation; the author has so far identified scant cross-level research but ideally recommends a combination of all three levels for analyzing its impact. Our findings can serve as a starting point for closing this gap.

Scholars found that innovation implementation usually relies on the interplay of different actors (Bossio & Nelson, 2021; Evans, 2018); however, our results indicate that this interplay is deeper than it appears and is not only relevant in news production but also in areas such as commercialization, organization, and audience engagement. Our research matches previous studies (Ekdale et al., 2015; Peters & Carlson, 2019) that underline the role of professional culture in the development of innovations. The rigidity of newsroom structures, the proliferation of distrust among colleagues and managers, and the difficulty of changing inherited work processes are common obstacles to innovation in this study. We found that some shortcomings can also be drivers; therefore, personal relationships should not be underestimated, since a large part of innovation input lies in the human capital of companies (Koivula et al., 2023; Westlund et al., 2021).

It is also evident that the state of development of the respective media organization has an impact on the level of supporting and obstructive factors across countries: While the success of innovations in established media organizations is often determined by internal factors at the micro and meso levels, journalistic start-ups describe external factors at the macro level as the sticking point. The different innovation dynamics between fee-financed public service media and market-financed commercial media organizations also reveal themselves across national borders and are particularly evident in Germany, the UK, and Switzerland. Public media organizations therefore mainly highlight the possibility of failure and the importance of open-minded management, while commercial organizations very often emphasize non-existent resources (staff, time, money), in line with Bunce's (2019) findings.

The study confirms once again that journalism is primarily a public service and not as marketable as other commercial products, especially for those innovations that strengthen the role of journalism in a democratic society: innovations that bring depth and variety instead of accelerating the rapid speed of news and pushing clickbait; innovations that focus on a relationship with the audience and strengthen audience engagement instead of selling the audience to the advertisers; and innovations that emphasize original reporting instead of forcing the often criticized churnalism (van Leuven, 2019). Of course, more and more people are willing to pay for this kind of quality journalism triggered by intelligent paywalls which tie citizens to the journalistic brand but exclude citizens who do not want to or cannot afford the costs and thus limit an understanding of democracy that relies on the participation of many.

The sample countries studied are assigned to different media systems according to Hallin and Mancini (2004; see Section 3). However, it turns out that the external specifics of the national media systems do not seem to have a significant influence on the degree of innovation of the respective media industry. Country differences in media policy, as in the rigidity of data protection, or systemic differences in the importance of start-up culture are relevant but do not have a primary impact. In some details however, not all innovations are understood in journalism practice in the same way or applied homogeneously in each news market:

For example, fact-checking in Spain is an organizational innovation after the launching of completely new fact-checking initiatives, while in the DACH countries it is considered both a production and process innovation in legacy media organizations.

All in all, it has become clear that across countries and independent of the respective media system, three external key drivers of innovations in journalism can be identified: *technology*, *societal change*, and *change in the digital media universe*. Of course, these drivers overlap and cannot be analyzed separately, but they have spurred a professional response in newsrooms and subsequently a number of innovations in journalism. Here are some examples: AI/automation, data journalism, social media, and audio/podcasts are driven primarily by technological change and the resulting changes in media usage behavior; journalism picks up on these technologies coming from outside its system and integrates them into production processes. Diversity as an area of innovation is a response to the social zeitgeist: Journalism, for example, is making newsrooms more diverse or using gender-sensitive language. Fact-checking departments are a reaction of innovative journalism to the rapid spread of fakes and manipulation attempts in the digital sphere.

Comparative studies allow us to highlight the enduring relevance of inherited national differences in how journalism evolves (Levy & Nielsen, 2010). Besides, as Livingstone (2012, p. 421) argues, "It is no longer plausible to study one phenomenon in one country without asking, at a minimum, whether it is common across the globe or distinctive to that country or part of the world." Thus, the comparative analysis of factors that explicitly and implicitly shape innovation could contribute to a better understanding of the complex evolution of journalism and serve as a starting point for new theoretical frameworks and learnings.

Our main findings reveal fundamental patterns in democratic societies in Europe, independent of the specifics of the respective media systems. But our study is also limited: First, the results are based on interviews with professionals who were directly involved in the innovations and who therefore were more focused on their immediate internal production conditions than on regulatory or macroeconomic framework conditions. Hence, further research should focus even more on the changing media policy frameworks, nationally and across the EU. Second, despite the high number of interviews overall, there is still a lack of a broader view, because for the full picture, especially on the meso and macro levels, there is a need for further information, for example from other stakeholders inside and outside the industry. Finally, some difficulties were encountered in adapting the interview questionnaires for each country, especially when dealing with the case studies. Not all innovations were understood in the same way, as mentioned, for example, in relation to fact-checking. However, commonalities were established to explicitly examine the barriers and drivers of innovation, and this qualitative information could be analyzed homogeneously through a single spreadsheet by all researchers.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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