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DIGITAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION

Public Service Media in the Age of Social Networks

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Abstract. Digital transformation and the expansion of social networks have essentially modified journalistic practice, facing challenges concerning its essential operation and boundaries. The traditional business models have collapsed, young people's media consumption habits have changed, and more non-professional journalists participate in news production. Social media platforms have an immense effect on journalistic work, especially journalists' professional and ethical standards. Perhaps traditional public service media are the ones that stand the farthest away from participatory practices and platform logic, characterizing today's media environment. What are the public media services' opportunities to fulfil their commitment of authentically and objectively informing citizens, including young people, about public affairs? This study aims to picture the boundary work of journalism currently underway by reviewing the phenomena emerging on the border of journalism and social media. Additionally, the study attempts to answer what a successful social media strategy looks like in public service media by presenting the social media activities of "tagesschau", the newsmagazine of ARD, a German public-service channel.

Keywords: journalism, public service media, social media, digitalization, Instagram, tagesschau

1. Journalism in the Age of Social Media

The determining tendencies of the current media environment significantly impact the whole economy of news production and consumption and journalism as a profession indirectly. Due to the expanding processes of digitalization and convergence (Jenkins, 2006), the popularity of social media has increased. Platformization affects every aspect of life (van Dijck–Poell-de Waal, 2018). News consumption is increasingly occurring online, often through social media, embedded

in everyday media consumption. At the same time, media consumption is also becoming unbound from time and space and increasingly adapting to user demands with the spread of portable smart devices.

In the late 1990s, when the impact of emerging digital technologies on journalism started to become perceptible, experts greeted this process. They projected implications like broadening interactivity, customizability, multimediality, and the potential to build new communities with optimistic expectations (Perreault–Ferrucci, 2020). Also, this initial optimistic approach expected the broadening technological convergence to eliminate the factors restricting the news industry. This way, the journalistic and everyday forms of news distribution, such as conversation, rumour, or private letters, will converge (Burgess–Hurcombe, 2019: 360). However, professionals also had to face the dangers and risks of this process soon, e.g. digitalization has radically transformed the relationship between journalists and their audiences and sources. It has transformed all the areas of journalistic work, from news gathering to editing and producing news and publication (Burgess–Hurcombe, 2019; Vázquez-Herrero, Direito-Rebollal–López-García, 2019; Nah–Chung, 2020). The conventional media genres, the traditional storytelling methods and news narratives are disappearing, and they are perceived differently (Carlson–Lewis, 2015; Boesman–Costera Meijer, 2018). New technological solutions supplement the old journalistic toolbox (Pavlik–Bridges, 2013), seriously affecting media organizations and their business models. Changes have begun in newsroom structures, new positions have emerged (such as social media manager or comment moderator), and new types of legal and ethical issues have arisen.

Accordingly, technological development is threatening both the external and the internal boundaries of journalism as a profession and an activity, and many researchers interpret the resulting transformation as boundary work or even boundary struggle (Carlson–Lewis, 2015; Boesman–Costera Meijer, 2018). In academic discourse, new concepts have been established to describe the changes consisting of various elements and to name the new developments, focusing on some aspects of the transformation by narrowing the concept of journalism with various attributes. This study will review the complex relation network of journalism and social media and the opportunities of public service media in the present situation with the help of these terms below.

The frequently mentioned concept of *digital journalism* comprehends intentions and solutions emerging these days concerning convergent digital media technology for journalistic purposes. According to Burgess and Hurcombe (2019: 360), digital journalism includes "those practices of news gathering, reporting, textual production and ancillary communication that reflect, respond to, and shape the social, cultural and economic logics of the constantly changing digital media environment". Indisputably, the change of media technology itself is a significant starting point of the digitalization of journalism. That is why a technology-focused definition seems obvious, but this approach does not seem to be well-established

anymore because digitalization is widely spread. A technology-based explanation cannot be valid because digital journalism "has been everybody's business in the sense that it is of interest to a range of social sciences, humanities and even sciences and technology disciplines" (Burgess–Hurcombe, 2019: 359), and not even the self-definition of journalists is based on this. According to Perreault and Ferrucci (2020), the attribute "digital" has essentially three meanings: "utilising technology to tell stories", "disseminating information in the quickest way possible", and focusing "on the audience in a market-driven manner" (Perreault–Ferrucci, 2020: 1305). However, there are divergences between digital and legacy journalism concerning the technological devices (laptops, tablets, smartphones, digital voice and video recorders, drones, virtual reality), the communication channels (email, blogs, self-publishing tools), and the activities (data-driven digital storytelling, data visualization, digital video, and new digital ways of news gathering, interviewing, and documenting). Still, those concerned do not look at the application of new technologies as the main criteria of digital journalism (Perreault–Ferrucci, 2020). They consider technology instead as a simple, trivial resource of professional work.

The digital media environment also dramatically impacts the production process of journalistic content, both in terms of language (in the broad sense) and genres. Salaverría (2019) emphasizes the role of hypertext, multimedia and transmedia, and interactivity among the linguistic features of digital journalism, which he states are the determining features of online news production, otherwise present in other types of media as well. As the term social news suggests, social media play an essential role in transforming traditional genres by their characteristic style and means of expression. According to Burgess and Hurcombe (2019), this distinctive genre of digital journalism is distinguished "by a fluency in the vernacular conventions and pop-culture sensibilities of social media: that is, the acronyms, the memetic imagery, and the affective use of GIFs (frequently depicting celebrities) are common in platform cultures" (Burgess–Hurcombe, 2019: 363).

News production is getting closer to popular culture, but it is not the only implication of its interconnectedness with social media. The young audiences available on social media platforms, who are especially receptive to advertising, branding, and online marketing technologies, represent an increased value for digital journalism (Perreault–Ferrucci, 2020: 1307). Therefore, the news economy is also exposed to the effects of commercialization related to the spread of content marketing and participatory marketing (Nyírő–Csordás–Horváth, 2012) or the activities of social influencers, for instance. Specific fields of journalism, such as "fashion and lifestyle journalism", which is considered soft news, have become twilight zones where amateur bloggers and vloggers increasingly supplement professional journalists. As is conclusive from Maares and Hanusch (2018), there is no significant difference among Austrian and German micro-bloggers between amateur bloggers and professional journalists. Their value systems, goals, and

perception of roles in the twilight zone mentioned above undergoes a so-called hybridization, as "traditional journalists are moving more toward the activities of micro-bloggers" (Maares–Hanusch 2018: 13).

2. Social Media as a Field of Journalism?

The involvement of amateur users in media content production was one of the determining antecedents to social media sites becoming fields of journalism. Users become determining actors of the information and media economy due to the texts, photos, and videos they make and share on their social media sites or because they are commenting, sharing, transmitting, evaluating, and curating activities. In the mid-2000s, the fathers of the participatory culture theory (Jenkins, 2006; Bruns, 2008) and their followers (e.g. Burgess–Green, 2009) presented the struggles of everyday users for their rights in participatory processes as efforts to democratize and diversify media economy as a whole. A decade later, it was clear that voluntary content producers were doing unpaid work for the owners of great media platforms, and the power asymmetry between producers and users was increasing in opposition to the excessive expectations. Furthermore, the specific internal algorithmic logic of the new media platforms has a severe impact on the media system and other social systems (van Dijck–Poell, 2013). At the same time, participatory logic has expanded to several areas of science and culture (participatory theatre, participatory action research, participatory museum). The common feature in the efforts emerging in these diverse areas is to empower or amplify marginalized, low-status, disadvantaged social groups, include them in social actions, and present their viewpoints, opinions, and knowledge. Those who stand for the participatory approach aim to eliminate power asymmetries and inequalities they consider undue and harmful and indirectly reshape public awareness.

One of the areas affected by participatory culture is journalism. The concept of *participatory journalism* refers to different forms of reader input at all stages of news production (Singer et al., 2011). In recent years, contemporary forms of audience contribution, such as citizen media, citizen blogs, citizen stories, collective interviews, comments, content hierarchy, forums, journalist blogs, polls, and social networking, have become increasingly integrated into the news production processes of online newspapers and websites (Singer et al., 2011: 17). Although the process is somewhat contentious (Carlson–Lewis, 2015; Jurrat, 2011; Salaverría, 2019), it can be interpreted as a consequence of journalists' effort "to accommodate input from the audience within the spaces that media institutions once tightly controlled" (Singer et al. 2011: 18). The term *amateur journalism* highlights that people without professional education and out of the

scope of institutional arrangements can also enter the area of the journalistic profession, which otherwise would require corresponding educational background and institutional system. From a professional point of view, anxieties arise from the lack of knowledge of ethical and professional standards and taking responsibility concerning the activity of amateur journalists (Jurrat, 2011). Content produced by amateur journalists may also deceive the audience, as members of the audience who are used to high-quality professional journalistic content may not be aware that the factual basis, objectivity, credibility, and fairness is not guaranteed by professional standards and institutional assurances associated with professional journalism.

The concept of *citizen journalism* – linked to the tradition of critical social theory – synthesises the participation of citizens interested and engaged in public affairs in the practice of journalism. Nah and Chung (2020) consider civil or citizen journalism (regarded as a type of participatory journalism) as the recent development of a long process and primarily approach it from the perspective of the internal processes of journalism. The authors' starting point was that professional journalists within legacy media consider citizens as passive audiences and rarely treated them as news sources. They dated the trend shift to the 1980s, when journalists started to pay increasing attention to the audience already seen as news sources and made efforts to get citizens to speak in news stories, so they increasingly became active participators in news production by producing their own news stories or by active collaboration with journalists. From this perspective, citizen journalism also has a significant role in the development of civil society (Nah–Chung, 2020: xiv) by urging citizens to deliver their opinion concerning community issues and public affairs.

Another related concept, *citizen witnessing*, reflects on situations in which everyday people produce news stories as witnesses to important or dramatic occasions or events of great interest (Stuart, 2013). Allan describes accidental journalism "as a type of first-person reportage in which ordinary individuals temporarily adopt the role of a journalist in order to participate in newsmaking, often spontaneously during a time of crisis, accident, tragedy or disaster when they happen to be present on the scene" (Allan, 2013: 9). In our days, the most likely contributions of those accidental, amateur journalists are video footages, smartphone photographs shared via social networking sites, or even social media posts.

The twilight zone between digital journalism and online activism broadens by the increasing participation of everyday users in digital news production and distribution. The concept of protest journalism refers to the social media publication of photos taken and videos made by participants about various protests, riots, and clashes. For media research, this type of digital content production raises several problems, e.g. archiving. Although media content (such as Snapchat

footages) with pre-programmed disappearance, synchronous coverages made by witnesses and delivered widely are meaningful media representations of socially significant events, they cannot be archived due to their ephemeral nature (Vázquez-Herrero–Direito-Rebollal–López-García, 2019), which is a great loss for collective memory. Consequently, media researchers face severe methodological and ethical challenges considering precariousness, privacy, and platform affordances (Richardson, 2020).

According to Atton and Hamilton (2008), the term *alternative journalism* is an ageless and ever-changing effort or practice with the specific goal of responding critically to the predominant concepts of journalism. In the frameworks of network society, this includes the journalistic-natured activities of amateur users outside the institutional system of the professional news industry and independent from the journalistic profession, using the potentials of network media. In the late 2000s, several major media theories (e.g. Burns, 2008; Castells, 2009; Jenkins, 2006) included the idea that social sites may become the effective alternative to mainstream media, as Poell and Borra point out (2011). Political activists often join such alternative communication platforms because creating their communication channels and their public sphere has always been a challenge for them, and social sites seemed convenient for these purposes. So, the concept of alternative journalism "includes the media of protest groups, dissidents, and fringe political organisations" and "can be seen as an attempt to counterbalance the dynamic of mainstream reporting" (Poell–Borra, 2011: 698).

Analysing the amateur news content posted on the social media sites Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr by civil participants in the protests around the 2010 G20 Summit in Toronto, Poell and Borra (2011) concluded that political activists primarily use this opportunity of the alternative report. Although these organizations urged protestors to "broadcast breaking news" on their social media sites (Poell–Borra, 2011: 696), as the authors had indicated, the mobilization of everyday users was less successful, and "the social media did not facilitate the crowd-sourcing of alternative reporting" (Poell–Borra, 2011: 695). According to the research, the attractiveness of the public-political-flavoured alternative media is somewhat restricted. It serves as an attractive alternative for communication only for the groups that emerged due to specific issues or situations, but it remains only a mere possibility for the mass news production and distribution by everyday people. In addition to the terms discussed above, the following terms are often used to describe hybrid forms of digital media journalism: *grassroots journalism*, *open-source journalism*, *hyperlocal journalism*, *networked journalism*, and *social media journalism*. The latter highlights one of the most recent trends in the transformation of journalism.

Social media journalism is justified mainly because social media has recently become the primary location for accessing news. According to Reuters Institute

Digital News Report 2020, "across all countries, just over a quarter (28%) prefer to start their news journeys with a website or app. Those aged 18–24 (so-called Generation Z) have an even weaker connection with websites and apps and are more than twice as likely to prefer to access news via social media. Across age groups, use of Instagram for news has doubled since 2018 and looks likely to overtake Twitter over the next year" (Newman et al., 2020: 11).

As social media platforms have become effective newsreels, audience members get to the news through them using mobile devices, and news consumption is part of their everyday media consumption. This process has several dangerous consequences, most notably that "journalists no longer control access to information, while greater reliance on social media and other platforms give people access to a wider range of sources and alternative 'facts', some of which are at odds with official advice, misleading, or simply false" (Newman et al., 2020: 10). The determinant role of social media in news consumption has also changed the way users inform themselves, as their awareness is accidental, incidental, and unbalanced due to the news they are exposed to, which are programmed by the algorithms of social media platforms; meanwhile, users themselves feel well-informed (Vázquez-Herrero–Direito-Rebollal–López-García, 2019).

News media are also forced to be present on these platforms to reach their readers, and this also brings journalists to use social media actively (including self-branding techniques that are typical here) (Djerf-Pierre–Ghersetti–Hedman, 2016), and they are urged to comply with the popular social media genres and to adapt themselves to those. Thus, it is becoming increasingly common to find that native social media formats are being transformed into journalistic micro-formats such as in the case of Instagram Story or TikTok videos. The journalistic adaptation of these social media genres with a short lifespan brings unprecedented ephemerality to the field of professional news production as well (Vázquez-Herrero–Direito-Rebollal–López-García, 2019).

In news consumption, and subsequently in news production, "social media logic" (van Dijck–Poell, 2013) takes the place of "mass media logic" (Vázquez-Herrero–Direito-Rebollal–López-García 2019: 2), validating its standards, strategies, mechanisms, and economies. Social media has recently become the scene of the cultural production of news as well. As the use of social sites is getting integrated into the daily work routine of journalists, the technical features have a normalizing effect on journalism, both on its professional standards and everyday activities (Hermida–Mellado, 2020). As users increasingly prefer partially or fully visual content within social media consumption, this trend is spilling over to the field of journalism, and a similar tendency is also apparent in the case of podcasts (Newman et al., 2020: 28, 30).

Reaching younger generations is a challenge for news media because of this generation's general apolitical nature and media consumption habits. In the media

consumption patterns of generation Z and younger people, television and especially printed media are neglected, and the popularity of social sites is outstanding even among online sources. Although Facebook and YouTube still lead the ranking of social networks based on the number of users according to the July 2021 figures (2,853 billion and 2,291 billion users), Instagram, fit for sharing pictures and short videos, is in fourth place with 1,386 billion users.[1] Whereas 12% of Facebook users under the age of 25 are women and 17% men, and in the age-group of 25–34 women are 12% and men 18.8%, 29.9% of Instagram users are aged between 18 and 24, and a further 32.1% are aged between 25 and 34. This means that 60% of the Instagram users are young adults compared to the 24% and 26% of Facebook. TikTok, another trendy application among people even younger globally, currently has 732 million users, from which exactly a quarter is between 10 and 19, and a further 44% are aged between 20 and 29 and 30 and 39 (each share half approximately). It seems to be clear from the figures above that the social applications Instagram and TikTok have a higher rate of young people and young adults among their users than Facebook, even if the latter has a more significant number of users than the upstarting apps. As the recent June 2021 Statista research points out, "younger adults were more likely to use social media as a way to access news, as 34 per cent of consumers aged under 35 used social media for news, compared to 26 per cent of all adults".[2] Consequently, news media can reach primarily the younger generations through the social sites they prefer.

3. Public Service Media in the Age of Social Media

The place and role of public service media have become dubious and uncertain (Lowe et al., 2017) within the framework of the network society (Castells, 2005). The original goal was to inform, educate, and entertain citizens, incorporated in the comprehensive efforts to maximize political authority and emancipate citizens. Public service media carried out this work with government support within the national framework in a traditional top-down monologue. However, the bottom-up logic of the global network media system favours neither state involvement nor the operation within a national framework.

In recent years, critiques concerning the operation of the large social networks that have played a crucial role in the emergence of the network society and the global companies owning them target the drawbacks of "participatory culture" discussed above, the exploitation of users (Fuchs, 2014), the monitoring of them, the misuse of the data collected this way, and the positioning of new media platforms outside of social standards and rules (van Dijck–Poell–de Waal, 2018;

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1   https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/.
2   https://www.statista.com/statistics/281915/main-news-sources-millennials/.

Lowe et al., 2017). According to critics, "the heart of the networked society rationale is essentially economic, rather than democratic, cultural or social" (Lowe et al., 2017: 23). Accordingly, these platforms are not engaged with the public interest, the common good, and public affairs – that is to say, traditional public service values. At the same time, their attractiveness is increased by, among other things, the customizability and individual nature of the services and content they offer, the publication of user content, and the providing of on-demand access instead of linear content service – all features that are unknown in traditional public service media. For all these reasons, public service media are being increasingly marginalized these days. The question is sharp: are they able to address citizens, especially young people, in a convergent, digital media environment, amid the boundary struggle of journalism and the competitions with start-ups and platform giants.

2.1. Tagesschau – Public Service in Digital Media

All news media are trying to react to the increasing role of social sites in news consumption in one way or another: they are experimenting with various solutions without any tested or proven strategy. In the following, this study will present an innovative model of one of Europe's powerful public service news brands, the German *tagesschau*. The data and information partly come from the analysis of the content published on different digital accounts of the channel and partly from an interview with Patrick Weinhold,[3] Leading Editor and Head of Social Media at ARD-Aktuell.

Tagesschau is a news brand of ARD, a broadcaster established by the joint organization of Germany's regional public service broadcasters. ARD, founded in 1950 as a television network, has broadcasted its first daily news feature on the television channel Das Erste (Channel One) from Hamburg since 1952. After the launch, the live news programme was initially broadcasted only once a day, and from the 1960s onwards, there were morning and evening editions. Since 1992, news magazines have been shown in the morning (MOMA – Morgenmagazin) and in the evening (tagesthemen), short news every half hour between 5.30 and 8.30 in the morning and finally a night news show (nachtmagazin). However, the

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3   The interview and research of reference sources took place within the frameworks of the research and curriculum development project NEWSREEL2 – *New Teaching Fields for the Next Generation of J*ournalists (2020-1-HU01-KA203-078824) supported by ERASMUS+. The project consortium consists of media and journalism scholars from the University of Pécs (Hungary), Masaryk University (Brno, Czech Republic), the Erich Brost Institute for International Journalism, an affiliate institute of TU Dortmund University (Germany), the ISCTE – University Institute of Lisbon (Portugal), and the University of Bucharest (Romania). The project has a solitary "journalism practice" partner – host writer, an international network based in Berlin. https://newsreel.pte.hu/.

channel is also actively present in the digital sphere: the digital news channel tagesschau24[4] broadcasts live news content 0–24, and their news materials are available on their website,[5] mobile application,[6] and independent third-party platforms. Three hundred employees contribute to content production today. According to the organization's blog,[7] "The tagesschau is the oldest and most-watched news program on German television", and Patrick Weinhold adds that it is also an essential part of Germany's cultural heritage in a sense. According to Statista.com, the television news brand with a determining role on the entire German media market had an average of 11.78 million viewers in 2020.[8]

However, the television news programme's audience is quite old: the average age of tagesschau late-night news show viewers is currently 64 years. It is difficult under these circumstances to fulfil the public service tasks of informing the entire German public (including young people) about public affairs and politics. The absence of certain citizens from news consumption groups means a severe challenge to public service media since being adequately informed is a prerequisite for making responsible individual decisions. Ten years ago, the management of tagesschau started to look for solutions to reach young people through the increasingly popular digital media and social networks. At this time, in 2012, Patrick Weinhold joined tagesschau, and he is now managing the work of the social media department as editor-in-chief. Parallel to the establishment of the social media department, resources for communication in the digital sphere have continuously increased; journalists are now devoting their digital media competence and knowledge to digital and television content at a rate of 50-50%, which was 20-80% ten years ago (20% for digital sphere and 80% for television).

The social media department, currently consisting of 16 journalists, has implemented the digital transformation of the TV brand to a 360-degree brand in the past ten years.[9] In the early 2010s, when the audience's news consumption expectations were remarkably changing, while the popularity of social sites increased, tagesschau developed its digital strategy. The aim was to create news products that young people would happily consume. While other actors of the German media market have created new, trendy, and youthful brands independent of their original brands, especially to reach the young audiences, tagesschau's staff

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4   "tagesschau24 is the digital news channel of the ARD. It features the news content of the tagesschau. Currently the programme airs from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. every day. The broadcast is produced by the news division ARD-aktuell in Hamburg. tagesschau24 offers its viewers key stories from politics, business, arts, and sports. In interviews throughout the day, our correspondents as well as experts from different fields analyse current events." https://blog.tagesschau.de/uber-uns/about-us-en/.

5   https://www.tagesschau.de/.

6   https://www.tagesschau.de/app/.

7   https://blog.tagesschau.de/uber-uns/about-us-en/.

8   https://www.statista.com/statistics/410911/tagesschau-tv-reach-in-germany/.

9   The main goal of the 360-degree branding is to reach audience members in consistent but multiple ways.

did not change the core brand but kept it and started to build up a social media news production based on it. Ultimately, this turned out to be a good and crucial decision. The essence of their strategy is to produce news for various digital channels and platforms, always in line with the specificities of the specific platform.

They have accounts and publish news content on Facebook,[10] YouTube,[11] Twitter,[12] Instagram,[13] and TikTok.[14] The German news brands have the most subscribers on these social networks, and their website has the fifth most users among similar German news pages. This success is partly because, as early adopters, they were the first among the German news media to have created these accounts and started publishing content there. Instagram proved to be similarly successful in reaching young people, and they are now pioneers on the increasingly popular TikTok platform, where tagesschau was the first news media to create an account.[15]

Regarding the pitfalls and difficulties of the project, Patrick Weinhold pointed out that it was not a simple task to present reliable, credible, and factual news on platforms that were initially designed for other purposes (video-sharing social site, social network, image-sharing social application, microblog) and used algorithms that control them to favour popular content. Producing news for different platforms requires strong differentiation; Instagram, e.g., focuses on storytelling and visual aesthetics that define its platform, a static application based on posting images. Meanwhile, TikTok, used for video-sharing by the youngest users, addresses topics of interest to this young age group.

If we wish to explore the components and reasons behind their successful presence in the digital sphere, it is worth highlighting the efforts and resources devoted to producing social media news across the entire organization. One of the primary conditions of efficient digital content production is to provide the human and financial resources needed: tagesschau – as seen above – established a separate social media department about ten years ago, headed by a young manager with a background in the field, Patrick Weinhold. Besides journalists, the social

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10 https://www.facebook.com/tagesschau – more than 2 million people follow the account, where fresh news feeds are published several times an hour, directing readers to the website.

11 https://www.youtube.com/user/tagesschau – they have had a channel since 2006 and currently have one million subscribers. The news programme broadcasted at 8 pm is uploaded to this platform daily.

12 https://twitter.com/tagesschau – they have joined in 2007 and currently have about three million followers. Here, adapting to the features of the platform, short visual news are published several times an hour, which direct the reader to the website.

13 https://www.instagram.com/tagesschau/ – 3.3 million followers read their news content here.

14 https://www.tiktok.com/@tagesschau – with 915,000 followers.

15 Weinhold pointed out in the interview that their appearance on TikTok was met uncomprehendingly within the industry, but he and his team realized that the number of young people, also from Germany, is increasing on this platform, and content is produced for them by various influencers. However, this content is often wrong, inaccurate, and misleading. Influencers, uneducated and amateur in news service, cannot explain and interpret the news to young people, which can be dangerous. Therefore, the tagesschau staff decided to create their news channel there also.

media team also includes staff with expertise in visual content production: graphic designers, graphic editors, and motion designers. Within the social media department, a so-called "innovation laboratory" supports the work of the staff covering daily content production. The task of the staff here is to monitor new formats and trends emerging in social media and create new, experimenting prototypes based on them. The most regularly used formats or social media news genres are selected from these. Constant development and innovation in genres and formats is an integral part of adapting to the characteristics of platforms. Another prerequisite of the up-to-date operation is the constant monitoring of the social media environment, gathering and analysing data about media usage and consumption habits, and making strategic decisions. Data are partly sourced by the tagesschau staff from the platforms themselves (using the insight function) and partly in collaboration with the media researchers at the University of Hamburg, thus successfully drawing on resources from the academic sphere.

Another critical component of successful news content production is related to the *formats* mentioned above. The popularity of news content produced for different social media platforms depends not only on the formal compatibility with the platform's characteristics (e.g. the use of the corresponding aspect ratio or a typical storytelling style) but also on the use of more or less constant, identifiable formats. The staff of the so-called innovation laboratory have created a manual with a detailed description of the currently used formats, and they are updating it continuously. The manual also supports them with explaining step by step how to use properly, for example, the image editor Photoshop when creating a specific format. The application of such ready-made editing formats facilitates the work of journalists, as while selecting from the various formats, they can decide which the most appropriate one is to produce the news for a given audience on a given platform. The use of temporarily permanent formats is also helpful from the audience's point of view, as it provides a kind of uniformity and consistency and offers a reference point for the interpretation of content. Moreover, the most appropriate editing techniques result in quality and homogeneous content, essential for professional news production and social sites.

2.2. Tagesschau on Instagram

Since the audio-visual news production and storytelling regarding text and image resource combination is the most complex on Instagram and since it is also the most popular among young adults, this part of the study will outline tagesschau's innovative activities in social media journalism through Instagram.

The bio of the tagesschau news brand's Instagram account has the following introductory text: *Nachrichten, Erklärungen und besondere Momente aus aller Welt. Das ist die tagesschau auf Instagram.* 'News, explanations, and special moments

from all over the world. This is the Tagesschau on Instagram.' The account with 3.3 million followers currently has 13,000 posts and publishes 5–8 posts and several stories daily. The creators use almost all the native functionalities of Instagram: one-page posts and posts with multiple elements, short videos published as posts, longer videos published in IGTV, stories with quizzes, stickers, emoticons and infographics, drawings and animated visual elements. A longer textual explanation usually supplements the published visual content, and hashtags are typical for the brand (#tagesschau) and related topics. The Instagram account corresponds with the visual image of the tagesschau brand regarding its colours and style.

By examining the news content published in tagesschau's Instagram account, several components of their storytelling and news production strategy can be identified. First of all, using the formats mentioned above. "Text on photo" format is one of the permanent editing patterns Patrick Weinhold mentioned. It is a square photograph with little textual information on it, while the emphasis is on the photo itself, which effectively transmits the content of the news (*figures 1–2*). These photos also suit the distinctive visual culture of Instagram regarding their aesthetics and clean style (Manovich, 2007).

Figure 1. *1.5 Degrees* **Figure 2.** *Summer returns*

The genre "it happens at the same time" is an example of video formats produced in the split-screen mode in a 1:1 square format. It offers an excellent opportunity to present contrasts, oppositions, and contradictions by applying visual storytelling resources. This way, the same event can be presented from different perspectives, showing simultaneous actions and situations.
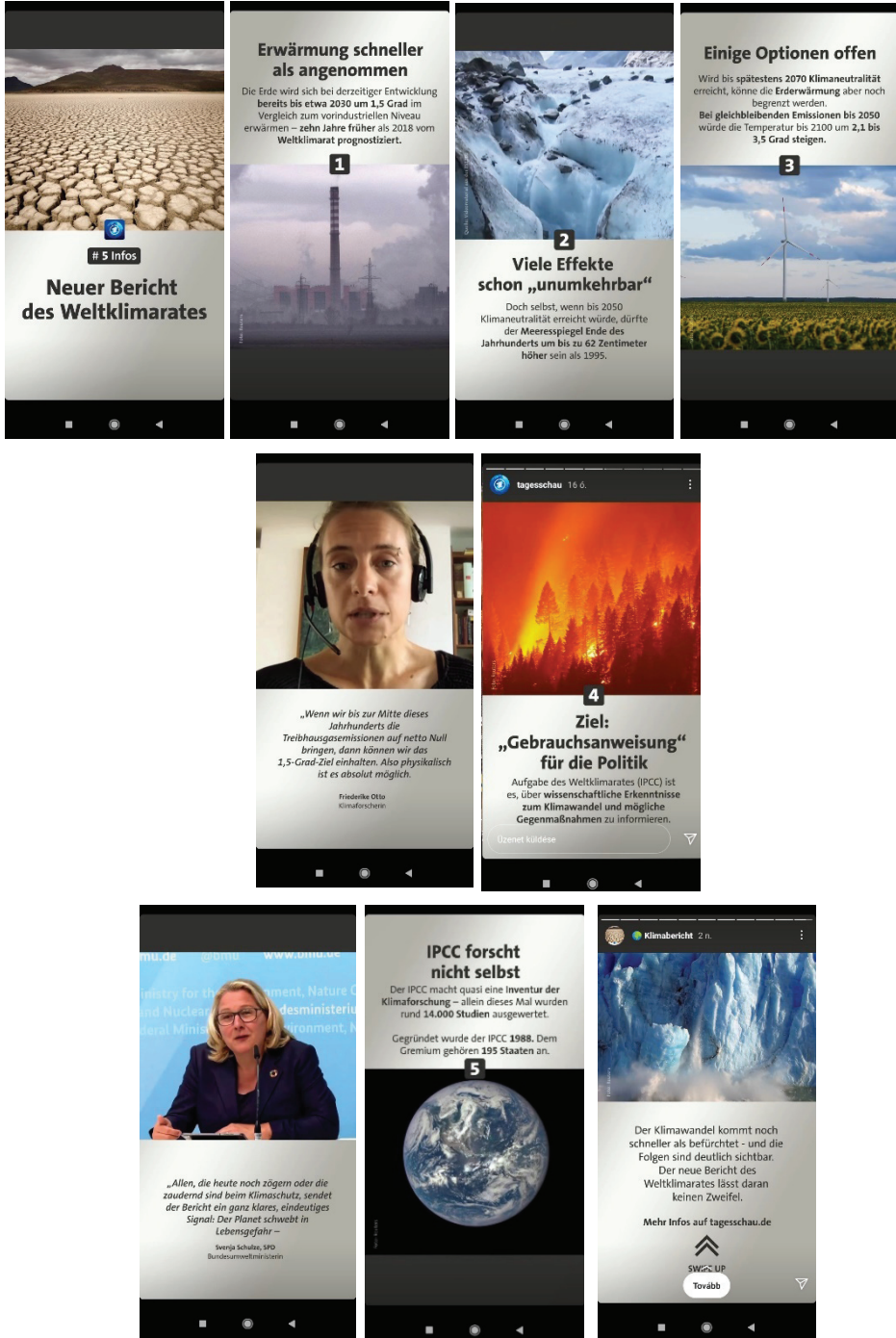
Figure 3. *Climate change*

Also, the multi-element, *serial nature*, in general, is essential in the various methods of storytelling based on the use of photos, drawings, or infographics, i.e. static images. This serial nature comes in posts created by stitching together multiple images or Instagram Stories made up of multiple elements. Both types can be complemented by animated elements, video or audio materials. In the case of such content, the sequencing and logical arrangement of the images stitched together provide the organizing principle of the narrative, as can be seen in the series of images posted as an Instagram Story (*Figure 3*). Creators help identify narrative logic by numbering and typographic tools (font size, bolding, layout). Image editing provides the dynamics of storytelling based on variation, built on playing with similarity (in perspective or framing) and variation (alternating the placement of elements on the screen), still and moving images and animated elements.

Journalists tend to use various tools to structure information or highlight elements they want to emphasize to present a topic or news as effectively as possible and in a way that is compatible with the platform and the media consumption habits. On Instagram as a visual platform, infographics and other graphic solutions are also practical tools for this kind of interpretative structuring, as illustrated by the following examples (*figures 4–6*).
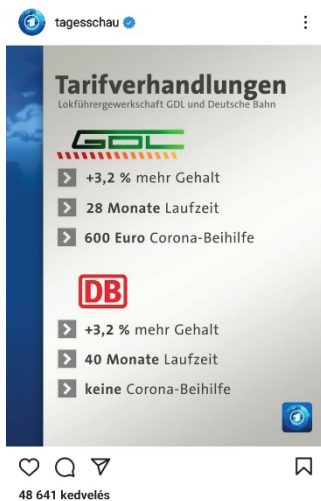

Figure 4.
Train drivers' union

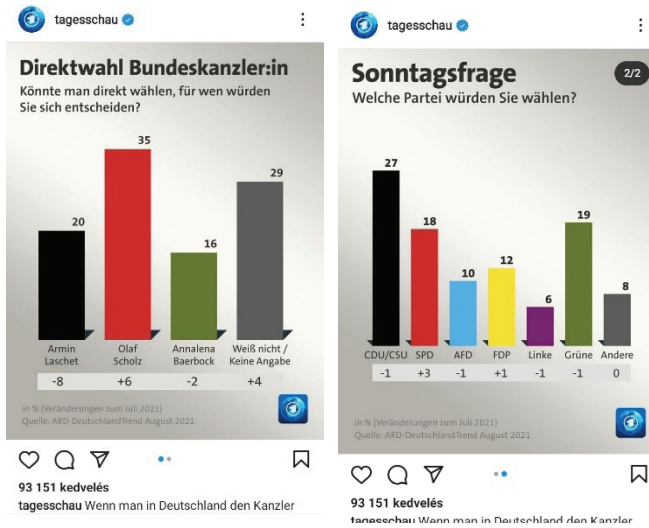**Figure 5.** *Strikes on the railways*

Figure 6. *Direct election*

In the practice of tagesschau, video journalists adding journalistic interpretative narratives to the information are a peculiar hybrid of the "talking heads" typical for traditional television culture, the figures of amateur video bloggers, and the influencers in social media. This solution brings back the function of the expert gatekeeper, who is otherwise missing from the amateur news content in social media, to maintain the light and casual style of the communication of social media influencers (*Figure 7*). It is worth noting that the journalists' age is in line with the audience's age on Instagram. Moreover, Instagram Stories use the same formats when citizens interpret or comment on a topic (*Figure 8*).
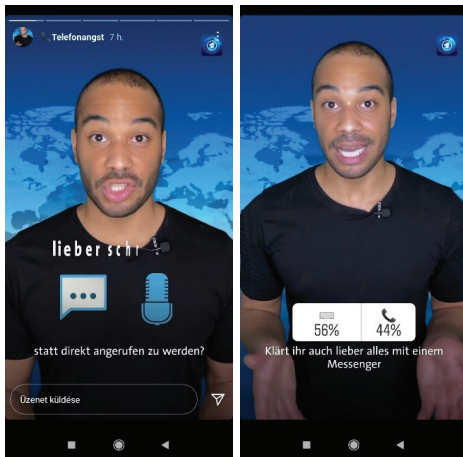
Figure 7. *Anxiety about phoning*   **Figure 8.** *Krippendorf and Schneider*
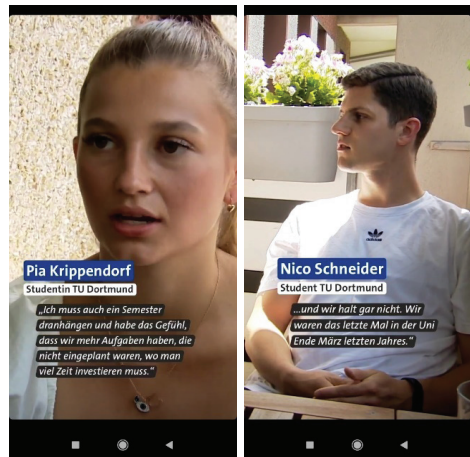
Educating, informing, and sometimes sensitizing the audience on issues of public interest is a crucial task of public service media. In this regard, there are various solutions and formats in the repertoire of tagesschau. Multi-element posts on a complex issue often feature various experts, giving space to professional, scientific, or public knowledge (*Figure 9*).

Figure 9. *Kirb, Kramp-Karrenbauer, Kaim*

Figure 10. *Rainbow flag*

Using the Instagram Story feature, it is also possible to publish various – in this case, educational – quizzes, which allow the users to answer questions and then check if their answer was correct. Since the quiz is interactive, it can further engage readers and increase their loyalty to the news media (*Figure 10*).

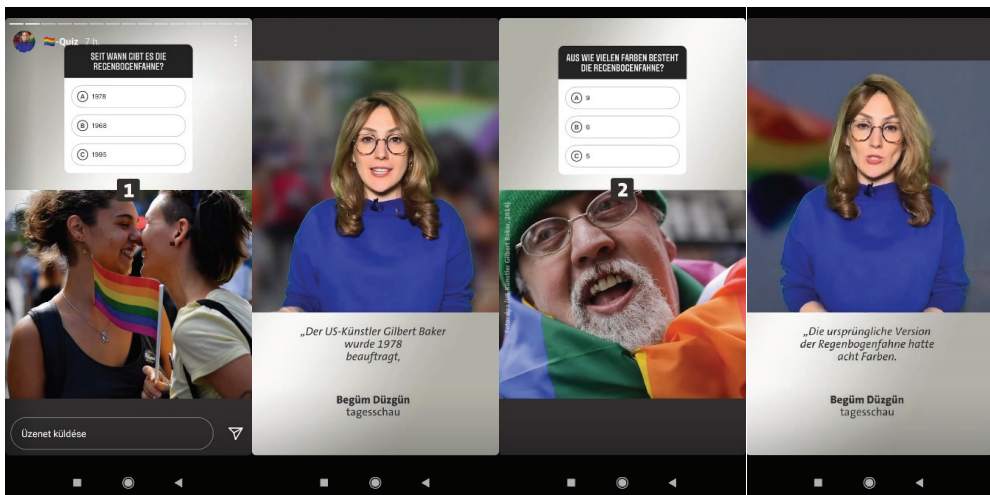Tagesschau reports the audience about essentially the same news, in the same manner, on all its digital platforms – except some minor fine-tuning.[16] Their news on their third-party platform accounts are about foreign and domestic politics, current events (e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic, the severe floods in Germany in the summer of 2021, or the Tokyo Olympics), environmental (with a focus on global warming), cultural, and lifestyle issues, education, sports, celebrities, and various other socially relevant topics. When being published, the information is embedded in a journalistic and expert narrative that explains and interprets the facts, offering the audience an immersive experience using the resources of audio-visual storytelling. Through various integrated forms of interactivity (follow, like, comment, reply to stories, react, forward), the audience can engage with the media and actively respond to the content posted.

The digital and social media activity of the tagesschau brand is an excellent example of how a large social media platform (besides its adverse social effects) can also work as a channel for the effective use of public service media in case their platform logic is recognized and adapted to public interest purposes. By allocating the right resources, integrating innovation into daily work, monitoring user and media consumption habits and adapting to these, public media can also succeed in the age of social networks.

3. Conclusions

The analysis of tagesschau, a German public service news brand, leads to a number of general conclusions. The example studied above clearly proves that public service news media may also be able to reach young citizens by choosing the right channel. The most appropriate tool for reaching the youth is obviously social media, especially mobile apps. Building a new digital brand is not necessarily required during the digitalization of a traditional public service media. As we have seen in the example presented, it is feasible by extending the already implemented traditional news brand into the digital field. When creating news content, digital journalists and editors have to adapt to the affordances of the platforms in order to make public and political content popular in social media. Developing new journalistic micro-formats fitting well with general trends in the form, style, and use

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16   Since most of the users of the TikTok application are still teenagers, the content and the tone of voice on this platform is the kind that may be of interest to them. At the same time, public life and public service are in the focus here as well.

of social sites is one possible way to attain this. Social media platforms themselves, as well as media content characteristics, user behaviour and needs are constantly and rapidly changing. As a result, the life cycle of journalistic formats adapted to social media platforms is rather short, and a continuous innovation in genre is needed, based on monitoring and analysing trends. However, all this is rather resource-intensive. Social media news production has an effect on newsroom composition as well. New jobs and skills are in need, especially ones related to image editing, data visualization, and traffic data analysis. The popularity of tagesschau's Instagram account proves that social media apps are able to reach the young users with relevant social, political, economic, and environmental news, capturing their attention and interest through the specific affordances of these applications such as interactivity, visual storytelling, personalization, easy access, and speed.

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New Digital Cinema: How Platforms Are Changing the Audiovisual Industry

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Abstract. Digitalization has been changing the methods of production, distribution, and use of written and audiovisual products, according to a process of "platforming". Most audiovisual content is available via streaming platforms, through a lot of devices (PCs, tablets, smartphones, smart TVs, and videogame consoles), which have empowered the process of media convergence. Based on a theoretical framework related to the impact of the platforms on the ongoing process, we intend to analyse how platforms are changing the identity of the audiovisual industry and how they represent themselves online. In order to analyse the ongoing process, we intend to examine some platforms that could be considered as best practices in the audiovisual field: Netflix, MUBI, and Festival Scope. On the one hand, using these platforms as case studies will enable us to highlight some beneficial aspects of the ongoing process of digitalization and platforming: holding many gazes and points of view; catching market niches; building a peer-to-peer network. On the other hand, we intend to emphasize some risks connected to the intermediation of platforms in the audiovisual field in terms of economic, cultural, and social effects.

Keywords: platforms, audiovisual industry, cinema, digitalization

1. Introduction

Digitalization has been changing the methods of production, distribution, and use of written and audiovisual products, according to a process of "platforming" (Van Dijck–Poell–de Waal 2018). Most audiovisual content is available via streaming platforms, through a wide range of devices (PCs, tablets, smartphones, smart TVs,

and videogame consoles). This has empowered the process of media convergence (Jenkins, 2006).

The following analysis aims to investigate the ongoing process related to audiovisual products and its impact on the identity of the audiovisual industry. In order to analyse the ongoing process of digitalization, we will start from a theoretical framework related to the impact of platforms on the audiovisual industry. Then, we will analyse in depth some platforms of audiovisual content that we considered as best practices. The aim of the analysis is to highlight opportunities and risks connected with the ongoing process of "platforming" and its result with regard to the audiovisual industry in terms of organizational identity.

2. Platforms and "Streaming Revolution": A New Identity for the Audiovisual Industry

During the 20th century, the audiovisual industry was characterized by the "Hollywood model", which was a "fordist" pipe-based model (Hesmondhalgh, 2005; Manovich, 2001) in which a small circle of producers offered their products to many consumers, according to the classic value chain model. "Pipeline businesses create value by controlling a linear series of activities […] Inputs at one end of the chain (say, materials from suppliers) undergo a series of steps that transform them into an output that's worth more: the finished product" (Parker et al., 2017: 4). From this point of view, the platform model has introduced a new mindset that thinks horizontally, connecting producers and consumers within a digital environment, breaking down space-time barriers, controlling data, and simplifying the supply chain (Iacovone, 2017; Guarascio–Sacchi, 2018).

Indeed, according to OECD (2019), "an online platform is a digital service that facilitates interactions between two or more distinct but interdependent sets of users (whether firms or individuals) who interact through the service via the Internet" (23). So, the audiovisual field has undergone a transition, from "monomedia industry" to "multimedia industry" (Preta, 2007), because the use of audiovisual products is now connected to different digital platforms, devices, and media. Therefore, the new audiovisual industry is based on some fundamental elements: content, cheapness, and control over data (Corvi, 2020).

Moreover, platforms provide an open infrastructure, which encourages user participation and satisfaction, spread by feedbacks thanks to social media (Brunetta et al., 2017). Thus, even the audiovisual field has undergone a transition to companies with a service provider role, following a user-based model that feeds different forms of participation and spreadability through intermediality and storytelling (Jenkins et al., 2013; Salmon, 2007). From this point of view, by making

a comparison between media ecosystems (Pescatore–Innocenti, 2011) and some economic theories about cultural and creative industries (Montanari, 2018), we can consider an online platform also as a creative ecosystem: an environment, digital or otherwise, that becomes a place of co-production of content thanks to the users. This produces a different role of the users who, according to the service economy, have undergone a transition from passive consumers of products to active users of services (Brunetta et al., 2017).

Indeed, the new audience can enjoy lots of audiovisual content, so users are more discerning. This is typical of "prosumer culture" (Collins, 2010), characterized by users' ability in terms of "distinction" (Bourdieu, 1984), which produces personalized media (Tryon, 2013). According to Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998), the new audience is more and more "skilled" because consumers have access to lots of audiovisual content, wherefore they are more discerning. This active role is so different from the passive role of consumers more typical of the previous pipe model because online products and services are constantly examined and compared on the web or through mobile services. Information about consumers is disseminated on blogs, forums, and social networks. In this way, consumers themselves are part of the production process (Brunetta et al., 2017).

So, the on-demand culture, the online dimension, and the personalization of the offer have a strong synchronous, collective, and community dimension. Social platforms become the place where users can comment and where they unintentionally advertise audiovisual content provided by streaming platforms. This is a new marketing method based on engagement, which is typical of long-tail markets (Anderson, 2006). Thus, the audience, selective and widespread, brings authenticity and transparency into its online word-of-mouth activity. So, it alternately becomes a consumer and a producer of value, according to a double thread that binds vision, use, intermediation, and storytelling (Jenkins et al., 2013; Salmon, 2007). This produces a different kind of audience that is not national but global and watches films or film series in their original language. The new audience is inclined to consume more episodes of a series at once (binge watching) and to comment in a continuous stream on social media (Corvi, 2020).

Therefore, the consumption of content is not contained within the boundaries of the streaming platform, but it finds space, like a river flood, in the other media streams that make up the web, in a continuous intermedial dialectic. For this reason, Severo proposes an analysis of the impact of platforms on user participation in a multimodal and multi-space perspective (Severo–Thuillas, 2020) in order to explore the dialectic of what Jenkins (2013) defines as "transmedia storytelling".

Transmedia storytelling is extremely empowered by the structure of the platforms, which constitute the open infrastructure within which content users can meet, discuss, enrich the narration from a transmedia perspective and produce new ones. Therefore, consumers of content start to have an active role

and become themselves producers of content. This has strong effects on the "spontaneous" marketing of the audiovisual product (Anderson, 2006). At the same time, this use of content has deep effects also on the very identity of the consumer, which is extremely influenced by the experience of online use in the context of the so-called performative society (Abercrombie–Longhurst, 1998). Images taken from audiovisual series or cinema flood the social channels. They become profile photos in the communities or avatars of the characters performed in the identity game played in the virtual reality. Thus, the virtual identity becomes an appendix, and not an antagonist, of the one that is built in real life (Floridi, 2014; Dean, 2010).

This is why the main concern of platforms is about user experience. Streaming platforms are characterized by a refined customer profiling just to please users' high expectations (Corvi, 2020). Therefore, the high quality of user experience is strictly connected to the platform's ability to profile their tastes and interests. This makes the data dimension crucial.

Indeed, on the one hand, users provide a large amount of data on their profiles and consumption choices, which are used by the platform to track their user experience and sometimes for marketing purposes too (Corvi, 2020). On the other hand, platforms use lots of metadata just to organize the audiovisual content, which is classified according to several criteria specific for each platform, thus establishing their own taxonomy, useful to their business model (Avezzù, 2017).

Therefore, organizing audiovisual content is a technical process driven by human perception: "There is much more than meets the eye, in the setup and operation of these systems: theory, subjectivity, unquestioned (scientistic) assumptions, judgements, values, habits. People who decide, define, describe, choose, interpret, think and believe" (Avezzù, 2017: 65). Platforms act as filters and as non-neutral intermediaries within user experience because data are never meaningless (Compagno–Treleani, 2019): "Data are never neutral, in the sense of being unaffected by the observer's procedures" (idem: 2).

The data dimension is increasingly crucial, especially if we consider that some online platforms can involve different entities. Because of the pandemic, for example, different cinemas or film festivals join an online platform not only to distribute their audiovisual content but also to build up strategies and creative solutions to face the pandemic situation. If we take a glance at the Italian context, for example, we can see that in 2020 the experience of Italian film festivals was mediated by platforms due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a report published by AFIC (Italian Film Festival Association) that investigated the experience of 142 film festivals during the pandemic of 2020, 29% of these film festivals were held entirely online, 28% online and offline, and only 31% entirely offline. So, platforms had a major role in this digital transition as solutions to face the pandemic emergency. From this point of view, some online platforms

connected to the audiovisual industry may be considered as digital ecosystems, being "combinations of interoperating applications, operating systems, platforms, business models and/or hardware, and not all components of the ecosystem must be owned by the same entity. In fact, a digital ecosystem may involve thousands of different businesses" (OECD, 2019: 24).

3. CLAP – Cultural Lab Platforming

User experience, access to a large amount of content, control over data, circularity between producers and consumers, elimination of space-time barriers, building a global audience – all seem to be the basic ingredients of the magic recipe that allowed the platform models to climb to the top of the international market and specifically the audiovisual supply chain. Obviously, the ongoing change, accelerated exponentially by the COVID-19 pandemic, implies an impact of the platforms on the audiovisual ecosystem from many points of view. The impact of platforms on the audiovisual industry is becoming more and more relevant, so it could be useful to highlight the beneficial effect of platforms and, at the same time, to stress the new issues connected to the ongoing process.

In this sense, the following analysis is part of the research activities developed within CLAP (Cultural Lab Platforming), which is an innovation programme of the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia. This programme is aimed at developing research on creative and cultural industries. According to a strong connection between technology and humanism, between traditional and innovative crafts, the specific objectives of the project are the production of original research that can generate new educational and training content, new job opportunities for young people, and prototypes of innovations for creative and cultural industries.

According to this framework, the research developed within CLAP revolves around the concept of cultural platforming, which consists in the systematic application of platform logics to cultural and creative industries. The ultimate goal of the programme is to create new models for the enhancement and use of cultural content and, at the same time, to experiment with them through digital citizenship initiatives. Within this framework, the audiovisual field constitutes a specific area of investigation. Like other cultural and creative sectors, the audiovisual industry is in fact going through a profound process of change, accelerated exponentially due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, CLAP proposes a reflection on which opportunities can be generated by the platforming of the audiovisual supply chain and which are the critical issues resulting from the process. For this reason, we will analyse in depth (Eisenhardt, 1989) some good practices of platforms related to the audiovisual industry, with the aim to highlight opportunities and challenges of the ongoing process. Indeed, these good practices clearly exemplify

some innovative aspects of the platform model. Moreover, we will highlight how the process of "platforming" is changing some habits of the audiovisual industry and, in a way, its identity too.

4. Many Gazes and Points of View: Netflix vs Hollywood

The impact of the platform model had the effect of a tornado on the previously pipe-based value chain within the audiovisual industry. Streaming platforms have been able to upset the whole audiovisual ecosystem in terms of production, distribution, use of content and, definitely, organizational identity. In this sense, the case of Netflix is emblematic because the platform upset Hollywood studios first due to the impact on all areas of the value chain (conception, financing, production, and distribution), in a scenario in which ticket sales in US theatres were already in crisis in the last decade (Corvi, 2020). Therefore, platforms have challenged Hollywood and its identity even before the pandemic. This was evident starting from 2019 when the Academy rewarded a film entirely and exclusively produced by Netflix (*Story of a Marriage* by Noah Baumbach). In the same year, *The Irishman* by Martin Scorsese was produced by Netflix, which was the only one with the economic resources to do so. This the reason why we can consider Netflix as a best practice.

Of course, this war of content, as it has been defined (Corvi, 2020), whose reward is essentially the time, rather than the money, of the users, has effects not only from an economic point of view but also on the identity of the industry and on its audiovisual content. In fact, the challenge between the previous pipe line model and the new platform model becomes a war of gazes and points of view too. Once again, it is not by chance that in 2020 Netflix USA produces a series provocatively entitled "Hollywood". The series, directed by Ryan Murphy, is based on the narrative mechanism of "what if". It wonders how the audiovisual productions of the 1950s would have been if in the big Hollywood production houses, and therefore in the audiovisual industry, there had been access for those who at that time were considered invisible and had no voice. So, Netflix implicitly wonders how could have been the society in the 50s if the audiovisual industry had had a different identity, more inclusive and equal. Moving from this question, the series unfolds along the effects of "what if". We can see leading roles assigned to African American women or the possible coming-out of actors no longer forced to hide their sexual orientation – the real case of Rock Hudson, a well-known actor, is programmatically resumed because in real life he was forced for a long time to conceal his homosexuality from the public.

The reason behind Netflix's interest in the inclusion of multiple points of view naturally does not ignore economic needs. On the contrary, this trend is

strictly connected to the identity of the platform, which has a highly user-based structure and whose business model is based on the long-term satisfaction of its users (Iacovone, 2017). If the global and widespread audience is at the centre, the plurality of points of view to be represented and satisfied is also central. According to Jenkins (2006), despite the rhetoric about the "democratization of television", this shift is driven by economic interests and not by the social mission of empowering the public. Media companies view convergence favourably for various reasons: convergence-based strategies exploit the benefits of media conglomeration because it empowers consumer loyalty and engagement. This is the reason why Netflix represents itself as a house of inclusion on its platform and on its social media too. If we take a glance at Netflix Italia's Twitter, for example, we can see that on 22 June 2020 they posted a tweet specifically related to their intention to increase the number of audiovisual content with LGBTQ+ stories.[1]

Indeed, the new and more inclusive value paradigm, towards which the platform and its potential audience tend, seems to be increasingly dominant, with concrete cultural effects on the process of representation, in which cause and effect chase each other. The effect of this broadening of point of view, for example, seems connected to the choice of the Academy, controversial and at times disputed, to update the inclusiveness parameters underlying the selection for the Oscars. It is evident that also in this sense an approach aimed at broadening the spectrum of the point of view reflects the ongoing cultural change, also fed by the impact of platforms on the audiovisual representation circuit and on the related experience of the audience.

Hollywood seems to change its identity, or the representation of its identity, in order to compete with the new model built by big platforms such as Netflix that seems to encourage more and more the inclusion of multiple points of view and gazes. This trend, even if driven by economic interests, seems to be able to feed a cultural change, whose fuel is a process of socialized imagination. This process is driven by the images, the stories – in a word: the resources – drawn from the immense reservoir of mass media. Media and audiovisual products cross and permeate the social world with their models of style, with their stories, with the icons and sounds that provide the imaginative fuel essential for late modern daily life (Scaglioni, 2006).

5. Catching Market Niches: MUBI

The broadening of the spectrum of the point of view is not the only consequence resulting from the new notion of audience built by digital and, specifically, by

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[1] *Spesso ci dicono che i nostri titoli sono pieni di personaggi LGBTQ+. Sapete cosa? Ne vogliamo mettere ancora di più. Direttamente nei titoli.* 'They often tell us that our titles are full of LGBTQ+ characters. You know what? We want to add even more. Directly in the titles.' The English translation of the tweet is made by the authors of this paper.

the new platform model. Indeed, if the audience takes on a global dimension, some trends that were market niches from a local point of view can spread on a global scale and find their sustainability. According to a typical feature of long tail markets, consumer niches, no longer relegated to a territorial level, can spread on an international level thanks to digital media. They can intercept interests and tastes that converge within a widespread audience.

Therefore, long tail markets allow the elimination of the so-called "tyranny of geography" (Iordanova–Cunningham, 2012) since they allow the customers to find what they are looking for within "online spaces" defined as "aggregators" (Anderson, 2006). Aggregators have lower market access barriers and, at the same time, allow an increasing number of products to overcome that obstacle and get to where they can find their audience (Anderson, 2006). Thus, a product that is difficult to find on a local scale can become easily accessible on a global scale, within a platform able to break down space-time barriers. In the "Internet Galaxy" mentioned by Castells (1996), populated by cybernauts who are discerning in their choices of use, there is a space of sustainability for market niches.

We can particularly highlight this aspect within the audiovisual industry by examining the case of MUBI. The platform represents the concrete example of how media convergence (cinema, streaming, smartphone) also becomes a cultural convergence: the high-level and the low-level mix, in a context of use in which niche films become easily accessible through different devices. This aspect has been exponentially accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, MUBI had more visibility in 2020, the year in which everything became (smart) TV, according to *The New York Times*.[2] In fact, looking at the Italian context, this aspect seems to be confirmed by the proliferation of domestic screens detected by the 54th CENSIS report. According to CENSIS, in Italy, the figure of 112 million devices has been reached and, specifically in 2020, the purchase of smart TVs involved 17 million Italians. This confirms the intense acceleration of the media collision process that has already been underway since long ago. We can say that MUBI has taken advantage of this process to build its identity as a platform and to build its successful business model. This is the reason why we can consider MUBI as a best practice.

Indeed, the platform was founded by Efe Çakarel in 2007, a long time before the COVID-19 pandemic. The core of the platform is the streaming service provided for users, who can enjoy a careful and accurate selection of non-mainstream films. In this way, MUBI is able to exploit the potential of a market niche that finds its sustainability on a global scale. The platform manages to aggregate art cinema enthusiasts from around the globe.

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2   Poniewozik J. (2020). This Was the Year When Everything Became TV. *The New York Times* 9 December. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/09/arts/television/everything-became-tv.html.

The mission of the platform consists in the collision of the media mentioned by Jenkins (2006), as it presents vision proposals selected by the administrators of the platform. They build a true digital video library, accessible at cheap prices. Knocking down the space-time barriers in order to exploit market niches is the ultimate goal of the platform. This is clear if we look at the claim that appears in the information section of the website, which underlines that one can avail themselves of the films made available by MUBI "Always, everywhere". So, MUBI wants to represent itself as a place in which you can always find what you need in terms of niche audiovisual content, beyond any space or time limits.

Furthermore, as a user-based platform, the user is at the centre and is the active engine of the platform. Indeed, MUBI is presented as a space in which one can enjoy the films but can also meet a community of enthusiasts with whom to confront or discuss about authors, style, and movies. In the spirit of platform design, the reference community is well identified. Taking community as a starting-point, the platform is shaped according to the needs of the user, who has the possibility to create his/her own movie playlist, visible to all users. In this way, the platform is able to offer an integrated service based on user-generated content. A specific section is also dedicated to users' feeds, who debate on what they have viewed and generate additional content. Therefore, the platform manages to enhance the active role of the user, from a "prosuming perspective", in order to build a loyal and global audience.

6. Building a Peer-To-Peer Network: Festival Scope

The revenge of market niches does not only affect streaming platforms but can also find space within a context in which fewer mainstream productions have always been at ease: the festival ecosystem. In fact, most films are not seen outside the circuit of festivals or private screenings (Boccardelli, 2008). Therefore, festival contexts have always represented the favourite territory for the production and distribution of less mainstream audiovisual products. Sometimes festivals support not only the distribution but also the production of the film, through specific industry and pitching activities. Somehow they assume the role of sponsor for the production. From this point of view, the ability of platforms to extend market niches from a global perspective is particularly significant for the festival circuit.

Moreover, the connection between festivals and platforms is strictly related to another element typical of the platform model: circularity. Indeed, in the ongoing process of digital transition and "platforming" of the audiovisual industry, the greatest transformation is perhaps the passage from individual and personalized media consumption to what is experienced as a collective and networked practice (Jenkins, 2006). It is a passage of consumption, which has as a side effect that users are more and more involved in the perspective of collective participation

and collective intelligence. Rather than talking about personal media, we should talk about community media: media that involve our lives as members of various communities, both locally with physical experience and online (Jenkins, 2006). Therefore, within a digital space, it is possible not only to reach a global and widespread audience but also possible to build a space in which to network among peers, as members of a community.

These two aspects can be particularly observed by examining the case of Festival Scope. It is a comprehensive platform for festivals that since 2011 allows its visitors to follow the programmes of different festivals, even if physically not present. Thus, the platform allows a breakdown of space-time barriers and, at the same time, intercepts market niches. This is the reason why we can consider Festival Scope as a best practice that expresses all its potential due to the pandemic emergency, according to a circular network logic that links producers, festival organizers, and users.

The platform offers various services related to the reference target. In this sense, it proposes a double interface, designed for two types of users: "basic" and "pro". The interface designed for the "basic" user allows to follow the schedule of the different festivals from home, making the films available on the user's account for a period of five days. The platform also provides technical support for the user: it offers information to facilitate use and specifies the necessary requirements for the different devices. The interface designed for the "pros" is the Festival Scope Expanded, which allows a multifaceted and diversified use of the platform. This use is not limited to providing a streaming service of the festival programme, but it outlines the possible needs of the "skilled" user (Abercrombie–Longhurst, 1998). It provides a more specific and diversified user experience thanks to a heterogeneous offer from an extremely user-based perspective.

Moreover, besides the double interface, there is a section of services designed for festival managers and organizers. The platform allows you to create your own festival online, offering support for the whole process thanks to the collaboration with Shift72, a service platform that follows digitalization paths. It takes care of moving on-line not only festivals but also cinema, broadcaster, and brand. Thanks to the support of Shift72, Festival Scope allows you to directly create an online festival using their own platform. Thus, it offers high-quality streaming infrastructures, rapid platform development, integrated payment system, and other similar services. In this sense, as a digital ecosystem (OECD, 2019), the platform is absolutely user-based, but it also becomes a context of co-production and co-design. This is the reason why the platform is presented as a place where one can use lots of Film Festivals, as well as enable users to create their own Film Festival, taking advantage of the digital infrastructure and the network available through the platform. Indeed, the platform is able to make use of the collaboration between peers through the digital world in a global perspective, putting online festivals within a network based on the platform, which also offers to look after its digitalization process.

7. Some Critical Issues

As can be seen from the analysis of the good practices previously discussed, the impact of platforms on the audiovisual supply chain has been evident, with beneficial effects on the audiovisual industry. However, it must be noted that each of the aspects of innovation can also hide some critical issues.

First of all, if it is true that user-centricity is a relevant element of platforming, in terms of activity and from a "prosuming perspective", it is also true that there is no lack of critical readings regarding how much this role is really active. Indeed, we can observe that user experience on large digital platforms is inevitably guided by algorithms. Even if Netflix and other mainstreaming platforms often propose a "democratization rhetoric", just in order to engage their audience (Jenkins, 2006), the role of the platform is relevant as intermediary. In fact, it is clear how much the process of organizing information, and therefore taste, is driven by platforms, which represent the open infrastructure in which interactions take place and on which our interactions are increasingly dependent. This happens in different contexts of our social life such as school, health, information, and entertainment (Van Dijck–Poell–de Waal, 2018). The role of platforms is predominant in contemporary life concerning various aspects: data management, transparency, security, and information. So, for what concerns the audiovisual industry, it is useful to highlight how platforms let the use of audiovisual content be more "democratized", while platforms also have an important role as intermediaries by managing data and content.

Therefore, on the one hand, the platform model supports the active role of users, from a prosumer perspective. This is the reason why many platforms insist on this aspect when they represent themselves on their social media. But, on the other hand, user experience is guided and mediated by the platform that organizes metadata with a very "human" gaze and with several criteria perhaps influenced by several biases. So, although the inclusion of users in the consumption choices promotes their active use, there is the risk of use still being guided by algorithms. This could produce participation bubbles, in which one communicates with those who have a point of view or taste already very similar to their own, according to a polarized "collaborative individualism" (Bandinelli–Gandini, 2019; Klein, 2020) rather than a real sense of community (Tryon, 2013).

If we consider this framework, there is also the risk of an American editorial perspective, especially because mainstreaming platforms are often strictly connected to main American companies (Van Dijck–Poell–de Waal, 2018).

Furthermore, platforms often have some geographical limitations because of which users see different content in different regions. So, even if platforms are able to knock down space-time barriers, there is also a risk of enforcing geographical boundaries and creating "geographical bubbles".

Some potential risks are finally connected to the heterogeneity of the catalogue. Even if streaming platforms often promote the active role of users in terms of content selection, the catalogue is often shown through some filters and placed in categories that are based on different criteria preselected by the platform. These criteria are often connected to previous user experiences, to the similarity between the different content and, obviously, to the business model of the platform. According to Avezzù (2017), from this point of view, "Recommender systems do not really promote discovery: on the contrary, the criteria regulating the patterns of similarity tend to reduce the complexity of a catalogue" (Avezzù, 2017: 64).

So, we can say that platforms could have a beneficial impact on user experience in terms of active role but, at the same time, we need to consider the non-neutral role of platforms in organizing data and metadata, which also have a significant impact on user experience. This role could become increasingly crucial for platforms that, as digital ecosystems, involve different entities.

8. Conclusive Remarks

In conclusion, based on the theoretical framework and the in-depth analysis of good practices, we can say that the impact of platforms on the audiovisual industry, and its identity, is becoming more and more relevant.

We can see that the impact of the platform model on the audiovisual supply chain can be beneficial by several points of view. In fact, platforms are able to knock down space-time barriers, broaden the audience on a global scale, support the inclusion of multiple points of views and gazes within the audiovisual representation, allow collaboration between peers, and support the emergence of market niches. All these aspects are often stressed by platforms – when they represent themselves online – as elements of innovation.

However, at the same time, we need to think of the potential critical issues arising from the non-neutral inclusion of a third entity, the platform, in the experience of production, distribution, and the use of audiovisual content. As is already happening in other fields, such as communication (Boccia Artieri–Marinelli, 2018), this inclusion can have strong effects in terms of economic, social, and cultural trends.

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Cite as:

"You are a Champion and Will Always Be!" – Sports Fans, Influencers, and Media Consumption in 2021[1]

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Abstract. The spread of digital media culture can be seen in action in almost every walk of life. The use of online media results in new solutions even in the most common practices, and the field of sports and related fan cultures are no exceptions to that. From the mid-2010s, the trend of sports events, athletes, and their fans becoming more and more connected to online space can be well observed. This transformation generates significant changes, which can often have far-reaching effects. One such phenomenon is that excellent athletes can appear in the role of online opinion leaders or influencers. In the following study, I present these processes based on the results of a recent study that examined changes in Hungarian fan habits in connection with the 2021 European Football Championship. The second half of the study then focuses on how changes in fan practices contribute to making athletes the most valuable players in the influencer market.

Keywords: sports fandom, sports content, sports influencers, patterns of consumption

1. Introduction

Sport has played a key role in Western culture since the beginning of modernity. In addition to the beneficial health effects of a sporty lifestyle, it also has a number of social and cultural functions that have played an important role in our lives for generations. Just to name a few: social practices related to sport play an important role in the process of socialization, help to practise group dynamics processes, teach rule-following behaviour, and help develop endurance and concentration. At the

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same time, one of the most important socio-cultural functions of sport is identity formation, emotional attachment to sports and athletes, which can manifest itself in two ways: directly and indirectly – directly when someone is living an active, sporty lifestyle and, for example, as a footballer, wrestler, or rower he or she is an active participant in sports; indirectly when the individual is not involved in any real sports activities, but as a fan he or she is constantly following the current events of a given sport. Nowadays, within the framework of media culture and media society, we attach increasing importance to the latter phenomenon, as more and more social and cultural practices are moving into the media space. Many of these practices are connected to sports fandom.

In May 2021, Telenor Hungary launched a comprehensive research project aimed at mapping the sports-related fan habits of the Hungarian population, with a special focus on online fandom activities.[2] The research was carried out with the participation of Hungarian Internet users aged 18–65. A total of 840 people took part in the research, the peculiarity of the sample being that women were underrepresented compared to the real composition of Hungarian society. This may also be due to the fact that men are still more interested in sports-related topics than women. Accordingly, 45% of the respondents were women and 55% were men. A further feature of the sample is that those aged 54–65 were represented slightly higher than the average. Considering the type of region and settlement, the sample is representative, but in the case of education there is a more significant difference compared to reality, as those with low education are underrepresented in the online sample, while those with higher education appear in a higher number than their real proportion in the society. However, these factors do not significantly distort the results of the study, as a sufficient number of commercially important groups appear in the focus of the query. Data collection was carried out between 28 May and 2 June 2021.[3] In the following, I will present the results of this study from the scientific perspectives of communication and media studies and cultural studies. In the second half of the study, I will focus on the changing role of sports influencers in the light of the study results.

2. Changing Fan Habits in the Online Space: Channels, Content, Social Media

The survey of sports fandom shows that sport is a particularly popular content among media consumers, with at least 73% of respondents watching at least one sport, while 49% are interested in more than one sport at a time. Smaller sporting

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2   Data were collected by Ipsos Instant Research.
3   For the official press release, see: https://www.telenor.hu/sajto/kozlemeny/itt-az-uj-rekord-elkeszult-az-orszag-leghosszabb-szurkoloi-salja.

events of domestic or local relevance are of low interest. It is worth noting, however, that the vast majority of respondents (73%) are primarily interested in world events, while 44% are also interested in continental sporting events. This also illustrates one of the most important features of late-modern media culture in the context of sports: in contemporary popular media, the constraints of space and time are indifferent, content is accessible to all, and its popularity is influenced only by its attractiveness and quality (Kellner, 1995). However, it is not incidental that athletes appearing in the global media space, due to their enormous visibility, have a very strong community cohesion force that can forge fan communities across national borders and continents.

One of the distinctive features of sports-related content consumption is that we can find clear differences by gender. 80% of the male respondents follow at least one sporting event, while the same practice is common to only 66% of women. All sporting events (international, continental, domestic) are followed by significantly more men, while the biggest difference between men and women is in the interest in continental and Hungarian sporting events: these are followed by 20% more men. All in all, it can be stated that the world of sports invariably concerns men more; what women are interested in within this thematic category I will discuss in more detail later on.

Sport is one of the most popular and universal topics in the media. Considering this, it is not surprising that such content can be found on all channels, but there is considerable variability in consumer behaviour regarding channel choice. Recent domestic research confirms the international finding that major sporting events are still watched on television by the vast majority of fans, 70% of those surveyed. We also know from international research what the background is. On the one hand, television as a means conveys content that is consistently edited with a consistently high technical standard, providing high enjoyment value, especially for sporting events (Silverstone, 1998). On the other hand, watching sports events on television is often a community experience that can provide a social experience for family members and larger groups of friends. It is worth noting, however, that the popularity of television varies more significantly in different age groups. The popularity of television is the highest among the elderly, who mainly follow sports events through this channel and who also connect the experience of fandom and support with this device. In the case of the middle-aged, television is also a leading medium, but in their case information is supplemented by browsing and viewing online content. Watching sports broadcasts on television is significantly reduced only among the younger generations, but more than half of the young people surveyed still show this behaviour. We also see from the research that the second most popular channel is online media, while the use of radio and press is already negligible among the classic mass media. The generational fault lines that emerge in connection with channel choices are the clearest in the case of social

media and streaming interfaces: 49% of young people and 26% of older people follow sporting events through social media, while 42% of young people and 22% of older people watch sporting events through online streaming. Accordingly, the overall ranking of popularity is as follows: television (70%), websites (42%), social media (34%), online broadcasts (31%), radio (10%), and print media (10%).

Social media provides an opportunity not only to watch sporting events but also to follow well-known athletes, and this is primarily an activity typical of young people (Woods–Ludvigsen, 2021). Nearly half of those surveyed (48%) follow well-known athletes and sports-related sites on social media, mostly Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Regarding fan habits, we can also experience generational differences, although these cannot be considered specific in the case of sports topics, as these patterns follow general regularities. In this context, the study found that the 18–26 age group is the most active in following athletes, with 69% of those surveyed visiting the profile of an athlete on a regular basis. According to the study, the most important motivations are the interest in the given sport or person (53%) and the exemplary behaviour, personality, and activity of the athlete (40%). This result is also in line with international research, and the phenomenon can be explained by the star cult and, within it, the influencer phenomenon (Guld, 2016, 2018, 2019). In this context, we have seen the process since about 2012 that opinion leaders with an athletic background who are also active on online platforms are able to grab and retain the attention of huge masses.[4] What is really interesting is that this can only be partly explained by the actual athletic performance of those characters, and especially for female consumers this has much more to do with the athletes' personalities, appearances, lifestyles, private lives, or the brands and products they promote. In this sense, we consider *ordinariness* to be an essential key concept, i.e. consumers like to gain insight into the everyday lives of well-known people through these interfaces (Szijártó, 2016).

The research also ranked a number of other topics related to sport according to the extent to which they attract the attention of those interested. This shows that 31% of respondents follow social sites because of summaries or exclusive videos, and 28% feel close to celebrities by being able to encounter content shared directly by athletes on these sites. 23% of respondents find out about the schedule of sporting events on these surfaces, and 22% visit personal sites for fun or funny content. 19% of the respondents expect insider information, 18% want to improve their own sports performance, and 17% specifically want more information about an athlete's privacy. From a marketing point of view, it is not incidental, but not particularly promising, that, according to their own statements, only 12% of users are interested in the products promoted by athletes, and only 6% stated that the appearance of celebrities also play a role when following a well-known athlete on

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4   https://www.digitalhungary.hu/interjuk/Az-online-videos-sztaroke-a-jovo-interju-Guld-adammal/4256/.

social media sites. It can be assumed that compliance with the envisaged norms worked most strongly on this issue, resulting in bias in the results. After all, we know well from commercial practice that the personality of athletes is particularly attractive, especially when it is matched with appropriate commercial brands in a marketing campaign.[5]

In the use of social media, the research revealed a gender difference in whether respondents follow a page or person related to sports in online or social media, but this difference is not significant. At the same time, it is clear from the results that the proportion of women who follow sports-related sites on social media is slightly lower. The reason for this is to be found in the different interests of the sexes: while men are basically interested in the schedule, results, and insider information of sports events, women are primarily interested in the private lives of athletes, and they are looking for useful tips and advice for their own sports activities. Generally, it may come as a surprise that men are more interested in the appearance of athletes than women and that women see a higher proportion of role models in athletes than men.

The research also shows that a significant proportion of users in social media dealing with sports are inactive (48%), i.e. they are passive consumers of content. Only 10% of respondents comment or like shares, and only 5% upload such posts on their own profiles. However, in another large group, 30% of respondents say they do not follow sports-related pages at all, while a further 6% do follow such pages but never actually read the content that is shared there. A higher rate of activity is seen only in a smaller group of young people, with 16% of the 18–26 year olds liking or commenting on sports-related posts compared to only 8% of the 54–65 year olds. These results are characteristic of several aspects and are in line with international trends. On the one hand, these proportions approach the "1-9-90" rule, which is typical of social media in general.[6] According to this theory, 1% of users produce original content, 9% amplify, edit, or supplement it, and 90% are only passive followers of events. This ratio does not seem to make a drastic difference in the case of otherwise particularly popular sports-related content either. It is also a typical international trend that these are younger people, members of Generation Z and Generation Y, who are highly active on social platforms, which is closely related to the fact that identification with youth cultures and subcultural identities, as well as parallel fan activity, usually reach their peak in these age groups.

As can be seen from the above discussion, sports-related social media activities appear more passively. As a result, none of the activities listed in the research and described below is specific to Hungarian sports supporters. Generally, following

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5　　See, for example: https://www.forbes.com/sites/kurtbadenhausen/2019/08/03/social-medias-most-valuable-athletes-ronaldo-mcgregor-and-lebron-score/?sh=5715bbaa2f98.

6　　https://blog.elatable.com/2006/02/creators-synthesizers-and-consumers.html.

athletes and making bets is typical of only 2 out of 10 respondents, while young people are much more likely to be involved in these activities than any older age group. Only 16% of the respondents participate in sweepstakes, 10% join online fan groups, and only 9% make online friendships because of a common interest in sports. Even fewer of them log in to social networking sites while watching a match (7%), share a related photo (7%), or exchange their profile picture during a specific event (3%). From a marketing standpoint, it is important that only 7% of the respondents buy sports memorabilia or branded products, among which the t-shirt is the most popular, followed by various utility items such as a hat, a badge, or a sweater.

The research also sheds light on the fact that on-the-go content consumption on mobile devices is not a rarity at all but, according to self-reports, is the most common for static content related to sporting events, such as reading online news or viewing photo reports. Only 17% of the respondents consume video content on the go, but this may also be related to the limits of the mobile Internet package they use. Young people are more likely to watch more sports-related content on the go, and this practice is much more common for men (22%) than for women (11%). Generally, it is not surprising that the on-the-go practise is most prevalent among the young members of Generation Z and Y, which is why they are often referred to as the "mobile (phone) generation". Several previous research has shown that the characteristics of these generations can be captured most sensitively through the significance of movement (Glózer et al., 2014). In the context of media usage, this movement can also be interpreted as a change of location in physical space and a transition between different media surfaces. Physical relocation can be interpreted mainly in relation to the home, the school, or workplace and the road connecting them, where specific media usage and practices are adapted to each location and to the road itself. Micro-moments are good examples for these practices. Micro-moments of media usage are created on the move, and these short-time slots can be used to consume even larger amounts of content in a very short time – nowadays on TikTok, as a very typical example. This is mainly made possible by the use of high-speed network connections, which are now available in more and more places. The movement in the virtual space of media can be explained primarily by the phenomenon of multitasking, the essence of which is that users move from one media interface to another without any problem and are often present in several places at the same time. It is clear from the study that all these characteristics also apply to young people when consuming sports-related content.

Finally, in connection with the results of the research, it is worth examining the content consumption habits of Generation Z more thoroughly in an international context. The special attention may be justified by the fact that digitally indigenous Generation Z youngsters are considered a "trendsetter generation", which means that future trends can be deduced from their consumption patterns.[7] This statement

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7   http://www.epa.hu/03000/03056/00075/pdf/EPA03056_mediakutato_2020_1_079-092.pdf.

is based on the observation that media use practices among this age group have a wide-ranging impact on consumer trends and typically appear among older users with a lag of one or two years and then become ordinary. Recent research has found, for example, that sports content has a declining appeal among young Americans and is preceded by other forms of entertainment, such as movies and series, or other segments of pop culture such as musicians and celebrities.[8] The declining popularity of sports is also shown by the fact that only 53% of the Generation Z youngsters are sports fans, while 63% of adults and 69% of Generation Y people say so. Generations Z youngsters in the USA are only half as likely to watch live sports events as members of Generation Y, but e-sports are already more popular in their circles than MLB, NASCAR, or the NHL. Although Hungarian research has not yet produced exactly these results, in the future we can also expect that consumption trends in Hungary will move into this direction among young people.

3. "You Are a Champion and Always Will Be!"[9] – Athletes as Influencers in 2021

Two things can be deduced from the above study. On the one hand, it is clear that the spread of online media culture is generating fundamental changes in the consumption of sports-related content, both in terms of channels and consumption patterns. On the other hand, the research also shows that there is a change in the role of athletes in the lives of fans and supporters. Telenor's study has shown – and there is no significant change in this respect from previous decades – that the identity of athletes is an important point of reference in our culture. Athletes are role models who play their part in conveying complex value systems that are related to, among other things, success, performance, excellence, or even male and female roles. At the same time, online culture is generating a significant change in the relationship that develops between athletes and fans. In the classical media environment, this was a one-way relationship where, within the frameworks of mass media, athletes were able to appear on a limited number of channels and only sporadically, typically in connection with their sports performance. In contemporary settings, in the world of online media culture, it can already be a two-way, interactive process that gives the impression that there can be a direct connection between fans or supporters and athletes. Basically, this transformation results in athletes being able to appear more and more often in the position of the

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8 https://morningconsult.com/2020/09/28/gen-z-poll-sports-fandom/.
9 Fan comment under Katinka Hosszú's Facebook post during the Tokyo Olympics, 28 July 2021. https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=365168798311117&set=a.200476304780368.

online opinion leader or influencer. In the second part of the study, we review the latest trends in this process based on international literature.

To understand the phenomenon, it is necessary to see what factors make athletes more attractive in the influencer market. In the present text, I will argue that there are three main factors that play an important role in the fact that athletes have an outstanding appeal to the public and at the same time represent a significant commercial value. One of the most obvious explanations for this phenomenon is the way fame is born in the case of athletes. If we examine the typologies of well-known people, we find that famous athletes belong to the elite group of stars in almost all approaches. In Monaco's taxonomic system, successful athletes fall into the category of "heroes" or "stars" – where both groups are characterized by serious effort, hard work, high performance, and in many cases unparalleled talent. At the same time, the category of stars is also characterized by the fact that the famous person also has significant visibility through public appearances (Monaco, 1978). In Rojek's system, athletes fall into the category of "achieved celebrity", which refers to real achievements that occur in spheres independent of the world of media such as science, economics, or even sports (Rojek, 2011). If we want to define the character of successful athletes specifically according to typologies developed for influencers, then in their case the category of slow, constructive career applies. This is explained by the fact that it often takes decades of work to build up an athlete's career. And while well-known athletes can gather millions of followers on a platform in a very short period, the work and performance essential to do so require a serious investment of energy and time.

The second factor is the powerful identity-forming function of sport and athletes, which can take many forms. Of these, I will only discuss two types of identity relevant to the topic. The first of them is group identity, which refers to a psychological attachment that a sports fan feels to their favourite sports team (Kim et al., 2009; Wan, 2006 – qtd. in Lee 2021). Attachment to fan groups in sports does not differ from the basic group dynamics processes described by sociology. In the members of a fan group, an emotional attachment develops not only towards the sport and the athletes but also towards each other. Group members prefer to sympathize with each other more than with individuals outside the group; furthermore, those in the group tend to consider themselves and their group different from other individuals and groups (Hogg–Abrams, 1988). Research on the topic has also shown that, depending on the strength of group identity, fans' cognitive and behavioural responses show significant differences. The most dedicated fans experience particularly intense emotional reactions, whether it is the joy they feel over winning a match or the depression after losing a game. In the case of hard-core fans, there are quite specific cognitive mechanisms that explain success with internal factors (e.g. athletes' outstanding talent, unparalleled abilities, etc.), while failure is explained by external circumstances. Research on

the topic has also revealed that supporters with high emotional commitment and strong group identities also have well-distinguished consumption patterns in terms of media usage: through multiple channels, with greater consistency and more focused attention to content closely related to sports (Yim–Byon, 2018). Intensive group identity can also explain the tendency for fans to be more loyal to brands associated with athletes, i.e. less likely to switch to new brands instead of the usual ones (Lin, 2017 – qtd. in Lee, 2021).

Another aspect of the identity-forming power of athletes is related to national identity. In this context, it is a general rule that athletes, especially in international competitions, never represent only themselves or their team but an entire nation. Because there are relatively few events in the public that would receive as much attention as international sporting events, the athletes featured in them also have serious symbolic potential. This factor can further deepen the commitment to successful athletes and add a strong emotional charge to the relationship between supporters and athletes. The process is most evident in classic media events related to sports such as the Olympic broadcasts, where outstanding performance becomes the glory of an entire country (Dayan–Katz, 1992). One of the most characteristic examples of this phenomenon in Hungary is the long career of Katinka Hosszú, who has had an unparalleled successful career as an athlete, having represented Hungary in international competitions many times, so it is no coincidence that she has become one of the most popular athletes in the country. In the light of this, it is no surprise that the athlete has become one of the most valuable and sought-after influencers in the online media of the recent years, with more than 400,000 followers on Instagram alone.[10]

The third factor is the looks, the attractive physical appearance of the athletes. Appearance has been one of the most important trademarks of celebrities since the early 20th century. Attractive appearance was already a sure entry into the world of stars at the beginning of the Hollywood golden age, and very often good looks was more important than actual acting talent. It is no coincidence that the outstandingly attractive, strong, healthy physique of athletes has been a valuable commodity in the industry of fame from the beginning (Dickerson, 2016). This is also evidenced by the classic and contemporary American film stars who have transformed from leading athletes into stars on the screen. The aforementioned group of stars include former football player Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, bodybuilder Arnold Schwarzenegger, diver Jason Statham, or even Ronald Reagan, who also made his way into the film industry after a successful athletic career before becoming President of the United States.[11] In this respect, the operation of the attention economy has not changed at all – good appearance achieved by sports is also key to success for influencers. For example, an industry survey conducted a few years

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10   https://www.influencerkereso.hu/toplista/instagram/kovetok.
11   https://www.mensjournal.com/entertainment/20-famous-actors-who-started-out-athletes/.

ago found that 50% of marketers consider the appearance of a known person to be principal to secure success, 29% consider it very important, 17% think that appearance is important, and only 5% of the experts interviewed believe that appearance is incidental.[12] It follows from all this that attractive-looking athletes receive huge attention in the media and not only in the audience but also among representatives of the commercial sphere – and only because of their appearance (Seiler–Kucza, 2017).

Marketing activity is now an almost unavoidable factor in the influencer communication activity of athletes. Influencer marketing has been one of the most innovative segments of online marketing since the mid-2010s, and the solution is growing in popularity. Influencer marketing is a type of content marketing that is based on the idea that consumers prefer to buy products that are promoted by well-known people, stars, celebrities, or ordinary celebrities who are recognized, admired, or idolized. The success of influencer marketing is characterized by an exponential increase in the amount spent on the solution in recent years: in the United States, the advertising cost spent on the solution increased by 33.6% in 2021, for a total of $ 3.6 billion.[13] Out of that amount, a growing proportion is acquired by world-renowned athletes with outstanding popularity, global reach, and an international fan base. One of the best examples of this is Cristiano Ronaldo, who is the most popular celebrity on Instagram with more than 318 million followers[14] and whose single post is worth $ 1 million in the advertising market (Lee, 2021).

According to the literature, one of the most important attractions for athletes who also act as influencers is credibility (Lee, 2021). For athletes, credibility can be interpreted as a consequence of athletic performance, which can be related to the energy, effort, and endurance invested in achieving outstanding performances. It follows from the characteristics of sporting life that the performance and credibility of athletes are still relatively rarely questioned so that athletes are exceptionally stable and reliable characters in the public sphere. This is the factor that commerce and the advertising industry seek to make the most of through the operation of meaning transfer. This means that marketers always strive to extend the values (strength, endurance, performance, attractiveness, etc.) associated with a successful athlete to a particular brand or product as effectively as possible. This practice has also worked successfully in the world of mass media for many decades, and in recent years even more effective solutions have emerged for social applications. In the age of web 2.0 and social applications, the illusion of a personal relationship develops between a fan or supporter and a successful athlete. Through media

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12 https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/digital/movie-stars-matter-but-social-908042/#pagetop.

13 https://www.emarketer.com/content/us-influencer-spending-surpass-3-billion-2021.

14 https://www.brandwatch.com/blog/top-most-instagram-followers/.

usage and the related cultural practices presented earlier, this process results in a stronger attachment than what fans could ever experience before.

4. Summary

The work done here demonstrates that athletes and their associated fan groups or fan communities are not only culturally interesting but also have significant commercial and economic significance. It is clear from the results that the change of media culture, the spread of digital, social media, in addition to the change of simple user practices, also result in significant changes in the relationship between athletes and fan groups. Although the study of Hungarian supporters showed that a significant proportion of users are still strongly connected to television when it comes to consuming sports-related content, more and more people are consuming online content too, especially members of the younger generations. The study points out that online media puts the relationship between athletes and fans in a new context, with the increase in the amount of content available, the generalization of the experience of immediacy, and watching content on the go. The biggest change, though, may be that athletes can address the audience via their own channels, with their own messages. And this practice can create a more direct relationship between fans and athletes than ever before, and, taking advantage of this, more and more athletes who are active as influencers appear in the public sphere. The discussion revealed that several factors play a role in the popularity and attractiveness of athletes, such as the way fame is born, group and national identity, and an attractive appearance. Together, these result in athletes forming an outstandingly reliable, stable group within the world of well-known people, which also explains that cultural and market interest in them will remain constant in 2021 as well.

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Cite as:

Beyond Netiquette:
Digital Citizenship as Participation

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Abstract. Digital citizenship research has been on the agenda of scholars and practitioners since 1999 and has been trending since 2015. A plethora of approaches and definitions have been arising, with two major directions: a theoretical-methodological and a practical-educative. The present critical literature review is aimed at advocating for a more civic approach to the issue of digital citizenship and at presenting arguments in favour of *a research agenda focused on the participatory components of digital life*. Our desk research operated with both original studies and meta-analyses related to the concept of digital citizenship. While being technically savvy and well-behaved online is a key requirement for today's netizen, becoming a citizen in virtual spaces requires more. Beyond netiquette, civic participation online is becoming a core competence.

Keywords: digital citizenship, digital life, participation, critical literature review

1. Rationale and Methodology

Why the increasing interest towards the issue of digital citizenship? As the Internet is becoming part of our lives, opportunities and challenges of an overwhelmingly digital life take up significant space within the public arena (Council of Europe, 2018; Frau-Meigs et al., 2015; Pathways for Prosperity Commission, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2014; Ram et al., 2020; Suzor, 2019).

With such a wide palette of approaches, from the theoretical and methodological to the practical-educational ones, why another review article? Our experience as researchers and educators has shown that basic and advanced digital literacy skills are necessary yet not sufficient for a competent and ethical engagement in digital life: a civic attitude and the ability to critically understand online interactions is necessary. A well-rounded approach to digital citizenship should be part of the research agenda, and a critical literature review might be instrumental to advocate for it.

The present critical literature review operates with both original research studies and with meta-analyses summarizing articles on the topic of digital citizenship. It is a desk research carried out from 15 July to 31 October 2021. Articles were selected upon relevance using the Google Scholar database, with the keywords "digital citizenship" and "digital life". The first search keyword was chosen as *digital citizenship* is the key concept of the present critical review, while "digital life" was one of the most overarching concepts encountered while studying information society topics since 2007 onwards, whence the selection.

The process of selecting literature review studies (meta-analyses) and original research articles consisted of two steps: firstly, the 50 most relevant articles were chosen and categorized for the *digital citizenship* concept; secondly, the 50 most relevant articles were gathered and categorized for the *digital life* concept. Based on the quality of the topic analysis, a number of 25 articles were included in the critical literature review, as shown in *Table 1* below.

Table 1. *Articles included in the review, by relevance categories*

Articles	Relevance categories
Atif and Choi, 2018; Choi, 2016; Council of Europe, 2018; Frau-Meigs, O'Neill, Soriani, and Tomé, 2017; Işikli, 2015; Pathways for Prosperity Commission, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2014; Ribble, 2015; Suzor, 2019; Webler and Tuler, 2000	Thorough theoretical analysis
Al-Zahrani, 2015; Choi, Glassman, and Cristol, 2017; Ram, Yang, Cho, Brinberg, Muirhead, Reeves, and Robinson, 2020	Thorough methodological analysis
Buchholz, DeHart, and Moorman, 2020; Lozano-Diaz, Figueredo-Canosa, and Fernández-Prados, 2020; Yue, Nekmat, and Beta, 2019	Timely, specific analysis
Chen, Mirpuri, Rao, and Law, 2021; Fernández-Prados, Lozano-Diaz, and Ainz-Galende, 2021; Öztürk, 2021	Thorough meta-analysis
Emejulu and McGregor, 2019; Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal, 2008; Ohler, 2010; Ribble and Bailey, 2007; Richards, 2010	Part of a thorough meta-analysis

Suzor (2019: 39) warns that the Internet has no immune system to protect users against abuse, wherefore it is critical to rely on educated users since online platforms often present themselves as neutral spaces and push responsibility on content creators. However, many of the Internet users are underage, unprepared to take responsibility for their communication practices and online content creation. Children and teenagers are immersed in the digital world yet not fully engaged in it (Bakó, 2019). Their parents and educators are even less connected to digital cultural spaces due to the lack of digital literacy (Bakó–Tőkés, 2018). No wonder

that education for digital literacy takes up a significant space in conceptualizing and operationalizing "digital citizenship".

2. Conceptualizing "Digital Citizenship"

Several research articles and books define digital citizenship with a focus on users' skills (Mossberger–Tolbert–McNeal, 2008; Ribble–Bailey, 2007; Ribble, 2015), while more holistic approaches look into knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values of the digital agora stakeholders (Choi, 2016; Ohler, 2010; Richards, 2010; Emejulu–McGregor, 2019).

In a comprehensive literature review, Fernández-Prados et al. (2021) highlight digital citizenship definitions used by theoretically and methodologically sound studies, as summarized in *Table 2* below.

Table 2. *Defining digital citizenship*

Authors	Definitions
Ribble and Bailey, 2007: 10	"norms of appropriate, responsible behavior with regard to technology use. Digital citizenship is a concept which helps teachers, technology leaders, and parents to understand how to use technology appropriately."
Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal, 2008: 1–2	"those who use the Internet regularly and effectively, that is, on a daily basis […] digital citizens are those who use technology frequently, who use technology for political information to fulfill their civic duty, and who use technology at work for economic gain"
Ohler, 2010: 187	"character education for the digital age"
Richards, 2010: 518	"practices conscientious use of technology, demonstrates responsible use of information, and maintains a good attitude for learning with technology"
Choi, 2016: 565	"Ethics, Media and Information Literacy, Participation/Engagement, and Critical Resistance."
Emejulu and McGregor, 2019: 140	"as a process by which individuals and groups committed to social justice deliberate and take action to build alternative and emancipatory technologies and technological practices"

Source: selected from Fernández-Prados et al. (2021: 2) upon variety of approaches

The selected definitions highlight the normative component and the complexity of the "digital citizenship" concept, with technological, educational, and civic activist aspects connected to the digital literacy of the users.

Research focused on educational aspects rely on Ribble's "nine elements of digital citizenship" (2015: 23) providing a practical teaching guide for schools on digital access, digital commerce, digital communication, digital literacy, digital etiquette, digital law, digital rights and responsibilities, digital health and wellness, and digital security. The guide is comprehensive and provides examples of dos and don'ts – hence its popularity.

Methodological approaches were also well received by reviewers and researchers, with a highlight on Choi, Glassman, and Cristol's model of measuring digital citizenship (2017) on a reliable and valid five-factor scale, using a questionnaire with 26 items. The five factors, as presented in *Table 3*, are structured on three levels or conditions of complexity: *technical skills* represent a basic, necessary yet not sufficient condition for developing digital citizenship; on the second layer, *local and global awareness* is an important communicative condition, whereas on a more complex level *networking agency*, *Internet political activism*, and a *critical perspective* is a "collaborative and cooperative condition" of digital citizenship (Choi et al. 2017: 111).

Table 3. *Three conditions of complexity when developing digital citizenship*

Factors	Description	Level of complexity
Technical skills	Lower levels of media literacy and basic open source intelligence skills	Necessary but not sufficient condition
Local and global awareness	Ethical consumption of information that deals with local and global issues	Distributed and communicative condition
Networking agency	Higher levels of media and information literacy	Collaborative and cooperative condition
Internet political activism	Action-/transformation-oriented participation	
Critical perspective	Rethinking online participation and the Internet	

Source: based on Choi, Glassman, and Cristol's visual model (2017: 111)

The measurement scale, be it complex and valid, has its limitations, as the authors themselves admit: the ethical aspects of participation are not detailed enough. Indeed, when it comes to public participation as an important component of democracy and citizen involvement in decision making, competence is a necessary yet not sufficient condition. Ethical conditions of participatory processes have also an important role in creating an inclusive socio-cultural environment for social actors.

The Choi, Glassman, and Cristol (2017) model is a good example of how digital citizenship research should be conducted, by looking both at the basic and advanced digital literacy skills, complemented with participatory attitudes and a critical

understanding of how the Internet works. If complemented with more comprehensive ethical criteria, such as the Webler–Tuler approach (2000) adapted for online spaces, a well-rounded research agenda could emerge.

Webler and Tuler (2000) have developed a model of competence- and fairness-based conditions for public participation in decision making, which could and should be integrated into conceptualizing digital citizenship. A well-organized public hearing event, for instance, be it offline or online, should take the following into consideration: are the rules of interaction comprehensive and created in a participatory manner? Is the space of dialogue organized in an inclusive, smooth, accessible manner? The system of fairness and competence rules for a proper participatory process are available in the *Appendix* section of this article.

3. Participation as Civic Engagement

While narrow definitions of online participation focus on active user behaviour on different platforms (Ribble–Bailey, 2007; Mossberger et al., 2008), broader approaches entail the civic component of digital life (Choi, 2016; Choi et al., 2017; Frau-Meigs, 2017).

As the Council of Europe defines it in a series of programmatic documents, digital citizenship is:

> the ability to engage competently and positively with digital technologies (creating, working, sharing, socialising, investigating, playing, communicating and learning); participating actively and responsibly (values, skills, attitudes, knowledge and critical understanding) in communities (local, national, global) at all levels (political, economic, social, cultural and intercultural); being involved in a double process of lifelong learning (in formal, informal and non-formal settings); and seamlessly defending human rights and dignity. (Frau-Meigs et al., 2015: 11–12)

This comprehensive definition entails a complex palette of normative criteria focusing on values, attitudes, skills, knowledge, and critical understanding necessary for living in a digital world. Connected to this approach, another key programmatic document, of the Council of Europe (2018), elaborated the context, concept, and model of competences for developing a democratic culture based on dialogue, inclusion, and participation. The model gives a set of values, attitudes, skills as well as knowledge and critical understanding of what is needed for a democratic culture, an ideal type of a citizen. Since our daily lives are increasingly digital, a model of offline citizen should also be applied online.

Table 4. *The 20 competences model for a democratic culture*

Competence	Description
Values	Valuing human dignity and human rights
	Valuing cultural diversity
	Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality, and the rule of law
Attitudes	Openness to cultural otherness, beliefs, and practices
	Respect
	Civic-mindedness
	Responsibility
	Self-efficacy
	Tolerance of ambiguity
Skills	Autonomous learning skills
	Analytical and critical thinking skills
	Skills of listening and observing
	Empathy
	Flexibility and adaptability
	Linguistic, communicative, and plurilingual skills
	Co-operation skills
	Conflict resolution skills
Knowledge and critical understanding	Knowledge and critical understanding of the self
	Knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication
	Knowledge and critical understanding of the world: politics, law, human rights, cultures, religions, history, media, economies, environment, and sustainability

Source: based on the Council of Europe Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (2018: 38)

Online and offline interactions are strongly connected in civic spaces (Choi, 2016; Ribble, 2015), wherefore education for participation has a key role in developing responsible netizens (Al-Zahrani, 2015; Buchholz et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2021; Hennig-Manzuoli et al., 2019; Işikli, 2015; Öztürk, 2021; Yue et al., 2019). More complex approaches (Choi, 2016; Frau-Meigs et al., 2016; Choi et al., 2017, Lozano-Diaz et al., 2019) enable developing more inclusive and responsive digital citizenship programmes.

Schools and civil society organizations can and should have an active role in promoting digital citizenship programmes for all individuals and groups since the Internet and its complex platforms develop rapidly, and even the savvy individuals need to learn continuously in order to be competent and ethical actors of the cyber-sphere.

4. Conclusions

Digital citizenship research is gaining space both in scholars' and practitioners' scientific dialogue. Despite the variety and complexity of approaches, well-received books and articles, comprehensive meta-analyses reveal clear trends: when it comes to topical focus, educational approaches prevail; methodological approaches are highly appreciated and included in literature reviews. Meanwhile, a tendency to define digital citizenship mainly as digital literacy – with a greater focus on digital skills rather than on values and attitudes – still prevails.

A research agenda focusing on competent and ethical citizen participation online is needed since the difference between merely being civilized and having a civic attitude online is significant. Such an approach would go beyond netiquette and look into the civic attitudes and participatory practices online.

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Appendix 1. Rules of fairness and competence for public participation (Webler–Tuler, 2000: 570, 572)

Discursive Standard Criteria for Fairness
<u>Agenda and the process rules</u>
Does everyone have an equal chance to:
– put their concerns on the agenda and approve or propose rules for discourse?
– debate and critique proposals for the agenda and the rules?
– influence the final decision about the agenda and the discourse rules?
<u>Moderator and rule enforcement</u>
Does everyone have an equal chance to:
– suggest a moderator and a method for facilitation?
– challenge and support another's suggestion for a moderator and a method for facilitation?
– influence the final selection of moderator and moderation method?
<u>Discussion</u>
Does everyone have an equal chance to:
– be present or represented at the discourse?
– put forth and criticize validity claims about language, facts, norms, and expressions?
Is the method chosen to resolve validity claim redemption dispute consensually chosen before the discourse began?

Discursive Standard Criteria for Competence
<u>Comprehensibility validity claims</u>
– Does everyone have equal access to the sources for commonly agreed-on standards and definitions?
– Do all participants have an understanding of each others' terms, definitions, and concepts?
– Do disputes about definitions, terms, and concepts take advantage of pre-established reference standards?
<u>Truth validity claims</u>
– Does everyone have equal access to available and relevant systematic knowledge about the objective world?
– Does everyone have equal access to available and relevant anecdotal and intuitive knowledge about the objective world?
– Is uncertainty of factual information considered along with content?
– Are factual claims consistent with the prevailing opinion in expert and local knowledge?

– Can participants delegate determinations of factual truth to an outside expert panel?

– Are cognitive legal claims examined by legal experts?

<u>Normative validity claims</u>

– Are there implicit barriers that will bias the distribution of interests that participate?

– Is the affected population identified through objective criteria?

– Are people in the general region permitted to decide for themselves if they are affected?

– Is the discovery and the development of mutual understandings of values among all the participants promoted?

– Are factual implications of normative choices considered in practical discourse?

– Do discourse procedures build compromises and the discovery and development of mutual understandings?

– Are normative choices checked for internal consistency?

– Are normative choices checked against laws?

– Are normative choices checked against present expectations?

<u>Truthfulness validity claims</u>

– Is discussion about the authenticity of the speaker's expressive claims promoted?

– Is an examination into the speakers' sincerity promoted?

– Is an examination into the qualities of the situation promoted?

– Are individuals allotted enough time to accurately state and defend their expressive claims?

– Is the scheme used to translate expressive validity claims into regulative or constantive ones acceptable to everyone?

<u>Overarching rules</u>

– Are misunderstandings reduced before reaching for agreement?

– Is the decision as to which validity claims are redeemed by the group made using a technique that was consensually preapproved?

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Online Identities in Politics.
Technological and Content-Based Approach

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Abstract. In this study, we examine a particular form of organizational identity, the issue of political organizational identity. We have chosen a technology and content-based approach and are looking for the answer to how technology influences identity formation, what role social media plays in shaping online political communities, and what characterizes a definable and strong online political identity. The impact of new communication technologies and media platforms has now reached all levels of society. It has influenced many aspects of everyday life, transformed politics, the economy, and culture, and has an impact on institutional identities as well. To identify the forces shaping institutional identity, we examine the role of digitalization, network technologies, and algorithms and the presence of social media and, finally, bring the *Occupy Wall Street* movement as an example of reshaping online identities.

Keywords: online identities, social media, political communication, OWSM

1. Introduction

On 28 October 2021, Mark Zuckerberg, the CEO of Facebook, introduced Meta, a new idea which will focus on bringing the metaverse to life and on helping people connect, find communities, and grow businesses in a virtual (meta-)environment. The metaverse is an extended version of today's online social experiences, now extended to three dimensions and projected into the physical world. It will allow users to share immersive experiences with other users, even when they cannot be together. If the venture is successful, individual identities will multiply in the future, and the physical world will be augmented by (a) digital one(s). Therefore, we do not have to wait long for the extended identities predicted in science fiction

movies. In our study, we will explore the path to the digital identity of the present and how this identity has been captured and/or taken hostage by politics through social media. The digital identity we are exploring was born in the information society.

Manuel Castells examined economic and cultural changes in the information society environment in the light of the relationship between individuals and the dynamics of virtual communities, and his works are used as a reference point. He was not, of course, the only author to investigate the interaction between the Internet and culture and society at the global level, David Bell (2001) identifying new types of cultural practices and community-forming causes. The digital personality (identity) is rooted in Internet culture, which is already following new patterns of behaviour and leaving a digital footprint in the world. This personality now moves much more easily within vertical than horizontal structures and finds it difficult to recognize itself in the context of traditional institutions and structures, thus requiring a specific approach. In addition to the disappearance of gatekeepers, we are also witnessing a counter-process, an attempt at total control and regulation. This control is taking place at the level of government, corporations, the arts, and the public sphere, and it is increasingly being seen alongside issues of freedom of expression and freedom of the press (Lessig, 2008; Goldsmith–Wu, 2006).

2. The Power of Identity in the Online World

According to Castells (2011), in the information society, power is distributed in a way similar to the nature of the Internet. Castells argues that identity has a prominent role in anchoring the meaning. Power lies in the digital codes of information rather than in the classical centres of power, and as these codes are constantly changing, the nature of power becomes increasingly unstable. In our view, the same can be said of identities. Seen through the lens of digital code, personal identities are increasingly reduced to the digital footprint of users, while organizational identities are shaped by the world of social media, the community of users, and the will of algorithms.

3. The Impact of Being Digital

Let us look at the domain of online identity, the Internet and its social impact. György Csepeli and Gergő Prazsák summarize the changes triggered by the Internet as follows: identities are multiplying, global presence is spreading, and social processes are moving to the Internet. As a result of the convergence of spheres of life, the fields of private, public, business, political, cultural, and even religious

are converging. At the same time, the boundaries of the self are blurring, the contours of groups are fading, grassroots organizations are becoming dominant, and a new public sphere is emerging (Csepeli–Prazsák, 2013). This new technological paradigm has also brought a spatial rearrangement with the emergence of virtual space and an immediate struggle by organizations to occupy it. At the level of the individual, this means that from the 2000s onwards, the daily life of more and more citizens has become a series of online actions. Its pace was first dictated by e-mails and nowadays mostly by messages from real-time chats and social media to smart device notifications. The Internet has shrunk distances, and in this new world communities are global rather than local, with technological links rather than geographical ones connecting members. At the organizational level, too, the creation of online identities has begun. The idea is that the organization (government, political party, corporation, church) most successful in promoting its own narrative will be able to dominate the online space. The rivalry between the United States and Russia in 2021 can also be identified in the struggle between the online identities of the two presidents.

In order to successfully undertake a study of online identity, let us first look at the changes caused by digitalization and networking. The term "creative disruptive technology" is used to describe the potential for increased information flows and data processing in the ecosystem composed of infocommunications technology, digital content, computer networks, and interactive platforms. Creative disruption through digitalization is bringing about the emergence of methods, solutions, and practices that redefine past traditions in the economic, social, cultural, and political subsystems.[2] A new type of lies, the deep fake puts disinformation at the heart of political communication, while the most popular online video service, Netflix, has become a storyteller capable of taking any ideology to the farthest corners of the world, with users paying for it. In the process of creative disruption, digital technology has reinforced different aspects of existing practices. These include accelerated and instantaneous access, algorithm-driven content dispersion, and a highly efficient and extensive online system of recommendation based on community members.

The impact of new communication technologies and media platforms has now penetrated all levels of society. It has reshaped politics, the economy and culture, institutions, families, and individual identities (Krajcsi, 2000). The changes have brought many benefits to those who possess the rich repository of information literacy – the citizens of the information society –, but not all individuals benefit equally. In the present, the unequal use of ICTs and unequal access to opportunities excludes more than ever before many people from taking advantage of the benefits that flow from the application of new technologies in many areas of social life

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2   Digitalization is also having a significant impact on the sciences – see natural sciences (Horváth et al., 2010; Ruszkai et al., 2021).

(Mancinelli, 2008). When the Internet entered everyday life in the 1990s, previously unknown members of society began to communicate intensively online. This communication was often based on shared interests and a commitment to certain topics and ideas. Personal relationships in the physical world were joined by online virtual communities brought to life by networking. As Szilárd Molnár points out, the study of the process whereby personal relationships are being increasingly marginalized in modern societies and the significance of the primary communities based on them (family, neighbours, friends) is gradually declining plays a decisive role in the history of sociological thought (Molnár, 2007). Reliability, credibility or the lack of it, the role of human–machine communication, and the transformation of physiological needs have come to the foreground. At the bottom of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Internet access and smartphone use appeared, the problem of processing information overload became a problem to be solved, the always online state became a new way of life, and the issue of free access to information came into focus. The real power used to lie not only in the possession of information but also in the cultural codes embedded in the network and in the knowledge of these codes, but in the present it lies in online identities, the narratives associated with them, and the stories told to construct them.

The social movements of the 1990s and the 2000s began to actively and effectively use the tools of online communication, digital media, and networking. Like social and cultural systems, movements built horizontal relationships between autonomous individuals, later groups, communities, and, finally, organizations. Movements have been organized through mailing lists, websites, and collaborative networking technologies and from the mid-2000s onwards through social media (see Occupy Wall Street). The distributed or decentralized networks that emerged often overlapped, reaching users from different social backgrounds and connecting them across continents around common ideologies, causes, or issues.

4. The Impact of Technology on Online Identities

Algorithms have been optimizing socially embedded processes for decades only to come to the fore in the context of social media. Recipes used in cooking are as much algorithms as mathematical equations or musical sheets. Computer code is an algorithm, YouTube's recommendation system is an algorithm, even artificial intelligence itself is an algorithm. As such, current developments in artificial intelligence go beyond traditional algorithms and are now self-programming systems. Systems – machines – are now capable of self-learning. Algorithms can answer mathematical problems, save lives and money, show the way out of heavy traffic, help reduce hate speech, and display the content that users find most compelling. While all of this happened invisibly in the past, the spread of

digitalization – reaching critical mass – has raised questions about the extent to which the world, society, and human destinies within it are governed by algorithms.

Algorithms are creating new centres of power in social media. Power is now in the hands of those who not only have the information but can process it and recognize patterns in the chaotic flood of data. At the same time, algorithms allow political organizations to tailor their online identity to the individual preferences of their users. YouTube's recommendation system is also based on individual behaviour. The algorithm looks at what a user watched in the past and what other users in the same category watch. Categories, hashtags (#), and keywords also play a role in recommended content on social media. Social media algorithms treat engagement (in terms of likes, comments, and shares) as a kind of snowball effect. That is, the more engagement a content receives, the more likely the algorithm is to reward it and show it to more users, but algorithms can also categorize users to show the element of a political organization's online identity that they believe is positive for users.

There is a special link between artificial intelligence and politics. The impact of new technologies on politics is already being felt. The Internet and social media forums, which were expected to increase freedom, are opening up a wide window of opportunity for attacks on democracy.

Social media has become a new battleground for political conflict and thus for political identities. In the current social media space, harmful and manipulative political content is spreading faster and more widely than ever before. This is particularly evident in the use of political memes. In political communication, memes are multimedia content designed to politically engage an internal group and/ or antagonize an external group, and they are primarily distributed via social media.

5. The Public Sphere and Online Political Identities

The public sphere is traditionally defined as the intermediary between society (its constituent citizens) and the state. The modern civic public sphere is generally defined as the totality of citizens in a society and as an institutionalized social space in which citizens exercise freedom of assembly, association, and expression while attempting to control political institutions (Habermas, 1962). In modern civil states, the public sphere is also the basis for social communication. Political organizations with online presence can offer a successful alternative to currently dominant forms of power, including global markets, international institutions, and states. The Internet and new forms of social media have radically changed the structure and ways of social communication. The public sphere has thus become much broader than before, with new topics, ways of speaking, and speakers emerging in the online environment.

In social media, two-way, decentralized communication, essentially independent of time and space, allows for the empowerment of opinions and voices that have been marginalized in traditional mass media and for the weakening of previously established power structures. First forums, then blogs and video sharing, and, finally, social networking sites allow for more intense debate than ever before on issues of importance to small groups of individuals. The very nature of the public sphere means that participants raise issues that they feel are important to the community and try to exchange views publicly. Ideally, the number of participants in such debates is unlimited, and anyone can take part in the discussion. The desirable condition is that everyone has access to the public discourse and that participation is not linked to status or position. Participation in the debate should not be subject to technical constraints and should not require special expertise. In this way, public communication is a mutual interaction of all citizens in an understandable linguistic environment. Access to smartphones by almost all members of society also ensures access to the public sphere to a significant extent. The low technical threshold allows people from different groups in society to participate in discussions, but users with similar opinions exclude other opinions from their environment, thus living in echo chambers or opinion bubbles. The idea of an opinion bubble is closely rooted in the media theory of selective perception and retention, according to which individuals favour news sources that reinforce their own opinions and exclude or delay the reception of news that contradict them. Social media, like much of the Internet, reinforces users' pre-existing opinions and political views by essentially surrounding themselves online (by joining communities) with a series of bans on individuals who think similarly to them. Users often delete, ban, or mute friends on Facebook whose (political) content they disagree with. Basically, they are building a big bubble around themselves on the Internet, the cortex of which Facebook is slowly cementing. A machine algorithm monitors the likes that users give out, and the system recommends in advance content they like. The site thus traps individuals in a bubble of opinions, because after a while all they see is a confirmation of their own thoughts and beliefs.

Social media platforms provide direct access to an unprecedented amount of content. Originally designed to entertain users, these platforms have changed the way information is disseminated. Indeed, algorithms mediate and influence content promotion based on users' preferences and attitudes. This paradigm shift has had an impact on the construction of social perceptions and the framing of narratives; it can influence policy making, political communication, and the evolution of public debates. Indeed, online users tend to favour information that aligns with their worldview, ignore divergent information, and form polarized groups around common narratives. Furthermore, when the degree of polarization is high, misinformation and fake news spread rapidly.

6. Building an Online Identity

For political organizations, consistency, a unique voice and style, a strong and distinctive appearance that can be differentiated from the rest are important for building up an effective online political identity. The definition of an online identity should take into account the topic that can be associated with the organization and the level at which the organization is active (local, regional, or global). An organization's online presence can never be an end in itself, so it is necessary to define its objectives (raising awareness, generating constructive debate, promoting results and good practices, solving problems, amplifying inaudible voices). It is also necessary to decide who the target audience for the communication is. The target depends on the content, style, and tone of the communication, which will make up the organization's online identity. The media in general, and social media in particular, are characterized by an overabundance of information and an overwhelming supply of information. Originality is achieved through an original style, a provocative but not offensive tone, a unique vision, and an unconventional approach. If the content (user-generated content – UGC) is highly experience-rich, the algorithms will rank it first. Experientiality is high when the community spends a lot of time on a post and engages in activity.

Since 2010, social media influencers have also been activists. An influencer is a content creator who has become an opinion leader on social media (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, TikTok), able to influence the actions of the community around him/her in the material world, for example, to engage in political activism. An influencer needs to gain and keep the trust of the community, and this is facilitated by their continued presence, credibility, and consistency in advocating for specific issues and causes. High-impact influencers reach a large number of users with their own content: text posts, pictures, videos, blog and vlog posts. A political organization can also build its identity effectively from the narrative created by its community of influencers.

Social media is all about communication, interaction, and immediacy, as well as a broad horizon of information. For a blogger, vlogger, or influencer, belonging to a political organization, immediacy means keeping up with the comments of their community, reacting to a high-profile event. Authenticity means not publishing false information, not producing fake news, as this is the only way to expose it. Experiential means that the followers, who over time form a community, enjoy reading the posts. This is achieved by evoking emotions. The timing and reception varies between platforms, with Facebook generally being used after work, Instagram being followed at basically any time of the day because of the short messages, YouTube videos requiring audio, and blogs being a longer form of entertainment.

In these communities, there are strong and weak relationships. Strongly interacting people form self-contained, closed groups, islands, networked by

weak ties. According to Paul Lazarsfeld's research in the 1940s, traditional mass communication cannot directly influence people's opinions because they discuss what they see on TV and what they read in the newspapers, so there are two stages of influence (Lazarsfeld, 1948). People basically listen to the opinions of those around them. However, in social media, even strangers with weak connections can influence each other – hence the influencing power of influencers.

7. The Example of the *Occupy Wall Street* Movement

The OCCUPY WALL STREET! (OWSM) started in New York in 2011. In addition to occupying the street that is home to banks and investors, protesters also occupied the virtual space. The protests proved that social networking sites are becoming a new tool for forming online communities. The main reason for this is that they are less under the control of the mainstream media, as they are mostly produced by private individuals rather than professionals, and they require much less financial investment than professional press.

One of the immediate precedents of the Occupy Wall Street movement is the resentment that has been building up among citizens that the financial crisis of 2008 – although it had a major impact on society – has provoked relatively little protest. While investment bankers enjoyed unprecedented profits and bonuses, they continued to receive substantial support from the US government even after the collapse of the system. Seeing the failure of consolidation and the rise to even higher positions of those who caused the crisis, some US citizens began to protest. This led first to the occupation of Wall Street and later to the occupation of New York and other major cities. Occupy Wall Street was a movement of unexpected, often humorous solutions that briefly transformed the US public sphere and reshaped the digital view of politics (Conover et al., 2013). The rapid spread of messages on Twitter allowed the movement to quickly build a physically dispersed, networked counter-public that could articulate its critique of power outside the traditional media (Penney–Dadas, 2014).

The movements of the 1990s and 2000s began to actively use the tools of online media, networking, and online identity. Like social and cultural systems, movements built horizontal relationships between autonomous individuals and later groups and communities. The flow of information became freer and the democratic debate in the online space allowed members of online communities to participate in decisions. In this new cultural, social, and technological paradigm, individuals often made sense of the world around them through communication with others. Movements were organized through mailing lists, websites, and collaborative networking technologies (and, from the mid-2000s, social media). The resulting distributed or decentralized networks often overlapped, reaching and

connecting users from different social strata across continents. Although mailing lists are still an effective tool today, three social media platforms – Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter – have become the primary channels of communication. In contrast to mailing lists, which provide interaction for closed groups, social media is used by activists to deliver short messages while being able to transmit information and links quickly, cheaply, and very efficiently. The six-step distance and the viral nature of news dissemination help them to do this (Juris, 2012). With the emergence of new types of global activism, online media technologies have played a significant role in the dynamics of these movements. During the 1999 protests against the WTO in Seattle, everyday observers noticed that participants were using mailing lists, websites, and mobile phones to organize very effectively. The Occupy Wall Street movement spread to hundreds of locations around the physical world, made possible by social media campaigns. In addition to a central Facebook page, users created more than 400 individual profiles to spread the movement across the US, including each state's own page. More than 170,000 active users participated in the campaign, and posts about the occupation received more than 1.4 million likes (Caren–Gabi, 2011).

8. Closing Remarks

Online identity and popularity are linked, as people like to follow those who espouse certain ideas, styles, or attitudes. Authenticity is an element of online identity, which is why the spread of false information and fake news, inappropriate debate, and the use of fake profiles are a constant threat to an online identity. Personal relationships in the real world have been joined by online communities brought to life by networking.

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Cite as:

Measuring Reactance to Camcorder Symbols Linked to Online News

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Abstract. The aim of the study is to test the validity of a short-scale measuring reactance to a camera symbol associated with online news, indicating the possibility of viewing video footage. The operationalization of reactance means a mixture of anger and negative cognitions preceded by the sense of danger of losing one's freedom (Reynolds-Tylus, 2019). As the brief reactance scale elaborated by Hall and colleagues (2017) contains these elements, we assumed that it would constitute the appropriate basis for the elaboration of further brief reactance scales. Thus, we elaborated a brief reactance scale adequate for measuring reactance to camcorder symbols linked to online news. Data collection took place among the students of Sapientia University (Romania). For analysing the adequacy of the scale, we used confirmatory factor analysis, reliability analysis, and convergent validity analysis. We also checked to what extent the elaborated measuring tool could predict the avoidance of news linked with camcorder symbols. The results of this analysis show that in the case of people with high reactance to camcorder symbols, the increase of reactance leads to these people choosing less and less news linked with camcorder symbols. All these prove that despite its limitations the scale constitutes an adequate tool for the measuring of reactance to camcorder symbols.

Keywords: reactance scale, online news, camcorder symbols

1. Introduction

Different signs (photographs, symbols, etc.) linked to online news serve as a kind of bait to guide readers' attention (Sargent, 2007; Kósa et al., 2020). Their thoughtless and frivolous use can lead to an overestimation of the importance of news topics (Zillmann–Gibson–Sargent, 1999; Knobloch–Hastall–Zillmann–Callison, 2003). Journalistic cues, such as layout features, design elements, or cues to the importance of the news, can even have an agenda-setting function for online news (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2015) described by Stoyceff and her colleagues as agenda cueing (2017). Cues reflecting the importance of the news, such as prominent headlines, highlighting with larger print, photo illustrations, symbols, viewership indicators, etc., facilitate selective reading and sorting (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2015). Despite the impact of these signs and journalistic cues in point, it may happen that they will have the exact opposite effect due to resistance to persuasion. In the relevant literature, this phenomenon is called reactance (Brehm–Brehm, 1981). The general aim of our research was to find out whether these attention-grabbing signs / journalistic cues trigger reactance from readers browsing the news. Results of earlier studies conducted among university students (Kósa et al., 2020; Ambrus–Kósa–Zsigmond, 2010) have shown that certain groups specifically avoid news linked with camcorder symbols.

Starting out from the above, our research investigated the effect on reactance of one of these journalistic cues, the camera symbol – which indicates the possibility of visualization of video content – placed next to the news with high and low utility,[1] and examined the validity of the short reactance scale created by the authors of the present paper.

2. The Concept and Measurement of Reactance

Conceptualizing reactance is linked to Brehm's research (1966), who analysed the reasons why people often did the opposite of what was expected of them or of what regulations dictated. According to him, if people are limited in their freedom of behaviour, and even if the chance of such limitations occurs, the desire awakens in them to regain that freedom. This is called psychological reactance (qtd. in Brehm–Brehm, 1981). Reactance, of course, does not occur every time, but only when the individual feels that in certain cases s/he would have the freedom of

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1 Knobloch-Westerwick and colleagues developed the model of utility, the Informational Utility Model (IUM) (Knobloch–Dillman Carpentier–Zillmann, 2003; Knobloch–Zillmann–Gibson–Karrh, 2002; Knobloch-Westerwick–Dillman Carpentier–Blumhoff–Nickel, 2005). Our current research is based on the IUM, indicating a single person's utility at a given moment. The conceptualization of its four dimensions – *magnitude, likelihood, immediacy, and efficacy* – enables the measuring of perceived threats and the opportunities carried by the messages (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015).

choice. The strength of reactance also depends on the importance of the situation: in the case of limiting less important choices, reactance is less strong than in the case of alternatives of a higher importance. Furthermore, it also depends on whether the limitation of freedom is total or only partial: obviously, reactance will be less strong when the limitation of freedom is only partial. Finally, the strength of reactance grows if the given limitation implicitly entails the possibility of further limitations (Brehm–Brehm, 1981).

Although according to the researchers developing this theory reactance cannot be measured (Brehm–Brehm, 1981), many experiments have been made in this sense. Among these, we need to mention the research done by Dillard and Shen (2005), who distinguished between four different alternatives in the course of the operationalization of reactance. According to them, the first approaches defined reactance as a purely cognitive phenomenon that can be used well in the course of explaining thought suppression. This is the so-called single-process cognitive model. An example of this would be the research conducted by Kelly and Nauta (1997), who proved that people with high levels of reactance, if instructed to suppress their thoughts, are less able to control their thoughts than those asked to express their thoughts. Unfavourable thoughts, thus, are part of reactance.

According to Dillard and Shen (2005), another group of authors think that reactance can be fully, or at least partially, described as an emotion. Thus, reactance is a motivational state that resembles certain levels of anger and annoyance. From the perspective of the single-process affective model, reactance can be operationalized in different ways, but in any case it will show the different levels of the emotion on the subjective scale of respondents. This approach characterizes the research of Selzer (1983) or that of White and Zimbardo (1980).

Further, according to Dillard and Shen (2005), in the case of the third logical approach, reactance should be perceived as the set of emotional and cognitive responses. Research belonging to this group used the parallel process model elaborated by Leventhal (1970) and the extended parallel process model developed by Witte (1992) for the analysis of the efficiency of social advertising (for ex. Dillard–Peck, 2001 or Stephenson, 2003), and they were not specifically studying reactance. According to the model, cognitive and emotional processing occur in parallel during the processing of frightening messages. Thus, this has been defined as the dual-process cognitive-affective model.

Finally, according to the fourth approach defined by Dillard and Shen (2015), reactance contains both cognitive and affective aspects, but, as compared to the previous approach, which differentiates these two effects, cognition and affect are intertwined within this model. According to their results, reactance should be perceived as the blend of anger and negative perceptions. The raison d'être of the intertwined cognitive-affective model has been proven by several studies – for ex. Quick (2011) or Rains and Turner (2007). The latter researchers have not

only tested but also enlarged the model, elaborating the linear affective-cognitive model. Their results have also sustained the intertwined cognitive-affective model.

This has been completed by Quick and his colleagues (Quick–Considine, 2008; Quick–Stephenson, 2008), who maintain that any situation of dissatisfaction can result in anger and negative perceptions, and thus for reactance to occur, a threat of losing freedom needs to be perceived.

3. Measuring Reactance to Health Warnings

Measuring reactance is especially important when talking about social advertising with healthcare content, given that their aim is to encourage consumers towards a healthier behaviour. Though the positive aspect of these items of advertising is hard to question, reactance often occurs in these cases as well.[2] For its measurement, Hall and his colleagues (2017) elaborated the so-called brief measure of reactance to health warnings. Starting out from the large literature that contains the earlier mentioned extended parallel process model (Witte, 1992) and Quick-Stephenson's (2008) two-phase model, the authors define reactance as a cognitive and affective reaction to a message that entails not only the possibility of losing one's freedom but also the emotion felt against the message and the counter-argument that rejects or invalidates the message. Based on this definition, Hall (2016) developed the reactance scale to health warnings within the context of images portrayed on cigarette packages. Later on, Hall and his colleagues (2017) elaborated a brief reactance scale as well, which does not only refer to images shown on cigarette packages but measures reactance to health warnings in general. This brief reactance scale contains the following three statements: "This warning is trying to manipulate me." "The health effect on this warning is overblown." "This warning annoys me" (Hall et al., 2017). The first statement of this brief reactance scale refers to the perception of loss of freedom (manipulation), the second one is the negative affective response (anger) to the situation, and the third one is the negative cognitive response to the possibility of limitation. Thus, we hypothesise that reactance to camcorder symbols linked to online news may be measured in a similar manner. We phrased three statements that would reflect cognitive and affective resistance to camcorder symbols but also the threat to freedom of choice. These are the following: "Camcorder symbols linked to news are meant to manipulate me" (perception of losing one's freedom). "Camcorder symbols are only meant to get more clicks" (rejecting the importance of camcorder symbols). "Camcorder symbols linked to news annoy me" (expression of emotion towards camcorder symbols). The study aims to examine the validity of this brief reactance scale. The novelty of the

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2   A study by Reynolds and Tylus (2009) provides a comprehensive description of research done in the field of reactance to convincing health communication.

approach lies in the fact that it extends reactance to health warnings to reactance to camcorder symbols linked to online news. The method also fulfils the growing demand for brief scales as well (Ziegler et al., 2014; Sandy et al., 2017).

4. Methodology

Presentation of the Sample

The subjects of our study were the BA and MA students of the Miercurea Ciuc and Târgu-Mureş campuses of Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania (Romania). In order to prevent the spread of impacts – the so-called "contamination" (Babbie, 1996: 264) –, the data collection took place over two days: 12–13 May 2021. The portal created with the purpose of this research was visited by 649 people in the course of the two days, while the survey was completed by 432 people. In the case of 34 of the respondents, data with reference to reading news were missing, wherefore they had to be left out of the research. Thus, the final database contained data with reference to 398 students.

Research Design

Data collection took place in a quasi-experimental set-up with a control group. After receiving an offer of taking part in the research, the participants accessed the portal created by the research group,[3] where they were randomly assigned to the research or the control groups. The advantage of random assignment is that the research and the control groups have similar compositions; however, a further important aspect was that random selection constitutes an important precondition of the majority of statistical procedures used for the evaluation of research results (Babbie, 1996: 260). People assigned to the research group were first asked to read through news headlines with and without camcorder symbols (*Table 1*), clicking on news that interested them. People in the control group only saw news headlines without camcorder symbols. In the case of both groups, news items were arranged in a random order on the portal.

When accessing the portal, we reminded respondents that they would not have time to read all the articles, so they should start with the news that is most important to them. Time spent on reading given news items was recorded by a computer program. Two minutes[4] were allotted to the reading of news, after which people involved in the research filled in an online questionnaire.

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3   When setting up the portal, we tried to create a site that resembled a real portal both in its name (youth-index.ro) and in its appearance. Thus, we also attached a photograph to each news item.
4   The duration was set after the test run, so that there was not enough time to read each news item.

Table 1. *Arrangement of news for the experimental and control groups*

1. Experimental group (news with camcorder symbols)	2. Control group (no news with camcorder symbols)
🔲Positive news with high utility	Positive news with high utility
🔲Negative news with high utility	Negative news with high utility
Positive news with high utility	Positive news with high utility
Negative news with high utility	Negative news with high utility
Positive news with low utility	Positive news with low utility
Negative news with low utility	Negative news with low utility
🔲 Positive news with low utility	Positive news with low utility
🔲 Negative news with low utility	Negative news with low utility
Distracting news item	Distracting news item
Distracting news item	Distracting news item

Measuring Tools

Although Brehm (1966) originally defined reactance as a psychological state, he did not rule out the possibility of individual differences when it came to reactions to the threat of losing one's freedom. In his later work (Brehm–Brehm, 1981), he already defines reactance as an individual variable. On the basis of research, it became more and more clear that individuals differ according to their inclination to reactance, and thus measuring reactance as a feature was elaborated. One of the best-known tools for this is the psychological reactance scale elaborated by Hong and Page (1989) and further developed by Hong (1992). In our research, we relied on a refined version of this scale that contained 11 items (Hong–Faedda, 1996), given that research results have shown its adequacy for measuring reactance (for ex. Shen–Dillard, 2005) among young people as well (Moreira–Cunha–Inmand, 2020). This measurement tool has been used by many researchers, for example for the measurement of individual reactance by Quick and Stephenson (2008).

The adaptation of the scale to Hungarian language took place in accordance with the usual two-step process: the statements of the original scale were first translated into Hungarian, and later these were translated back into English. Statements translated from Hungarian to English corresponded to the content of the original English scale. Participants in the research could express their opinion about these statements through a five-point Likert scale, where 1 meant "I do not agree at all", while 5 meant "I agree completely".

In the case of the tool elaborated for measuring reactance to camcorder symbols, responses were also recorded on a five-point Likert scale.

5. Results

All respondents were students of Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania. There was a slight majority (57.8%) of women, while considering the type of settlement the number of those living in villages (53.0%) was almost the same as the number of those living in cities (47.0%). The youngest respondent was 19 years old, and the average age of the respondents was 22 years.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

In the case of the three items we had phrased and in analysing assumed reactance to camcorder symbols, we first performed confirmatory factor analysis with the help of the IBM SPSS for the AMOS 26 Graphics program. The results of this factor analysis show a strong (in the case of two statements) or medium (in the case of one statement) relation between the items and the assumed latent variable (Reactance) (*Figure 1*). But the model that we have elaborated is just-identified,[5] and thus there is no possibility for testing the fitting of the model given that in such cases the model fits the data by definition (Münnich–Hidegkúti, 2012).
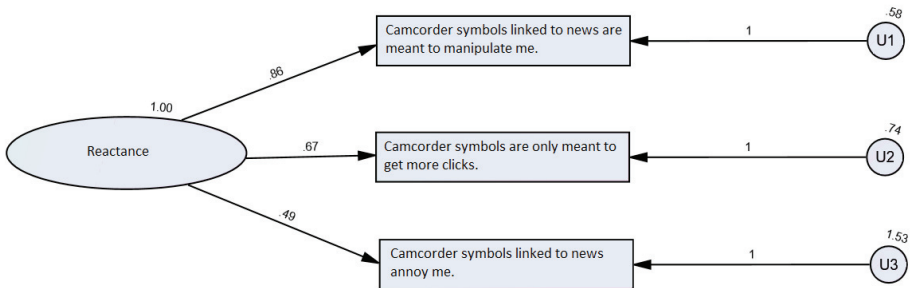

Figure 1. *Results of the confirmatory factor analysis*

Reliability

We checked the reliability of our measuring tool first with Cronbach's alpha indicator. The consistency of the three items measured on the scale that we elaborated was 0.57 ($\alpha = .57$), which means an acceptable internal consistency, especially if we consider that the value of Cronbach's alpha depends on the number of items. Due to the low number of items, we also checked internal consistency with

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5   If the number of free parameters is the same as the number of individual elements of the covariance matrix (qx(q-1)/2), we talk about a just-identified model (Bollen, 1989).

the Spearman–Brown correction given that in the case of a low number of items this is more acceptable (Eisinga et al., 2013). The two test spheres were created by the random split of items. The value of the Spearman–Brown correction was 0.64 (r_{SB} = .64), which is slightly higher than the Cronbach's alpha.

For further checking reliability, we also used McDonald's omega[6] reliability indicator, the value of which was 0.58, which in our opinion shows moderate reliability. According to Kjell and Diener (2021), a Cronbach alpha higher than 0.5 and a McDonald's omega higher than 0.7 shows good internal consistency.

The acceptable level of reliability is not consistent, but it depends on what we are measuring. In the case of features that are more stable in time, we can rightfully expect higher values of reliability (Nagybányai Nagy, 2006a). As opposed to this, for example, in the case of attitude scales, according to Horváth (1997), Cronbach's alpha of 0.5 is also acceptable (qtd. in Nagybányai Nagy, 2006). Based on all this, we consider that the reliability of the scale is acceptable.

Convergent Validity

For checking the convergent validity of the brief reactance scale to camcorder symbols linked to online news – similarly to Kim and colleagues (2020) –, we used the Hong reactance scale (Hong–Faedda, 1996) containing 11 items. Our results show that the relation between the brief reactance scale that we elaborated and the Hong reactance scale is significant ($p = 0.01$), but it is characterized by weak correlation ($r = 0.33$). This result can be considered acceptable since when measuring convergent validity not only do we not expect perfect correlation but we do not even consider a high correlation to be a good result, as that would mean that the two instruments measure the same thing (Nagybányai Nagy, 2006b).

Predictive Validity

We also examined to what extent the brief reactance scale elaborated by us is able to predict the avoidance of online news with camcorder symbols.

As we aimed to keep our variables continuous, we created the independent variable involved in the following way: we sorted the ascending scores of the variable of the reactance scores, and then, after calculating the mean, we marked the value of both one SD below the mean and one SD above the mean. Thus, we created a new nominal variable in the following column, with three levels, but taking into account the normal distribution of the scores when dividing it. We labelled them as follows: 1) those who had low scores on the camcorder reactance scale, 2) those who had average scores on the scale, and 3) those whose scores began from the value of M + 1 SD. We ran a linear regression in SPSS to test the effect of the Camcorder_Reactance with a three-level predictor on the selection

of headlines with the camcorder, using commands as follows: Graph→Legacy Dialog→Simple Scatter→Define→Set Markers by. In the case of people with high reactance in the research group, we observed a typical behaviour pattern, and we were able to identify a weak correlation: with the growth of their reactance to camcorder symbols, they chose less and less news with camcorder symbols ($R^2 = 0.044$, $r = 0.21$; see *Figure 2*).
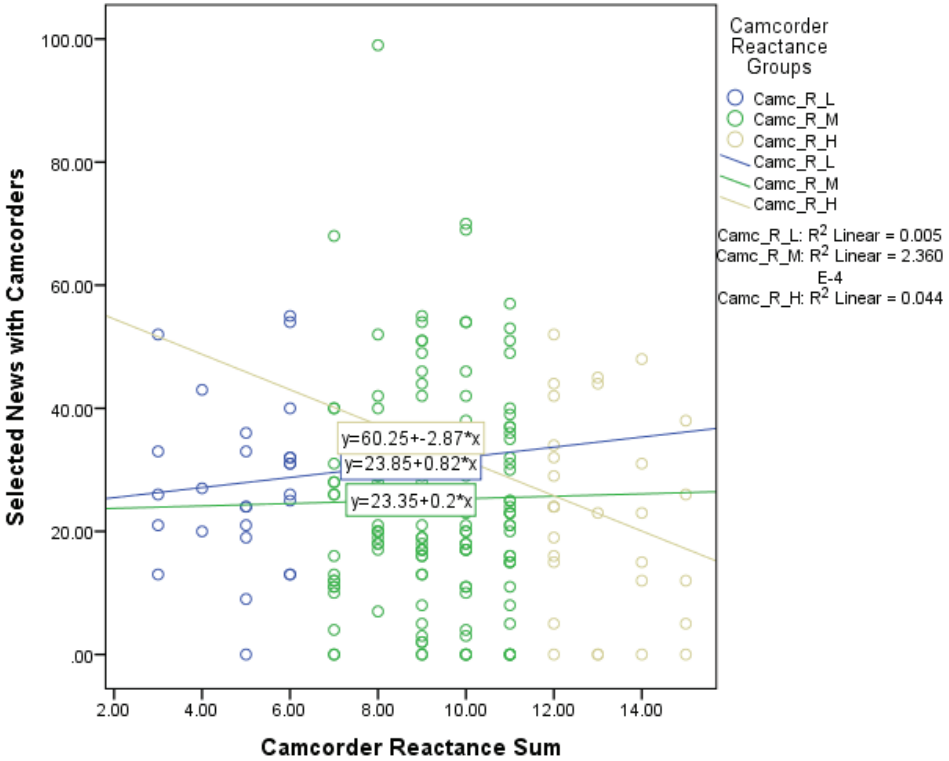

Figure 2. *Respondents' growing reactance to the camcorder symbol leads to selecting less news featuring it*

6. Discussion

The general aim of our research was to examine whether the attention-grabbing signs / journalistic cues trigger reactance from readers browsing the news. Involving several factors – such as dominant information-processing style, utility of message, priming, and results of earlier studies conducted among university students (Kósa et al., 2020) – has shown that certain groups specifically avoid news linked with

camcorder symbols – namely, respondents high on both scales, with average scores on the verbal scale, and low on visual scale.

Starting out from the above, our research investigated the effect on reactance of the camera symbol next to the headlines and examined the validity of the short reactance scale created by the authors of the present paper.

The results show that in the case of people with high reactance to camcorder symbols, the increase of reactance leads to these people choosing less and less news linked with camcorder symbols. Despite its limitations, the scale constitutes an adequate tool for the measuring of reactance to camcorder symbols.

Although avoidance of news with a journalistic cue – in our case with camcorder symbol – has been demonstrated three times among certain groups of students (Kósa et al., 2020; Ambrus–Kósa–Zsigmond, 2010), as to our knowledge, the role of reactance in such a process has not been investigated so far. At the same time, we suppose that some of the other journalistic cues – symbols, videos, photos, indicators, etc. – could cause avoidance in the same or similar context.

7. Conclusions

The present study's aim was to elaborate a brief reactance scale to camcorder symbols linked to online news. We based our scale on the statements of the brief reactance scale to health warnings elaborated by Hall and his colleagues (2017). According to the confirmatory factor analysis, the relationship between the three statements of the scale and reactance to camcorder symbols is medium or strong. We checked the reliability of the measuring tool on the basis of three factors: Cronbach's alpha, the Spearman–Brown indicator, and McDonald's omega. The first two showed relatively high reliability, but McDonald' omega showed moderate reliability. There is a significant, weaker-than-medium relation between the measuring tool and the Hong reactance scale, which we considered acceptable from the perspective of convergent validity.

The analysis of predictive validity showed that the reactance scale we elaborated was able to predict the avoidance of online news with camcorder symbols in the case of people with high camcorder reactance.

The reliability indicators of the brief scale are generally lower than those of the entire scale (Ziegler et al., 2014), but they reveal several advantages (elaborated in detail by Sandy et al., 2017) that make it worth opting for, using them in the course of empirical research. On the basis of all these, we can state that, despite its limitations, the elaborated scale can be used effectively in the measuring of reactance to camcorder symbols linked to online news.

8. Limitations of the Research and Possibilities for Further Studies

The most important limitation of the research is the fact that the elaborated measuring tool is limited to the measuring of reactance to one symbol only. In the course of further research, it would be worth applying the elaborated reactance scale together with other symbols as well. Collection of data took place only among university students, which limits the possibility of generalization. Further research with a more varied population would increase the possibility of generalizing results.

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Cite as:

The Social Media Communication
of Hungarian County Seats:
Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube Presence

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Abstract. The communication toolkit of urban marketing has changed significantly in recent years, with online solutions and social media becoming the focus of attention besides (and, in a way, instead of) classic offline tools. In our study, we explore how this toolkit can be effectively applied to cities and how cities should communicate through different platforms. For this purpose, we have created a kind of social media tutorial regarding Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. In our own primary research, we used data from the first quarter of 2021 to investigate the presence of Hungarian county seats on the abovementioned three platforms. For this purpose, in addition to the usual social media data, such as page likes, subscribers, number of views, or even the activity rate, we created a much more complex, professional but also – inevitably – somewhat subjective analysis system. It would be also worthwhile for other cities to use this criteria system as a checklist or to adopt good practices from the cities at the top of the list.

Keywords: Hungarian county seats, social media communication, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube

1. The Most Important Social Media Tools
in City Marketing

In the first part of our study, we will briefly analyse the different social media platforms, and then we will discuss the most important information about them in detail. Last but not least, we will show how cities should use the specific tools. In

each subsection, we tried to refer to the characteristics of each platform by using a witty adjective in the title.

1.1 Facebook – "The Online Diary"

Facebook is one of the most important global social media platforms (and, in many ways, the most important one), which has led to a whole new set of user habits (Klausz, 2011: 102).

It has become the third most visited site in the world (with only Google and YouTube ahead), and its mobile interface is the second most downloaded application in the world. According to research data from early 2021, the number of active users per month is currently 2.74 billion out of the 7.64 billion inhabitants of the Earth. Facebook users spend an average of 34 minutes a day browsing the site, liking an average of 12 posts, and clicking on 12 ads per month. The pandemic situation has also influenced Facebook trends, making the site even more popular and resulting in a 50% increase in the number of views of live events such as fitness classes and lectures (Newberry, 2021a).

Facebook is a platform for young people, middle-aged people, and the older generation as well. According to a US survey, 64% of 12–34-year-olds, 74% of 35–54-year-olds, and 52% of 55+ year-olds, meaning 63% of the total population (13 years and over), were regular users in 2020 (Newberry, 2021a).

Now let us look at the possible use of Facebook in the case of cities. If we look at a city's Facebook page, the first thing we are likely to notice is the *cover* and *profile pictures* of the page. You can set a video as the cover image, and the profile picture is usually the logo or coat of arms of the city. The page is then divided into two vertical sections. The main content (about, photos, etc.) and informative data about the community (number of page likes) are displayed on the left, while the *timeline* is displayed on the right – you can navigate between the menu items to change the content displayed at any time. It is important for a city to use as many relevant features as possible, as each gives the user an extra opportunity to get information on the topic. It is very important to fill in the details of the *About* section (e.g. address, phone number, website, other social networking sites), and it is also an opportunity to explain your purpose and story in more detail.

For Facebook pages, it is the quality and content of the published *posts*, photos, and videos that matter most, as this is what users consider in deciding whether or not they are interested in the page, i.e. whether or not they *like* it. According to statistical analysis in 2020, Facebook pages share an average of 1.55 posts per day, 55.6% of which are photos, 22.2% are video creatives, 18.5% are link posts, and 3.6% are plain text content (Newberry, 2021a). However, in addition to increasing the number of page likes, it is also important to pay attention to maintaining the *activity rate* since it is useless for a user to follow a city's page if he or she does

not see any posts or the profile or its administrator does not respond to comments at all. The average activity rate generated by Facebook posts is 0.18%, and below 10,000 page likes it is 0.52%. For video content, the average is 0.26% according to the latest statistics (Newberry, 2021a).

In addition to the timeline, Facebook offers many other options for users. For example, the *Stories* feature (i.e. content available for just 24 hours) is used by an average of 500 million people a day. In addition, one of the most popular services is the *Messenger* messaging platform, which is used by 1.3 billion people – many of whom are not otherwise active on Facebook. Last but not least, there are Facebook *Groups*, used by 1.8 billion users, which provide an excellent opportunity for community building (Newberry, 2021a). For most cities, users create the groups themselves, but it is also worth being present in some form in these, as there are many questions and needs that can be directly explored, and it can be useful to share up-to-date information within the groups.

In the business market, most companies prefer to let experts take care of the day-to-day tasks and employ an agency to produce quality content, as this kind of creativity and expertise is needed to stand out in a saturated market – but this is still not a popular solution for cities, where most things are done in-house rather than outsourced. But content can still be enriched, for example, by publishing *GIFs* (moving or animated content) or *memes* (funny images or videos that spread quickly on platforms) or by running *games and competitions*.

However, a page with perfect content is still not useful if only a few people know that it exists. This is addressed by the platform's *ads manager*, which offers several different features for pages. In Facebook's heyday, it was possible to achieve good results on the platform without paid advertising, that is, only through *organic* (unpaid) promotion. However, the effectiveness of this has been declining in recent years, as existing followers are not necessarily aware of new content any more (mainly due to changes in the algorithm and the increasing amount of content – and, of course, Facebook's business model). Examples of the *types of ads* that can be used include, but are not limited to, *fan-gathering ads* (aimed at attracting new visitors to the page), *highlighting posts* (which can also help to gather reactions), and *ads to promote events or encourage downloading an app*. In addition to these, for those with a website, it can be a useful advertising feature to run *traffic-generating* or *conversion* ads, which can achieve very impressive results. In the latter case, i.e. conversion advertising, the user completes a goal such as making a purchase or downloading something. Examples include advertisements promoting summer concerts in a city, where it only takes a few clicks to buy tickets (in this case, *the conversion goal* is to buy tickets). In addition, the ad manager aggregates the results of the campaigns so that they can be easily analysed and optimized according to different criteria and metrics.

City Marketing Tutorial for Facebook

– Overall, we can say that Facebook is currently an unmissable opportunity for all cities, as it allows them to quickly gain real, relevant page followers with whom they can communicate continuously through the platform. Creating an official page and filling it with content is therefore the first step to a social media presence.

– When planning and designing posts, it is worth bearing in mind the use of content types that can boost activity, such as videos, GIFs, and games.

– Through the page, you can provide content not just for one but almost all of your target groups, even thematically – including local residents, entrepreneurs, NGOs, but also tourists or investors.

– From a long-term strategic point of view, it is easy to show the existing uniform identity by displaying certain permanent elements and colours through the creative content of the page.

– In addition to organic content, it may be also useful to start increasing paid appearances, as Facebook's ad manager can deliver impressive results for a very small budget in terms of activity, page likes, and other conversion goals.

– Along with page management, it is worth exploring existing Facebook groups, and if there are none, an official group can be created.

1.2 Instagram – "The Digital Photo Album"

Instagram was launched in 2010, when the app was only available on iPhone devices. The platform quickly caught on with users because it focuses on visual content rather than text. Therefore, it provides relaxing entertainment with a focus on pictures and videos – usually with short captions although longer captions are now a trend again.

According to data from early 2021, the number of monthly active users had already exceeded 1 billion. In addition, content posted in *stories* are followed by 500 million people a day, making Instagram the sixth most visited website today. The platform's users are mainly young people, spending an average of 30 minutes a day consuming content. The various business pages/profiles publish an average of 1 post per day on the platform (Newberry, 2021b).

In his 2019 work on Instagram marketing, Jack Gary highlights the percentage *of committed users* reached by the platform (those who like, comment, share, or follow the page, i.e. show some *activity* in connection with the content), which he complements by mentioning a research by *Forrester*. It shows that the activity rate on Instagram is 58 times that of Facebook and 120 times that of Twitter (Gary, 2019: 11).

As the platform is dominated by images, *content consumption* is also faster than on Facebook – adapting to the online habits of the younger generation. In addition to the continuous scrolling of images, the platform now offers a range

of other features. These include *stories* (which are displayed by the application for 24 hours), *GIFs* and various *animated stickers*, *voting*, internal *messaging*, *countdown*, etc. Furthermore, you can create *highlights*, which are stories that you do not want to lose after a day, so you can keep them using some sort of grouping (e.g. travel, restaurants, work). You can also give them a name so that everyone understands the basis of sorting. Also, there are applications that let you create a *cover page* with the same style for different groups of Instagram highlights, giving your account a unique identity. Another useful feature is the *live feed*, which appears in the stories but is prominent during the broadcast. The latest feature is *IGTV*, which allows the posting of videos longer than 30 seconds on the platform, making it possible to operate it as a vlog (or video blog).

Instagram can be managed together with Facebook ads *from an advertising perspective*, but in addition to the news feed, there is also the option to appear between stories or to display the same content on both Facebook (including Messenger) and Instagram through an ad. However, *duplicating* content is not recommended, as we are targeting different audiences on different platforms, and it can be boring for those who are present on both platforms to see the same thing.

City Marketing Tutorial for Instagram
– Instagram is a symbol of a new era in our world, which has become an indispensable element of the online presence of cities. With its many features, the platform gives us the opportunity to show the best of your city through images and short videos, both to residents and to external audiences, especially tourists.
– Although Instagram has a high activity rate compared to other platforms, it is still worthwhile to use content types that tend to generate higher activity, such as videos and GIFs.
– Besides sharing posts, it is useful to remember the importance of stories and highlights, where you can share daily updates with your followers, making their connection to the city even more personal.
– Considering aspects of developing the city identity, it is also useful to use certain permanent elements and colours in the posts, stories, and cover pages of the highlights on this platform.
– Consistent use of hashtags is of paramount importance, as unique hashtags can easily spread among users, generating traffic for the city's page, while more popular ones may attract new users to the page.
– In addition to organic content, it is relatively easy to create an ad on Instagram, but only the content can be highlighted in this case. Although there is no direct way to increase the number of followers, it is possible to encourage users through posts with a little creativity to follow you on the platform.

1.3 YouTube – "The TV of the Internet"

The YouTube video sharing platform was launched in 2005 and caught on with users very soon. By 2021, YouTube has become the second most visited website in the world (after Google Search) and the second most popular social media platform (after Facebook). The number of active (logged in) users per month had exceeded 2 billion by the beginning of the year – but it is important to note that the site can also be used without a login. Surveys show that the average time spent on the platform by people aged 18+ is 42 minutes a day (Newberry, 2021c).

It is important to note that anyone can become a *content producer* on the platform, as registration and publishing content is free. In short, the process of creating and sharing a video is as follows: once a topic has been dreamed up, a video can be created in a variety of ways, with infinite variations depending on the imagination and possibilities of the creator. Once the shot is ready, all you need is an eye-catching *title*, *description*, appropriate *tags*, and a selected *index image*, or thumbnail image – the latter is what users see as a home image, so it is a good idea to choose a telling one. That is all it takes to post a video, but the YouTube platform offers much more than that. For example, you can create a so-called *transcript*, which is a very useful option for users to see parts of the video in a table-of-contents-like way, preview the content, and jump directly to the part of the video they are interested in. For those considering not only a one-off share but also a continuous channel, the *closing image* is a great option, which can be displayed in the last 5–20 seconds of videos, regardless of video length. This is therefore a recommendation to the user regarding interesting topics and where to click next.

If you want to run a well-functioning channel, the *Creator Studio* interface provided by YouTube makes it easy to track the growth of the channel and the popularity of different topics through various analytics. The platform really does offer more than traditional television, as it not only produces content but also allows for constant and *mutual communication* with consumers through comments and the building of an active and interested community.

City Marketing Tutorial for YouTube
– It may also be worthwhile for cities to publish videos on different topics, as they can further increase user interest, deepen the relationship they have established, and easily share the published content on other platforms or for advertising purposes.
– Various city events, commemorations, graduations, concerts, or other events may all be excellent topics for video content. Users may also consider image videos for tourists, showing local attractions and places of interest, or they can

produce ones for investors, focusing on the potential of the city, or even videos combining both aspects.

– While the examples above require more preparation, you can also make videos that require less investment and less post-production. This could be an interview with a local celebrity or an online presentation/broadcast of a concert. The possibilities of the platform are endless, limited only by the creativity and financial means of the marketing team.

– In addition to planned video content, you may also want to experiment with live broadcasts, whether it is the mayor's office hours or the coverage of an event.

– Visual identity elements are also useful in this case, for example through the use of index images.

– When publishing content, it is not a good idea to leave out solutions that require less work such as the closing image, the descriptive section, and the transcript.

2. An Examination of the Online Presence of County Seats in Hungary

After getting acquainted with the main characteristics of each social media platform and the arguments for their use by cities, in the next section we will focus on the presence of Hungary's county seats on these platforms.

It is important to note that we have not analysed the county seats in terms of their attractions, culture, economy, or even resources, nor even their city marketing in general. All we were interested in was how much use they make of the listed tools and opportunities of social media communication.

In addition to the usual social media data, such as page likes, subscribers, views, or activity rate, we have also created a much more complex set of criteria. This system is, of course, professionally based, but it is also somewhat subjective, inevitably – however, the scoring system is not subjective, allowing a uniform comparison of social media communication by the county seats.

This analysis is based mostly on yes/no questions, with a negative answer of 0 and a yes answer of 1 (criteria partially met) or 2 (criteria met). In addition, the criteria also include some multi-point items that could not be asked in the form of a yes/no question – for example, the one regarding the frequency of posts. The scores obtained were finally summed up and used to produce a ranking of the cities. Once again, it is important to stress that all these preference systems, even if professionally based, are inevitably subjective. However, the same can be said of other city brand rankings, and it is no coincidence that no two rankings have ever produced the same result.

Our measurement tool was therefore primarily the scoring table we had created, in which we collected the scores by criteria, as well as figures for other data of the page (page views, average number of likes/post, activity rate). In creating the system, we tried to take into account as many useful features and options as possible and to evaluate the regularity, variety, and quality of the content of the posts. As it is not possible to combine the different data, we ultimately produced a number of rankings, which we then tried to evaluate together.

For sampling purposes, we first collected the cities and their platforms to be examined. It is important to note that the analysis focused strictly on the central pages and did not include tourism-related social media profiles or city profiles linked to local news outlets and press organs. We are confident that our research has thus been able to provide a complete coverage of each social media platform of the county seats. If any platform of a city is not included in the analysis, that is, of course, the responsibility of the authors – in that case, we were not attentive enough while gathering information.

The results related to the social media pages of the county seats have been added one by one to the table mentioned above. The data was thus collected in a summary table so that we could easily rank the cities according to the given criteria later on.

The cities surveyed were Békéscsaba, Debrecen, Eger, Győr, Kaposvár, Kecskemét, Miskolc, Nyíregyháza, Pécs, Salgótarján, Szeged, Székesfehérvár, Szekszárd, Szolnok, Szombathely, Tatabánya, Veszprém, and Zalaegerszeg. In total, we analysed the social media presence of 18 cities, i.e. rural county seats. Budapest was deliberately left out, as it is difficult to compare the capital with the above-mentioned cities.

The platforms examined were Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. The covered period was 1 January 2021–31 March 2021 (3 months in total).

3. An Analysis of the Facebook Pages of County Seats

3.1. Presentation of the Analytical Framework

Facebook offers a wealth of opportunities for pages, both in terms of presence and community building, as well as advertising. The above framework includes elements that can be found in the settings of Facebook pages and can easily be completed with a little effort, thus increasing the quantity and quality of content on the page.

Each page has a unique link that is automatically generated by Facebook when it is created. It is worth changing this, as it makes the page more searchable and, if a user links to it, it will look nicer with an edited link (e.g. www.facebook.com/Békéscsaba-Megyei-Jogú-Város-181417988538630/ vs. www.facebook.com/debrecenvarosa/). Just as in the case of various businesses, you may also want to

set the coat of arms or logo of the settlement as the profile picture of the city (and display it on the creatives of your posts). This is necessary from the users' point of view because they will mainly see the posts on their timelines, and the logo can make the page much easier to identify, not to mention branding, which is also based on it in a sense. Setting the cover image is quite essential, as its absence is easily noticed by users. The cover is no longer just a picture, as it can also be a gallery of images or a video (the latter is more likely to grab the attention of users, so we gave +1 point to examples where it was used).

Table 1. *Analytical framework – Facebook*

Criteria	Score
Custom username set (link)	1
The profile picture is the city's coat of arms or logo	1
It has a cover image	1
It has a video as cover image	1
Contact details are filled in (partially/fully)	2
Click-through option to other social media channels	1
There is an events tab	1
Post share (irregular: 1, weekly 1: 2, weekly 2: 3, weekly 3+: 4, daily 3+: -1)	4
Utilization of functions, updates, news tracking (occasional/regular)	2
Use of image galleries/montages/albums (sometimes/regularly)	2
Activity posts (occasional/regular)	2
Video posts (occasional/regular)	2
Traffic diversion link posts (sometimes/regularly)	2
Carousel posts (occasional/regular)	2
Use of own images (sometimes/regularly)	2
Spelling	1
Emoji usage	2
Community management	1
Number of likes (end of month 3)	-
Number of posts (3 monthly)	-
Average number of likes and reactions per post	-
Average number of comments per post	-
Average number of shares per post	-
Engagement rate (average)	-
TOTAL	30

We then looked at the *About* tab, where there are several options that can be filled in. This includes, for example, filling in contact details and the option to click through to other platforms. You can also create various events on behalf of the page, which you can organize into a chronological list within the page, under the *Events* tab in the header. This can be particularly useful for events, as it allows the user to view upcoming events in one place.

After an examination of the settings, we looked at the posts of the pages, which we narrowed down to one quarter (1 January–31 March 2021). The regularity of the posts shared is a key issue in managing any platform, so we have scored this differently. A score of 1 point was awarded if posts were shared irregularly, 2 points if one post per week was regularly shared, 3 points if two posts per week were shared, and 4 points if three or more posts per week were shared. However, this should not be overdone either, so 1 point was deducted for results exceeding 3 posts per day. It is important that the posts published should be good not only qualitatively but also quantitatively, so we have focused our attention on the content of the posts after the number of posts. We examined whether the page was making use of the currently available post types (e.g. poll, 3D post) and whether it was following the trends. We also looked at whether the page used a gallery feature, whether there were video/GIF and link posts, and whether there were activity posts. We also monitored the use of own images (by own we do not mean the posting of stock images that can be bought and used freely, which make the page boring) and community management. In terms of the text of the posts, points were given for spelling and the use emoticons, which eases the texts and makes them social media friendly.

In the final section, we collected data that were used to create a separate ranking, as they do not characterize the quality of the page in themselves but are important benchmarks alongside the other criteria. Thus, we recorded the number of page visitors, the total number of posts for the three months under review, and the average number of likes, comments, and shares. These were then used to calculate the engagement rate: [(likes + comments + shares) / post] / page likes.

3.2 Results Based on Facebook Usage

Based on the research, it is surprising that the city of Szeged does not have a Facebook page, while Pécs only has a website that links to its various institutions, and they do not have a central page either. Of course, the social page of the city medium (the local news outlet if you like), has many followers in Szeged and Pécs, but they cannot be considered in the same category as the central Facebook pages of the other county seats. Interestingly, Tatabánya's website included a Facebook link that linked to a non-operating page, but their Facebook page was eventually found.

Table 2. *Results – Facebook*

Based on page likes		Based on score (max. 30)		Based on activity rate	
City	Page Likes	City	Score	City	Activity rate
Nyíregyháza	30 075	Győr	24.0	Kaposvár	1.74%
Székesfehérvár	25 449	Debrecen	23.0	Szombathely	1.74%
Győr	20 635	Székesfehérvár	22.0	Salgótarján	1.15%
Debrecen	17 743	Szombathely	21.0	Tatabánya	0.81%
Kaposvár	17 167	Szolnok	20.5	Zalaegerszeg	0.75%
Zalaegerszeg	11 410	Kecskemét	17.5	Veszprém	0.57%
Eger	10 203	Zalaegerszeg	17.5	Békéscsaba	0.46%
Szolnok	10 029	Miskolc	16.0	Székesfehérvár	0.44%
Tatabánya	8 549	Tatabánya	16.0	Debrecen	0.43%
Szombathely	8 242	Kaposvár	15.0	Kecskemét	0.43%
Veszprém	6 812	Eger	14.5	Szolnok	0.32%
Salgótarján	5 396	Békéscsaba	14.0	Győr	0.22%
Békéscsaba	4 604	Nyíregyháza	14.0	Miskolc	0.21%
Kecskemét	2 537	Salgótarján	14.0	Eger	0.12%
Szekszárd	2 443	Veszprém	13.0	Nyíregyháza	0.10%
Miskolc	946	Szekszárd	9.0	Szekszárd	0.04%

In this part of the study, cities were ranked according to three criteria: the number and activity of their page visitors and their result in the scoring system. In terms of page views, Nyíregyháza and Székesfehérvár were the clear leaders with a follower base of over 30 000 and 25 000 respectively. Győr, Debrecen, and Kaposvár were also among the top cities. Miskolc came in last, well behind the other cities in the ranking. Meanwhile, it is important to point out that the ranking refers to the official Facebook page managed by the cities and that there may be several other profiles linked to a city, which may produce higher numbers. Moreover, while social media activity may be weaker, other means of digital, online communication can still be strong – for example, the website *miskolc.hu* won the *Website of the Year* prize of the Hungarian Marketing Association in 2018.

The activity rate is an indicator of the average percentage of fans who show activity in connection with the posts. This shows that Nyíregyháza, which performed best in the page engagement ranking, is in second-to-last place here, which is also due to the fact that 8-10 posts are shared on their page per day, which is not good for the trend of activities, as no post can "ramp up" completely. Kaposvár and Szombathely are at the top of the list, but Kaposvár has more activity

overall, as the city page also stands high in the page like ranking, so the activity rate indicates a much larger active follower base.

Based on our qualitative scoring system, Győr came first, Debrecen second, Székesfehérvár third, and Szekszárd finished at the bottom of the list. Out of the 16 city Facebook pages, only two pages had not modified their link and four used a profile image other than the city's coat of arms or logo. All of them had a cover image, but only Debrecen used the livelier video option. Almost everyone provided information in the *About* section, but in several cases this was incomplete. In addition, links to other social media platforms can be attached, but only 5 pages used this option. The *Events* tab option was used by all pages.

During the analysis, it was interesting to observe how each city managed its Facebook page, with some of them using it as a "news agency" and others as a bulletin board or community space. The regularity of post shares showed very mixed results: for example, Békéscsaba's page was practically stagnant between November and February, while Nyíregyháza's page had 884 posts in three months, which means 8-10 shares per day. The regularity of posts has been taken care of by almost all pages – although some have gone overboard and posted a lot of times in connection with the COVID-19 situation. Szekszárd's page was the one that stuck out the most (in a negative sense), as they shared only one post in the past quarter of the year, and this was also reflected in their activity rate.

In terms of the content of the posts, cities prefer to use the link post format – it directs users to the website. They are usually published as articles/news. In addition to link posts, informative posts were found on almost all pages, but Székesfehérvár cleverly designs them with uniform graphical elements and colours, which, if used regularly, can be easily noticed by users and can also enhance the overall quality of the page. In the case of Székesfehérvár, another interesting fact is that *podcast* episodes, i.e. audio clips, were also shared during the period under review, which is currently a unique solution in the marketing activities of cities and an increasingly popular form of content from the users' point of view.

Posts with video and image galleries were also abundant on the pages, and these appear to be popular forms of posting, which generally resulted in higher user activity. Székesfehérvár and Zalaegerszeg also launched video campaigns in which local city leaders and celebrities encourage users to get vaccinated against the coronavirus. While these videos provoked very divisive reactions, they also undoubtedly generated high levels of activity. Zalaegerszeg also ran a music video campaign during the examined period, in the first quarter of 2021.

In contrast, there were hardly any posts encouraging people to get active – only six cities used it, and they did so rarely. In this category, we have included posts that attempted to elicit interaction from users. Examples of such solutions include games (Tell us what…; Which one do you think…?) where users can reply in comments, wherefore such solutions encourage users to vote or react in other

ways. In addition to these, the criterion of taking advantage of opportunities was also considered – by which we mean trends and the use of other forms of Facebook posts –, and only two cities met this criterion.

The content, quality, and regularity of the posts were therefore very mixed on the pages studied. Some, for example, only shared link posts without accompanying text, while others wrote extremely long texts. The regularity of so-called mood posts also varied. Some cities used this form of content on a weekly basis, while others did not use it at all. In our opinion, it may be worthwhile to use this, as in all cases they resulted in an outstanding level of activity for the pages. In terms of activities, the mayors of Székesfehérvár, Szombathely, and Zalaegerszeg are also regularly featured on the page, taking part in various actions, in several cases making live broadcasts or video announcements. Although the mayor's presence can generate divisive opinions – especially if the message is politicized –, when examining them from the aspect of activities, these appearances generated high numbers in almost all cases.

Spelling was impeccable on all pages, and the majority also used the right amount of emoticons. However, only half of the cities react or reply to comments from users on a regular basis, leaving many questions unanswered. It is also interesting to note that in the case of Székesfehérvár, the mayor often did this through his own Facebook page.

4. An Analysis of the Instagram Pages of County Seats

4.1. Presentation of the Analytical Framework

Table 3. *Analytical framework – Instagram*

Criteria	Score
Unique username set (link)	1
Profile picture is the city's coat of arms, logo	1
Bio is filled (partially/fully)	2
Bio has link to website/most social networking sites	1
Post sharing (occasional: 1, 1 per week: 2, 2 per week: 3, 3+ per week: 4, daily 3+: -1)	4
Uses gallery images (sometimes/regular)	2
Uses highlights	1
Uses IGTV	1
Activity posts (sometimes/regular)	2
Video posts (sometimes/regular)	2

Criteria	Score
Use of own images (sometimes/regular)	2
Spelling	1
Emoji use	1
Hashtag use	1
Hashtag use also in English	1
Has its own hashtag (and uses it consistently)	1
Community management	1
Number of followers (end of month 3)	-
Number of posts (3 months)	-
Average likes per post	-
Average number of comments per post	-
Engagement rate (average)	-
TOTAL	25

Regarding this platform, we also focused on the settings that are visible to the "outside world". Thus, we looked at the profile picture (it is also important to use the city's logo or emblem here) and the elements of the bio (description), that is, whether it contains a link to the website or other social media platforms, as well as an introductory text or a slogan. We then looked at the frequency of posts, just as in the Facebook analysis, scoring it from 1 to 4. We then turned our attention to the content of the posts, where we also scored possible post types. Examples include galleries, highlights (unfortunately, we are not able to look at stories as they are only available for 24 hours), IGTV, activity-increasing posts, and sharing video/GIF content. The use of own images and the consistent use of spelling, emoticons, and hashtags (also in English) on this platform were also examined. We concluded the set of yes/no questions with a question examining regular responses to comments.

Finally, we looked at the numbers – that is, the number of followers, the number of posts published in the last 3 months, and the average number of likes, comments, and shares per post – to calculate the activity rate.

4.2 Results Based on the Use of Instagram

During the analysis of these platforms (as in the case of the analysis of Facebook pages), three rankings were established according to different criteria. The first one was based on the number of followers, with Győr in first place and Székesfehérvár in the second. These cities were ranked lower in terms of activity, as the high number of followers was not associated with a high level of activity in their case,

while for pages with a small follower base, a lower volume of activity resulted in a higher rate. (To understand this, let us look at the example of Győr, where the 2.82% activity rate indicates more interactions in terms of volume than the 7.96% result of Zalaegerszeg, the city ranked first.) Based on the scoring system set up by us, Győr ranked first, with Székesfehérvár in the second place. Interestingly, Miskolc came third in terms of page likes, activity rate, and scoring alike.

Table 4. *Results – Instagram*

Based on followers		Based on scoring		Based on activity rate	
City	**Followers**	**City**	**Score**	**City**	**Activity rate**
Győr	3 512	Győr	19.0	Zalaegerszeg	7.96%
Székesfehérvár	3 250	Székesfehérvár	17.5	Békéscsaba	7.60%
Miskolc	2 881	Miskolc	17.0	Miskolc	4.58%
Nyíregyháza	2 655	Kecskemét	15.0	Kaposvár	3.45%
Kaposvár	1 973	Zalaegerszeg	15.0	Győr	2.82%
Debrecen	1 640	Szombathely	14.0	Szombathely	2.47%
Békéscsaba	1 592	Békéscsaba	12.0	Kecskemét	2.34%
Eger	1 259	Debrecen	12.0	Debrecen	2.32%
Szombathely	1 051	Kaposvár	8.0	Székesfehérvár	2.25%
Kecskemét	556	Nyíregyháza	5.0	Nyíregyháza	0.00%
Zalaegerszeg	515	Eger	4.0	Eger	0.00%

As can be seen in the table, there are far fewer cities on Instagram, and many of the cities above are using the platform irregularly or have stopped posting. Békéscsaba's page was inactive between November and February (as was their Facebook platform). The pages of Zalaegerszeg and Eger became active after a one-year break, Debrecen restarted Instagram activities after a 5-month break, and Nyíregyháza's page has not had any posts since January 2020.

Győr, Miskolc, Székesfehérvár, and Szombathely are active users of Instagram, and they have not stopped posting regularly despite the virus situation. These pages often use gallery or video post types. The platforms of Székesfehérvár and Győr also convey a unified image through *Highlights*. In the case of Győr and Miskolc, their content posted on Instagram is also repeatedly posted on Facebook, which may not be the best content-posting strategy in the long run, as it is enough for the users to follow one platform because the other one does not provide anything new to them.

All but 3 cities chose a coat of arms or logo as their profile picture, and most pages filled in the bio appropriately, as almost all of the descriptions included a link to a website or other social media platform.

On this platform, almost all cities tried to use their own pictures, but Kecskemét's page shared several creatives that were practically posters with lots of text. Although this is clearly visible on a monitor, it is not at all readable for mobile phone users, and there is no possibility to enlarge it properly on this platform. In addition, it should be noted that Instagram is mostly used as a mobile app, so it is worth paying special attention to the readability of the creatives here.

All but a few pages used hashtags for their posts, but these were mostly in Hungarian, with only five pages using labels in English. Six pages also used their own hashtags, which were consistently displayed in the majority of their posts and the bio. Although we gave extra points for comment management, this was not necessary for any of the pages, as users did not really comment in text; most of them provided feedback in the form of emoticons.

5. An Analysis of the YouTube Channels of County Seats

5.1. Presentation of the Analytical Framework

Table 5. *Analytical framework – YouTube*

Criteria	Score
Unique user URL set	1
Profile picture is the city's coat of arms, logo	1
Has a cover photo	1
There are links to other social media channels	1
Contact data are filled in	1
Frequency of videos (irregular: 1, monthly: 2, 2 per month: 3, 1 per week/more: 4)	4
Has at least 1 playlist	1
Has posts under the community tab	1
High-quality videos	1
Has video description	1
Uses consistent index images	1
Community management	1
Number of subscribers (end of month 3)	-
Number of videos (3 monthly)	-
Average number of views/video	-
Average number of likes/video	-
Average number of dislikes/video	-
Average number of comments/video	-
TOTAL	15

The link can also be modified on YouTube, which can be changed if the city has enough followers. It is also recommended to set the city's coat of arms or logo as the profile picture, and the cities can also upload a cover image and set buttons linking to other social media platforms. It is also useful to fill in the *About* details on this platform to inform users.

We examined the use of other features such as the creation of playlists (at least one) or posts that could be published under the social tab, and then scored the regularity of posting videos, which was given a score of up to four points depending on whether video content was published irregularly, monthly, fortnightly, weekly, or more often. We then looked at the quality of the videos, whether there was a description added, whether the index images were consistent, and whether the comments received were replied on behalf of the page.

Finally, we also summarized the numbers on this platform, including subscribers, videos posted in the last three months, and average views, likes, dislikes, and comments per video.

5.2 Results regarding the Use of YouTube

Table 6. *Results – YouTube*

Based on subscribers		Based on scoring		Based on average video views	
City	Subscribers	City	Score	City	Video views
Székesfehérvár	1 240	Székesfehérvár	11.0	Debrecen	1 158
Debrecen	237	Tatabánya	9.0	Veszprém	937
Tatabánya	212	Veszprém	7.0	Győr	254
Zalaegerszeg	78	Győr	6.5	Székesfehérvár	208
Szombathely	74	Debrecen	6.0	Békéscsaba	184
Kecskemét	55	Kecskemét	5.0	Tatabánya	97
Szekszárd	51	Miskolc	4.0	Kecskemét	76
Miskolc	39	Békéscsaba	3.0	Miskolc	37
Veszprém	30	Zalaegerszeg	1.0	Szombathely	0
Békéscsaba	18	Szekszárd	1.0	Zalaegerszeg	0
Győr	8	Szombathely	0.0	Szekszárd	0

In many cases, YouTube channels were difficult to find, as in certain cases they were not listed on the search results page or websites and other social media platforms where they could be clicked through. A total of 11 channels were found, again ranked in three different ways. In terms of subscribers, Székesfehérvár topped the list, standing out from the rest, while Győr came last. In terms of video views,

Debrecen stood out from the platforms examined. Based on the points received, Székesfehérvár was ranked first, Tatabánya was second, and Veszprém third. Győr, in fourth place in the ranking, makes the most of its opportunities, but it has very few subscribers.

Szekszárd, Szombathely, and Zalaegerszeg had no videos uploaded to their channels during the examined period, while Székesfehérvár and Tatabánya shared 9 videos in the first quarter of 2021.

The profile picture of the channel was appropriately set up in six cities, but only four cities uploaded a cover image, and only Székesfehérvár and Veszprém used the channel to redirect to other social media platforms. At least one playlist was found on seven channels, but only Székesfehérvár used the *Social* tab. In general, the published videos were of good quality and most of them were accompanied by a video description, but none of the channels used a uniform index image.

Some cities have turned off the possibility of commenting, which is not necessarily a good decision as it completely cuts off user feedback even though one of the essential features of online presence is mutual communication.

6. Experiences and Recommendations Based on the Social Media Communication of the County Seats

The above study shows that the majority of cities are trying to maintain an active presence on Facebook, with varying degrees of success. In contrast to the default settings, we could discover several interesting contrasts in post types (e.g. lots of text without pictures or little text with pictures), all of which were popular or none of them. Generally speaking, thoughtful, regular, and activity-stimulating posting, as well as a diversity of content and two-way communication with users can be a good way forward. The challenge for social media communication is to provide users with content that is fresh, interesting, and informative on a daily basis (that is also thoughtful in terms of marketing strategy), which also encourages user activity.

Instagram is used regularly by significantly fewer cities. This platform has a lot of potential, not only for young people but also for foreign and domestic tourists, as it is generally considered that the Instagram platform has a much higher activity rate than Facebook. It may therefore be worthwhile to publish 2-3 posts a week on the platform (even thematically) so that people can find the city on this platform – but, unlike Facebook, they will find a different type of content, as the former is mainly about informing, while the latter is more about image building. It is therefore advisable not to duplicate content but rather to regularly publish posts made for the specific platform with smaller frequency.

Creating content on YouTube requires more effort and work because while a Facebook or Instagram post can be put together – with a little exaggeration – by just about any marketing person, the shooting and post-production of videos usually requires an expert and the right tools for video production (which is usually not a low-cost process), so it is recommended to hire a specialized team for this. In addition, it is more difficult to determine which direction to take on this platform besides the usual image videos and promotional content. The research showed that most cities are not actively using their channel, and if they are uploading some content, it is likely to have been created for another platform or for advertising purposes. However, even on this platform it is worth experimenting, trying out different directions, whether it is a live broadcast from the mayor or a recording of a typical weekday representing the atmosphere or an interview with a local celebrity.

LinkedIn, Twitter, Snapchat, and TikTok were not included in the survey, as these platforms are actively used by very few cities or none of them. However, it may be worth considering them when planning online marketing activities, as each of them allows cities to reach a different target group (e.g. LinkedIn reaches investors and TikTok reaches very young people). However, it should also be remembered that the quality of content on all platforms must be kept in mind, so it is not worth launching a new platform if you do not have the appropriate resources or ideas.

All in all, it can be concluded that social media marketing has a prominent role in city marketing and city communication. However, there is plenty of room for improvement, even in the case of large cities, as only 16 of the 18 county seats surveyed had their own Facebook pages, 11 had Instagram profiles, and 11 had YouTube channels – and these were also active at varying levels. Nevertheless, the cities at the top of the rankings set a good example. It is not only the other county seats that should learn from them but also all other cities and even villages, as online competition between settlements is likely to increase in the coming period. The criteria set out in the study can provide a checklist of things to look out for when using Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

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Best Practices of CSR Reporting in Romania

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Abstract. The aim of the study is to examine the content and quality of online CSR reports of the eight large companies with the highest CSR index scores in Romania in 2020. The CSR reports of the eight large companies examined were analysed on the basis of two types of web content: on the one hand, on the basis of CSR content published on the company website and on the other hand on the basis of data published in sustainability or CSR reports uploaded to the website. The research method was thematic content analysis. The analysis criteria of the mentioned content were developed on the basis of the reporting principles of the GRI framework and the ISO 26000 standard. The findings showed that the principles of content and quality of non-financial reporting prevailed in the sustainability reports, while the data published on the websites was more for wider information.

Keywords: CSR reporting, sustainability reporting, EU non-financial reporting, Romania, best practices

1. Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted humanity's responsibility to sustain the planet. Ensuring sustainability also depends crucially on finding financial and non-financial reserves to ensure the success of implementation (UN, 2015). To meet sustainability goals, large companies are able to mobilize a diverse and significant amount of resources, which effort takes the form of corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) encompasses voluntary activities by companies that are not purely financial and that society as a whole expects companies to undertake in relation to governance, social and environmental issues (Cornelissen, 2020: 282). The numerous ethical scandals surrounding large multinational corporations have led to increasing pressure on companies to take responsibility for social and environmental issues beyond their narrow economic interests (CSR, 2013: 801). According to the European Communication

Monitor 2020 report, the second most important issue for corporate leaders is CSR communication, which closely follows the topic of building trust with the business environment (ECM, 2020: 74).

The European Union's (EU) CSR strategy for 2011–2014 sets out the voluntary nature of corporate social responsibility but strongly recommends that large companies pay attention to the social and environmental impacts of corporate activities (EU, 2011: 8). A few years later, the EU clarifies its position on corporate social responsibility in its Directive 2014/95/EU on non-financial reporting (NFRD). Under that Directive, large European companies with more than 500 employees have been invited to report non-financially from 2017 onwards.

The implementation of corporate social responsibility takes place in several steps. The design and implementation phase is followed by the reporting and communication phase (Bernhart–Maher, 2011). In order to make corporate stakeholders aware of their CSR initiatives, companies disclose their CSR efforts (CSR, 2013: 801). Disclosure of CSR activities is a valuable tool for tracking progress while having an incentive effect to improve a company's CSR performance. At the same time, CSR reporting also contributes to maintaining a positive reputation and strengthens the commitment of internal and external stakeholders.

Research reveals that the amount of disclosure does not adequately reflect the quality of disclosure (Rezaee–Tuo, 2019). Academic examination of published CSR data is of paramount importance, as it is often the case that companies disclose incomplete and unreliable information in CSR reports (Michelon et al., 2015; García-Sánchez et al., 2019). CSR reporting provides accountability to corporate stakeholders and transparency of corporate operations only in the case of a meaningful approach; otherwise it provides the communication of visible and selected information that meets societal expectations (Ashforth–Gibbs, 1990: 181). In CSR reporting, the use of recognized frameworks does not guarantee the disclosure of relevant, comparable, and credible information and does not automatically imply alignment of corporate strategies with social values and norms (Ahmad et al., 2012: 37).

The aim of the present study is to examine the web-based CSR reporting of the eight large companies with the highest CSR index value in Romania in 2020 in terms of quality and content. Large companies in Romania with the best CSR performance were selected on the basis of CSR index values established by the Azores Sustainability and CSR Services Agency (Azores, 2020). The Azores is the only independent Romanian agency that has tracked the CSR performance of large Romanian companies over the past five years under the GRI framework. In 2020, the Agency calculated the CSR index of 700 large Romanian companies. In the research summarized in the present study, the study sample reached the highest CSR index value in 2020. The CSR content published on the websites of these companies and the 2019 sustainability reports uploaded to the websites were analysed using the method of thematic content analysis (Anderson, 2007).

The structure of the paper is as follows: in section 2, the concept of CSR reporting, in section 3 the research methodology, in section 4 the results of the thematic content analysis, and in section 5 the conclusions of the research are presented.

2. CSR Reporting

In its 2011 CSR strategy, the EU defines CSR as "the responsibility of enterprises for their impact on society" (EU, 2011: 7). CSR is a voluntary commitment by companies to act in accordance with the principles of sustainability, to act honestly, and to take specific corporate actions in order to protect the environment and contribute to the well-being of the society around them. CSR is a corporate tool to promote sustainable development.

CSR reporting refers to the regular disclosure of information about a company's governance, social and environmental performance (CSR reporting, 2013: 801). CSR information is published in the form of separate sections of annual reports, corporate websites, and standalone sustainability or CSR reports. Since 2015, companies have been preparing sustainability reports that also include information on CSR areas. Sustainability reports also cover non-financial aspects of the economic operation of companies. For corporate stakeholders, sustainability or CSR reports are an easily accessible source of information that provides an opportunity to assess the impact of companies on society and the environment (EU, 2014: 1). The reporting requirement for companies is to take into account the information needs of all stakeholders, e.g. customers, suppliers, investors, employees, local community, municipalities, advocacy groups, public authorities, vulnerable groups, social partners, representatives of civil society, etc.

In the EU, the adoption of the NFRD has created the conditions for sustainability and CSR reporting. The NFRD defines areas of non-financial information that are "environmental, social and employment issues, respect for human rights, the fight against corruption and bribery" (EU, 2014: 2). The areas of non-financial information are also the core areas of sustainability reports. Among the non-financial areas, CSR areas cover social and environmental issues (CSR, 2013; Corporate Social Responsibility, 2013).

The NFRD does not provide actual indicators for reporting to help companies assess their position or progress in the field of sustainability and corporate social responsibility, but it provides examples of how initiatives in certain non-financial areas are reported. At the same time, it recommends the use of internationally recognized frameworks for the preparation of non-financial reporting such as "International Organization for Standardization ISO 26000, the International Labour Organization's Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)" (EU, 2014: 2).

The NFRD "exempts subsidiaries from their reporting obligations if their parent company reports for the whole group, including subsidiaries" (EU, 2014: 2).

The currently most widespread sustainability and CSR reporting framework has been developed by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), an international independent organization under the auspices of the United Nations, which is a constantly updated standard (CSR, 2013: 804). The ISO 26000 standard has also been widely used in the preparation of CSR reports. The fundamental difference between the GRI and the ISO 26000 standard is that while the GRI defines the actual indicators for sustainability reporting, the ISO 26000 standard sets out the measures and expectations that can be expected from socially responsible companies to address CSR areas (ISO and GRI 2014: 8; Henriques (ed.), 2011: 149).

High-value sustainability and CSR reporting requires adherence to a number of principles (ISO and GRI, 2014: 8). Both the GRI framework and the ISO 26000 standard specify the principles that form the basic requirements for non-financial reporting. ISO 26000 recommends the disclosure of information on social responsibility in a comprehensible, accurate, balanced, timely, accessible, and comparable form. The GRI reporting principles can be divided into two groups and are explained in more detail. The GRI principles for content include stakeholder involvement, presentation of the sustainability environment, validation of materiality, and striving for completeness of information. The GRI principles that ensure the quality of reporting are accuracy, balance, ensuring the transparency and comparability of data, building on available sources, and timeliness (GRI, 2020: 7).

Table 1 summarizes the areas and topics of non-financial information defined by the GRI framework and ISO 26000. The list of non-financial areas and topics follows the ISO 26000 standard; however, the indicators of the GRI framework are compatible with the areas listed in the table (ISO and GRI, 2014: 25). Following the ISO 26000 standard is more common among European countries, while the use of the GRI reporting framework is widespread in the USA (Ogarca–Puiu, 2017: 12). It is common in European countries for large companies to be ISO 9001 (quality) or ISO 14001 (environmental) certified, which in many respects meet the requirements of the ISO 26000 standard (Henriques (ed.), 2011: 131).

Reporting is just one but an extremely important element of CSR communication (Henriques (ed.), 2011; Bernhart–Maher, 2011). The effectiveness of CSR communication also depends on the channel of disclosure. In the renewed media environment, in addition to traditional channels, more and more companies choose to publish web-based CSR reports. This form of publication has a number of advantages over traditional printed publications, such as being environmentally friendly, allowing for regular updates, and incorporating interactivity, which are becoming increasingly important for communication with stakeholders. In the case of web-based sustainability and CSR reports, an important issue is the application of reporting principles (CSR reporting, 2013: 809).

Table 1. *Non-financial areas based on the ISO 26000 standard and the GRI framework*

CSR areas	Topics
Organizational governance	Organizational profile, strategy, and values Decision-making structures and processes Management approach Register of organizational stakeholders
Economic issues and fair operating practices	Responsible economic operation Anti-corruption Responsible political engagement Fair competition Respect for property rights Validating CSR in the value chain
Environmental issues	Pollution prevention Sustainable use of resources (raw materials, energy, water) Climate change mitigation and adaptation Environmental protection, biodiversity, and natural habitat restoration
Social issues: labour issues	Employment and employment relations Working conditions and social protection Social dialogue Occupational health and safety Human development and training in the workplace
Social issues: human rights	Due diligence Human rights risk situations Avoiding complicity Resolving grievances Avoiding exclusion and protecting vulnerable groups Protection of civil and political rights Protection of economic, social, and cultural rights Ensuring fundamental employment rights
Social issues: consumer issues	Fair marketing, factual and impartial information, and fair contractual practices Protecting the health and safety of consumers Sustainable consumption Consumer service, support, complaint and dispute resolution Protecting consumers' data and privacy Access to basic services Consumer education and awareness raising
Social issues: community development and involvement	Community involvement Development of education and culture Job creation and skills development Technology development and access Wealth and income generation Healthcare development Social investments

Source: author's compilation based on GRI 2020 and ISO 26000

The credibility of CSR reporting is enhanced by the involvement of third parties in the implementation and disclosure of CSR efforts. CSR activities implemented in combination with advocacy or NGOs, reports of employees committed to the company's CSR initiatives, and independently audited sustainability and CSR reports have greater credibility (Anwar–Malik, 2020: 4).

3. Methodology

The research presented in this study uses a qualitative approach and relies on a non-intrusive data collection method. The aim of the research is to examine the CSR reporting of the eight large companies with the highest CSR index value in Romania in 2020 in terms of content and quality. Based on the assessment of the Azores Sustainability and CSR Services Agency, the below listed eight large companies can be considered as best practices of CSR reporting in Romania.

Table 2. *Sample composition*

Name of the company	Country of origin	Sector	CSR index value (max. 100)
Coca Cola Romania	USA	Beverages	98
Kaufland Romania	Germany	Food retail	98
HeidelbergCement Romania	Germany	Construction	95
Grupul CEZ Romania	Czech Republic	Energy	92
Raiffeisen Bank Romania	Austria	Financial	92
Romgaz	România	Energy	89
Telekom Romania	Germany	Telecommunication	86
Lidl Romania	Germany	Food retail	85

Source: Azores, 2020: 10

The CSR reporting of the eight companies surveyed was analysed based on two types of web content: CSR content published on the company's website and data provided in sustainability or CSR reports uploaded to the website. The data analysis method was thematic content analysis. The data collection and analysis period was May 2021.

The use of websites as a research data source was justified by the fact that they are the most commonly used self-controlled media channel for companies to communicate directly on strategy and CSR (ECM, 2020; Georgiadou–Nickerson, 2020; Papp-Váry, 2019; Garcia–Garcia, 2017; Bravo–Matute, 2012; Hou–Reber, 2011). The corporate website is also preferred by the public as a source of

information for communicating CSR activities (Kim–Ferguson, 2014: 4; Kim–Ferguson, 2018: 555).

Compared to the study of social media communication, the thematic content analysis of corporate websites predominates in the Romanian studies, as companies engage in one-way communication on CSR issues and do not focus on establishing dialogue with corporate stakeholders in social media (Şerban, 2016: 31). This is also supported by a survey conducted by CSR Media (2020), according to which a significant number of Romanian companies continue to communicate CSR on their websites.

The analytical criteria of the reporting of CSR "gold medal" companies in Romania have been formulated on the basis of the reporting principles of the GRI framework and the ISO 26000 standard.

Table 3. *Content and quality criteria of CSR reporting*

Content criteria of the CSR reporting (A)	Quality criteria of the CSR reporting (B)
a) Involvement of stakeholders (identification of stakeholders – external, internal – impartial assessment of their expectations)	a) Accuracy (data are detailed, and the method of calculation can be followed)
b) Presentation of the sustainability environment (contribution to sustainability now and in the future, at local, regional, and global level, in different areas of sustainability)	b) Balance (both positive and negative aspects of CSR activity are explored, not just a selection of good results)
c) Materiality validation (presentation of relevant issues related to the social and environmental impact of the organization and on which stakeholders make decisions)	c) Transparency (classification of CSR activities by thematic area or stakeholder)
d) Striving for completeness (reporting on all relevant issues during the reporting period)	d) Comparability (published data follow an international standard: ISO26000, GRI, etc.)
	e) Verifiability (availability of data sources for published data)
	f) Timeliness (reference of data to precise periods)
	g) Strengthening credibility by involving third parties, quality assurance systems

Source: author's compilation based on GRI 2020 and ISO 26000

4. Findings

4.1. Content of CSR Reporting of the Surveyed Romanian Companies

In the following, we present the fulfilment of the content and quality criteria of CSR reporting based on the joint observation of the data published under the sustainability or CSR menu items and in the 2019 sustainability reports uploaded on the websites. The surveyed large companies that are good examples of CSR in Romania had a separate sustainability or CSR menu item on their website and a downloadable 2019 sustainability report. It is worth noting that the companies surveyed did not publish CSR reports but sustainability reports that integrated CSR-related areas.

It can be stated that the data published under the sustainability or CSR menu item of corporate websites were more informative. The CSR initiatives, which can be limited in different areas and over time, as well as the actual results, were presented in detail in the annual sustainability reports. The theoretical chapter of the study discussed that CSR is a tool for companies to ensure sustainability. Six companies already had a tradition of sustainability reporting, and sustainability reports for 2017 and 2018 were also available on their websites. The language of the sustainability reports is Romanian in six cases, indicating that the information was primarily aimed at the Romanian public. For two companies, Kaufland and Raiffeisen Bank, the report was in English, referring to the global nature of the communication. It is important to emphasize that the content of the reports was adapted to the situation in Romania, and the published sustainability/CSR initiatives responded to the challenges of local circumstances.

Table 4. *The motto of the CSR activities of the surveyed companies*

Name of the company	Motto
Coca Cola Romania	Together for the future.
Kaufland Romania	Our actions do the talking.
HeidelbergCement Romania	At the foundation of everything that lasts.
Grupul CEZ Romania	CEZ Green Generation.
Raiffeisen Bank Romania	Digital solutions for responsible banking.
Romgaz	The energy of a dynamic future.
Telekom Romania	Experiencing together.
Lidl Romania	Generations that deserve a better future.

Source: author's compilation

The slogans of the sustainability reports summarized in simple terms the attitude of the companies surveyed towards sustainability and social responsibility. The slogans draw attention to the future and the new generation and reflect the relationship of companies to these two concepts.

A / a) Involvement of stakeholders. Looking at the websites, it can be observed that the companies surveyed addressed two main target groups, namely employees and customers. Each company provided content in a separate menu item to these two functional target groups. Three companies (Raiffeisen Bank, Romgaz, Telekom) also created a separate menu item for investors, during which financial data, analyses of their economic performance, and annual financial reports were published. The sustainability reports mapped the full range of stakeholders in the companies surveyed and outlined the ways to communicate. The websites of the companies surveyed also contained codes of ethics and conduct that regulated the relationship between companies and their target groups.

Tools to facilitate two-way communication with customers were also present on corporate websites. For all companies, the website was linked to Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. In the case of some companies (Coca Cola, Kaufland, Raiffeisen Bank, CEZ Group), online customer service tools were also available, e.g. transmission of personalized content subject to registration, personalized e-mail communication, telephone service, chat service, or even service robots. However, it was not typical to maintain online communities, forums or to run professional blogs.

A / b) Presentation of the sustainability environment. The large companies surveyed included in their sustainability reports a presentation of the global or regional environment for sustainability. The surveyed companies also presented the situation in Romania in each sustainability area and adjusted the reports to the Romanian environment. In presenting the non-financial results achieved in 2019, the companies summarized the period during which they apply sustainability aspects in their activities and also projected the development rates planned for the next period. The surveyed companies also highlighted areas of sustainability that are important to them: e.g. in the case of CEZ Group, Romgaz, Telekom, and Raiffeisen Bank, the pursuit of digital transformation and the possibilities of ensuring sustainability in this area were analysed.

A / c) Validation of materiality. An important step in preparing a sustainability report is to identify topics that are relevant to the company's economic, social, and environmental impacts and to influencing stakeholder decisions. Social responsibility is possible if companies are aware of the needs and expectations of stakeholders and have a regular dialogue about it. The listing of the stakeholders of the companies and the identification of their needs did not appear on the websites of the eight companies examined; however, these issues were presented in detail in the materiality matrix chapter in the sustainability reports. Current sustainability/

CSR topics for companies were ranked based on stakeholder dialogue, starting from the company's direct and indirect impacts on environment and society.

The Romanian CSR gold medal companies have indicated on their website the areas of sustainability/CSR in which they have operated. These include organizational governance, environmental protection, workforce and work processes, consumer affairs, and community development. Sustainability reports included a presentation of the sustainability strategy of companies, along with the actual commitments they wanted to achieve over time. The formulated sustainability strategies were based on the UN's Transforming Our World: The Requirements for a Sustainable Development Agenda to 2030 (UN, 2015). Their performance in reducing social and environmental impacts has been compared by companies to recent sustainability performance and commitments to be made at a future date (2030: Kaufland, HeidelbergCement, Telekom, Coca-Cola, Lidl; 2025: Raiffeisen Bank).

The sustainability reports of the surveyed companies also covered the topic of economic issues and the commitment to fair operating practices. All the companies examined were characterized by the incorporation of the principles of social responsibility into the corporate philosophy. Achieving excellent business performance, paying attention to customers, and contributing to social well-being were at the forefront of companies' mission and vision. Attention paid to environmental issues has appeared in the missions of five out of eight companies. The companies emphasized compliance with fair competition rules (e.g. HeidelbergCement, Kaufland, Lidl, Romgaz, CEZ Group, Coca-Cola, Raiffeisen Bank), contribution to the fight against bribery (e.g. HeidelbergCement, Kaufland, Romgaz, CEZ Group, Coca-Cola, Raiffeisen Bank), and the enforcement of sustainability values in the value chain (e.g. HeidelbergCement, Kaufland, Romgaz, Telekom, Coca-Cola, Raiffeisen Bank). Companies have also provided training of fair competition to managers as part of the fight against bribery.

In the field of environmental protection, companies have reported on the following initiatives: pollution prevention activities, energy efficiency, the use of alternative energy sources, the conservation of natural resources, and efficient waste management. HeidelbergCement highlighted the use of environmentally friendly equipment and technologies, and Lidl highlighted the creation of the EDGE award-winning environmentally friendly business premises. In the case of companies belonging to the beverage and food industry (e.g. Coca Cola, Lidl, Kaufland), priority has been given to the distribution of green products. Half of the companies surveyed (Coca Cola, CEZ Group, HeidelbergCement, Raiffeisen Bank) sponsored environmental projects led by green organizations or local authorities.

In sustainability reports, companies have dedicated a separate chapter to human rights issues or integrated them with social issues. The key initiatives were to ensure equal opportunities and diversity, as well as fundamental labour and

consumer rights. All companies surveyed paid close attention to the safety of work processes and health protection. All companies reported providing comfortable and safe working conditions for their employees, creating equal opportunities for people from different socio-demographic groups, providing training for individual and professional development, predictable career planning opportunities, and a number of employment benefits. Contact with the workforce is a prominent area of CSR gold medal companies, and workforce satisfaction has been a priority for some of the companies (HeidelbergCement, Lidl, Raiffeisen Bank).

The most common forms of customer responsibility were thorough responsible marketing, the provision of quality products and services, and increased attention to customer needs. Four of the eight companies focused on raising and educating customers (Coca Cola, Telekom, CEZ Group, HeidelbergCement). Kaufland, Lidl, Telekom, Raiffeisen Bank, Romgaz, and CEZ Group conducted surveys to measure consumer satisfaction. Telekom, Raiffeisen Bank, Romgaz, and CEZ Group have improved the quality of services provided to consumers through digital transformation.

Companies have contributed to social well-being in two ways: on the one hand, they have initiated rural development and skills development projects; on the other hand, in order to solve the problems of local communities, companies also offered skills, i.e. employees of the companies volunteered in the local communities (six of the eight companies). Community development projects also targeted the development of technological infrastructure (e.g. HeidelbergCement). The companies surveyed made a significant contribution to the development of digital skills of disadvantaged target groups in local communities, and each company supported several educational projects. Six of the eight companies contributed to the development of healthcare (HeidelbergCement, Coca Cola, CEZ Group, Kaufland, Romgaz, Telekom). Support for sports and art events also appeared in the case of five companies (CEZ Group, HeidelbergCement, Kaufland, Romgaz, Raiffeisen Bank).

A / d) Striving for completeness. The sustainability reports presented the results for the period under review in all non-financial areas. The principle of completeness was met in the sustainability reports, which strictly followed the GRI framework.

4.2. The Quality of CSR Reporting of the Surveyed Romanian Companies

B / a) Accuracy. The numerical results of the CSR activities and the amount of resources devoted to these activities did not appear on the websites, but the specific information was included in the sustainability reports uploaded thereon. The source of the data was the reporting companies; however, the methodology for calculating the indicators was not always included in the reports. Of the eight companies examined, the HeidelbergCement report stated that publishing an

accurate calculation of the indicators would jeopardize their market position. The sustainability reports of the surveyed companies provided statistics, calculated indicators, subsidy amounts, and the number of beneficiaries for each sustainability area.

B / b) Balance. To ensure transparency, companies should also indicate adverse facts and figures when presenting CSR activities. None of the eight companies surveyed reported difficulties and barriers to CSR activities. Sustainability reports also did not report any spill-over effects that would have resulted in a high level of dissatisfaction among corporate stakeholders.

B / c) Transparency. The principle of transparency has been applied both in the editing of sustainability/CSR menu items and in the compilation of sustainability reports. Thematic separation of CSR initiatives has been a feature of both websites and sustainability reports. The structure of the sustainability reports followed the chapters of the GRI framework. The structure of the reports was uniform, consisting of a presentation of the organizations and the governance of the organization, followed by answers to economic questions and fair operating practices, as well as environmental and social issues. Regarding CSR reporting, sustainability reports can be considered as the main source of information. The transparency of the data reported was enhanced by representation in graphical and visual models and the provision of interactive links for further information. Transparency was also reflected in the fact that sustainability reports for the previous period (2015–2018) were also available on the companies' websites, under the sustainability/CSR menu item.

B / d) Comparability. The data of the companies surveyed were comparable, as the surveyed companies used the GRI framework to prepare their non-financial reports. The sustainability reports of all the companies surveyed ended with an index of GRI indicators, which allowed the CSR results to be traced and compared.

B / e) Verifiability. The data published in the sustainability reports came from the companies' own resources, but the reports were independently audited for just two companies (Kaufland, Lidl).

B / f) Timeliness. In the case of the examined companies, the principle of timeliness prevailed in the sustainability reports, and the dating of the data was typical. The frequency of the reporting and the dates of the last reports were also specified. The analysed sustainability reports covered the period from 1 January to 30 December 2019. In the case of the data presented on the websites under the sustainability/CSR menu item, the principle of timeliness was not always enforced, as the date of the shares could be partially identified.

B / g) Credibility, involvement of third parties. Stakeholders' trust in the company is positively influenced by the fact that the companies have quality assurance certificates and awards for their field, as well as membership in recognized international professional organizations. Among the Romanian CSR gold medal

companies, HeidelbergCement, Romgaz, Telekom, and Coca Cola had various ISO certificates (ISO 9001, ISO 14001, ISO37001). It was more common to have professional awards (e.g. HeidelbergCement, Kaufland, Coca Cola, Raiffeisen Bank) and to present partnerships with industry-specific international organizations (e.g. HeidelbergCement, Lidl, CEZ Group, Coca Cola, Raiffeisen Bank). Telekom has implemented community programmes with the Red Cross. Kaufland and HeidelbergCement were founding members of the Sustainability Embassy in Romania, an association that disseminates and supports the organizational culture of sustainability in Romania. The sustainability report of Coca Cola and Raiffeisen Bank was also prepared with the support of the said association. Presentation of the results of CSR activities through actual cases occurred in reports of half of the companies (CEZ Group, Telekom, Coca Cola, Raiffeisen Bank). Beneficiaries' reports were not typical on the websites or in the sustainability reports.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of this study was to examine the CSR reporting of eight Romanian companies that can be considered as good examples based on their achieved CSR index value. Of the eight companies, three belonged to the food and beverage industry, two to the energy industry, one to the construction industry, one to the telecommunications industry, and one to the banking sector. We were not able to observe sectoral differences between the companies.

The research was based on the idea that undertaking CSR activities can transform the overall operation of companies and not just an apparent activity to maintain corporate reputation. By presenting the content and quality characteristics of CSR reporting of CSR good examples in Romania, a way of best practice CSR reporting was highlighted. Six of the eight companies surveyed had disclosed non-financial information for several years and had experience in CSR reporting. It was observed that the surveyed companies provided more general information to stakeholders under the Sustainability/CSR menu item on their website, and the detailed information was provided in the sustainability reports. The enforcement of the content principles of high-quality sustainability reporting was partially present on the websites. These companies used the GRI framework to disclose their non-financial information, and only two companies were subject to external audit of their reporting, which would have increased the credibility of the report.

The sustainability reports included a list of corporate stakeholders and how to contact them, but through the websites companies mainly communicated with customers and employees. The sustainability reports were adapted to the Romanian environment and included the CSR goals to be achieved for the future. The principle of materiality has been applied to varying degrees on websites and

in sustainability reports. Relevant CSR topics were presented on the websites in a traceable way, but here mainly the commitment of the companies to CSR was emphasized. The principle of materiality was met in the sustainability reports, as the relevant CSR topics were discussed in separate chapters, and the results were compared with past performance and future targets. The pursuit of completeness was also reflected in the sustainability reports, as information was provided on all CSR topics for the reporting period. The principle of timeliness was not met on the websites, as in several cases it was difficult to identify the reference period of the CSR performances.

Most of the CSR initiatives were in the field of environment and workforce development. The most common initiatives in community development were to support educational programmes or organize activities that contribute to the development of skills and abilities in the local community. These activities contributed to the development of lagging regions in Romania, where the level of human capital development is low (World Bank, 2020: 41) and where the level of environmental awareness also needed to be improved (Ahmad et al., 2012: 75; Öllerer, 2012: 25).

The qualitative aspects of CSR reporting were also reflected in the sustainability reports. In some cases, the websites included actual results in each CSR area, but timeliness, verifiability, and comparability were difficult to establish. The principle of transparency prevailed on the websites of the surveyed companies; however, the principle of balance was less applied. In the reports, we encountered accurate company statistics and calculated indicator values for the reporting period for each CSR topic. However, it was a problem to follow the principle of balance, which raised the problem of data selection and reduced credibility. The principle of comparability also prevailed in the sustainability reports, which ended with an index of GRI indicators.

Overall, it can be concluded that the principles of CSR reporting have been applied at a high level in the sustainability reports of the surveyed companies. The reports met the content requirements set out in the GRI framework, and the quality principles of accuracy, transparency, and timeliness were applied. The level of implementation of the principles of balance and verifiability was lower. The credibility of the sustainability reports would have been greatly enhanced if the reports had been verified by independent experts.

The examination of the good examples of CSR in Romania supports the validity of reporting and serves as a guide to the practice of corporate social responsibility reporting in Romania. In the Romanian economic environment, high-quality CSR reporting is still new, and it is mainly characteristic of the Romanian branches of multinational companies and large Romania-based companies. Corporate stake-holders, and in particular the younger generations, are increasingly interested in corporate business philosophy and social responsibility, which requires rethinking

companies' communication strategies and stakeholder engagement practices to adapt to expectations. Further development of research would be necessary in several directions. It would be important to examine the development of CSR communication over time for Romanian companies with a tradition, as well as to carry out comparative analyses of CSR communication in different economic sectors.

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