

## **Media Accountability Goes Online**

A transnational study on emerging practices and innovations

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#### Summary

The Internet is both a challenge and an opportunity for media accountability. Newsrooms and citizens are adapting existing practices and developing new ones on news websites, weblogs and social media. This report offers the first comparative study on how these practices are being developed and perceived in thirteen countries in Europe (Bulgaria, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Serbia, United Kingdom), the Arab world (Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia) and North America (USA). Through the analysis of data on the media systems and in-depth interviews with journalists, experts and activists, the study maps the initiatives performed by media organizations and explores media criticism projects promoted from outside the newsrooms. The concept of journalistic fields proposed by Bourdieu provides the contextual analysis of the diversity of countries. It articulates the relationships between the media and the political and economic fields to explain how they shape media accountability developments on the Internet. The role of media self-regulation institutions and the active user culture enabled by the Internet are other actors considered in the description of the tensions surrounding media accountability in the journalistic fields. In this context, the study suggests that media accountability online is being enacted in practices that vary from country to country depending on the perceptions of journalists and newsrooms about it, the interplay of accountability aims with economic and political goals of the media, and their positions in the dynamic struggle for credibility within the journalistic field.

Few media accountability practices are widespread in the countries analyzed, and the actual developments are very uneven in terms of motivations, technical tools and workflows. The analysis shows that those countries where there are more active online practices (USA, UK) are some of those with lower trust of the public in the media. In other contexts, such as the Arab countries, the efforts towards media accountability are mainly led by those citizens and journalists that also struggle to democratize society. The challenges in Europe seem to be maintaining the autonomy of the journalistic field, and while practices within and outside media organizations are scarce and often not systematic and institutionalized, the study has found cases that highlight how the Internet can be an effective tool to promote ethical journalism by fostering transparency and responsiveness.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

This interim report discusses the development of media accountability on the Internet. Our analysis aims to shed light on how transparency of media production and the responsiveness of those who produce them is facilitated by media organizations and/or called for by Internet users. Our empirical study is comparative by design. It encompasses thirteen countries: eight of them are in Europe, four of them represent Arab countries in the Middle East and North Africa, and one North America (the United States).

Our intention is to identify the scope and volume of specifically Internet-based media accountability practices. But, instead of proposing that these practices are universal or similarly adopted in any part of the world, we assume that their existence, functionality and lifespans are culturally dependent. We anticipate finding some common trends but also some sharp discrepancies in the development of media accountability online, with diversity not only among countries but also within actors in different positions in the media ecosystem.

This paper aims to elaborate on the conceptual and methodological background of the study. In chapters 1 and 2, the emphasis is put on the concept of media accountability on the one hand, and on the premises of studying media accountability in a comparative setting on the other. The empirical part of the report focuses on two sets of developments of media accountability practices: those initiated by media organizations (chapter 3) and those deriving from outside media organizations (chapter 4). Both elements of the report will be elaborated in a book that is due to be published in 2012.

This report is part of the project *Media Accountability and Transparency in Europe* (MediaAcT) funded by the European Union. The project as a whole analyzes the development and impact of established media accountability systems (e.g. press councils, codes of ethics) as well as new media accountability systems emerging in the Internet (e.g. media criticism in blogs). The project is a joint interdisciplinary effort of a team of twelve partners from Eastern and Western Europe as well as from the Arab world.

### 1.1 A theoretical framework

#### *Media accountability*

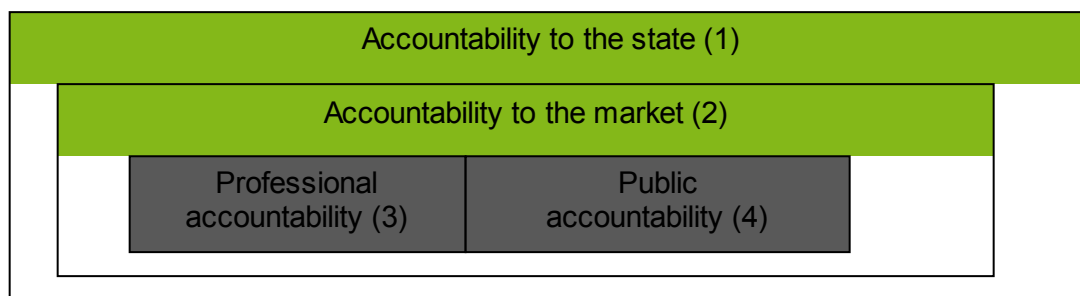
In general terms, media accountability denotes “voluntary or involuntary processes by which the media answer directly or indirectly to their society for the quality and/or consequences of publication” (McQuail, 2005: 207). This definition presumes that holding media accountable is *normatively* justified as a part of social responsibility of the media (McQuail, 2003). While this

definition spells out the normative principle, it leaves open what is ‘the society’ to which the media should be answerable to and how the media are supposed to draw public legitimacy.

Echoing the classic Weberian sociology, Bardoel and d’Haenens (2004) note that the media is held accountable, on the one hand, to the systemic powers of the *state* and the *market*. On the other hand, the influence of these systemic forces is filtered through a set of practices initiated by the media themselves. In any political system, the media are submitted to the rule of law (constitution, public and criminal law). This general principle ascribed to any individual member or institution in the polity may be coupled with more specific duties imposed to the media by the state (see, figure 1 below).

In Western societies, for instance, public service broadcasters are compelled to provide information to ethnic minorities, facilitate crisis communication in the times of emergency etc. In more autocratic systems, means of holding media accountable to the state can be much stronger and overarching than that. In the eyes of autocrats, even censorship or molesting journalists may be regarded an instrument of accountability imposed by the state.

Figure 1: Modes of media accountability, developed from Bardoel & d’Haenens (2004)



While all news media operate in a market, the media is also held accountable to their owners and customers. The configurations of ownership and the level of competition in the market, of course, vary from one media system to another. In any case, with regard to owners, the media organizations are expected to meet with the economic objectives set by their CEOs and boards, and maintain a cooperative relationship with regard to audiences and advertisers through providing these with ‘good service’ in the name of ‘customer satisfaction’. Sometimes media proprietors and managers argue that the operations of the market and the court room are the only appropriate form of holding the media accountable (Groenhart, 2011).

In Arab countries different modes of media accountability may merge depending on ownership structures in the country. In Syria, for example, where most of the media outlets maintain to belong to the ruling Baath party, market accountability is subsumed in state accountability. Consequently, economic objectives become mostly identical with political objectives.

In addition to direct influence from the state and market, the explicit and implicit expectations towards the media are partly filtered through a pair of other modes of accountability: professional and public accountability. Both of these assume a space of relative autonomy for journalism with regard to the systemic powers of the state or market. The scope of the autonomy and its effects, again, vary a great deal from one place or situation to another.

*Professional* accountability stems from the attempts of media practitioners to establish themselves ethical and quality standards that would render their work useful and viable for the society. Professional accountability is intimately connected to principles and practices of self-regulation (ethical guidelines, in-house ethical rules of conduct etc.). These, in turn, are expected to inform individual journalists in their daily work fostering public trust in what journalists do. This is actually in their self-interest to maintain their autonomy and credibility.

A fourth mode of media accountability in Bardoel's & d'Haenens' typology is *public* accountability, whereby media organizations aim at drawing a more direct relationship to their users and recipients (as consumers, citizens etc.). Public accountability may be sought for through a number of 'instruments' that are not easily distinguishable from those of self-regulation or the market strategies of media outlets. These may pertain to, for instance, ways of managing audience feedback: receiving complaints and managing them, conducting audience research etc. New digital technologies enabled by the Internet may significantly enhance the range of attempts enhancing public accountability through online interaction with users.

Our focus in this study is predominantly in *professional* and *public accountability* for two reasons. Firstly, most of the actual practices aimed at rendering media transparent and responsive stem from this relatively autonomous space, albeit they may not be totally independent from the state or the market. Nonetheless, it is within this framework that news organizations solve, for instance, how they correct errors, or how they facilitate and utilize user feedback and comments. Secondly, professional and public accountability constitute a central discursive space for social actors such as journalists, media managers, bloggers, 'ordinary Internet users', and representatives of state and market, to engage in public communication about the functions of the media and their performance.

This discursive place is hardly akin to a Habermasian idealtype of public sphere where everyone would be heard and all arguments are submitted to the rule of rational deliberation. Instead, public debates on media accountability constitute a messy exchange of arguments in a number of forums: newsrooms and seminar rooms, online discussion boards etc. and not all them will be equally taken into account.

Bertrand (2003) argues that the fundamental means for media accountability are evaluation, feedback and discussion. This means that holding media accountable presumes communication between media producers and users or recipients of media. As any act of communication, media

accountability, too, needs to be understood as a *process*. Theoretically, this implies that the accountability process starts only when members of the public actually call the media to account. In order to keep the process going, these arguments need to be responded or elaborated by other stakeholders. Accountability processes are not actually clear-cut and linear, but circular. Nonetheless, their analysis may benefit from distinguishing three phases in the media accountability process. In this distinction we may separately look into how accountability is pursued (1) *before* the act of publication (addressing norms and expectations of public communication), (2) *during* the production (access, selection, and presentation of media products) and (3) *after* the production (answerability and responsiveness). (Evers & Groenhart, 2010.)

The questions derived from these analytical categories may be formulated as follows: What sort of instruments and practices are available before, during and after the media production? How are these instruments and practices being used by various actors? What seems to be their influence to media accountability practices or to the performance of the news media more in general?

### *Media systems and journalistic fields*

Even if accountability is central to *normative* understanding of the media almost everywhere, it has invoked varying cultural and institutional reconfigurations in national news and media cultures. Hallin and Mancini (2004) demonstrate that historically, four general variables have tended to be crucial determinants of media systems: the size and reach of news market, parallelism between political parties and newspapers, the degree of professionalism among journalists, and the role of state intervention in media policies. Based on their analysis of eighteen countries in Europe and North America, Hallin and Mancini induced three types of media systems: The Liberal Model (represented by the US, UK, Canada and Ireland), the Polarized Pluralist Model (including France, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece) and the Democratic Corporatist Model (including Germany, the Netherlands and the Nordic countries).

Even if their focus is not particularly on media accountability, Hallin and Mancini point out that in each model media accountability has been enacted in a different manner. This suggests that the actual practices through which media accountability is pursued and the cultures whereby its objectives are understood are to a great extent culturally sensitive.

At the end of their book, Hallin and Mancini (ibid. 300) note that since the 1970s, a number of tendencies – mainly related to commercialization and the growth of critical professionalism – have blurred distinctions between the analyzed models. This points out to two opposite but simultaneous trends within the media systems. On the one hand, national media systems are reportedly *diverging internally*, due to differentiation of media outlets and profiles of journalists.



Historically, this trend has resulted, for instance, in the separation and polarization of quality newspapers and popular press, most notably in countries such as Great Britain, Germany and Austria.

Other patterns of divergence may lack such institutional features but may prove to salient all the same. One of such developments may refer to increasing division of labor among journalists resulting in specialization, which adds to complexity within journalistic production. Divergence may also be triggered by generational differences among journalists. A notion of generation gap is often associated with how journalists relate to digital technologies. This distinction tends to be influential, for instance, in France where online journalism was introduced a bit later than in many other countries.

On the other hand, Hallin and Mancini argue that there is a tendency towards *convergence* of media systems as many national news cultures and media systems – both in Southern and Northern Europe – are said to gravitate towards the Liberal Model as a result of increasing commercialization in the media. This is indeed a controversial argument, which has become further complicated by the developments in Central and Eastern Europe after the collapse of media systems under Communism (see, Dobek-Ostrowska et al. eds., 2008).

Interestingly, in his keynote to the *MediaAcT* conference held in Wroclaw in February 2011, Daniel Hallin suggested that the direction of convergence may have changed. He pondered, whether the dynamics is flowing *away from* the Liberal Model rather than towards it. The main empirical reference for this argument is obviously the USA, where the media system is becoming more politically polarized due to the growing importance of political partisanship within the media as highlighted by the conservative *Fox News* and liberal *Huffington Post*.

Particularly with regard to non-Western media systems, the convergence hypothesis has to be reconsidered. In the contexts of Arab countries, where different historical developments such as colonialism or constant violent conflicts<sup>1</sup> have shaped media systems to a notable degree, a distinct development towards any of the outlined models is nearly impossible. In Lebanon for example, a liberal media market as an indicator for the Liberal Model co-exists with strong political parallelism distinctive for the Polarized Pluralist Model. Reform initiatives in Jordan's state television allow us to presume that the Democratic Corporatist Model guides parts of the media development in Jordan while other aspects of the media system point towards the Liberal and the Polarized Pluralist Model. Quite recently, the uprisings in the Arab world have challenged the convergence hypothesis even more severely.

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<sup>1</sup> Hallin mentioned these special factors in his speech held at the University of Erfurt, 29 October 2011, entitled "Comparing Media Systems beyond the Western World".

Another important factor generating change within and across media systems is obviously the Internet. As a still relatively new technology, the Web and new platforms of social media introduce professional news organizations new channels for publishing contents and interacting with their users. Equally important is that the Internet provides new means for audiences to seek information for their needs, to voice their criticism towards the news media, and if necessary, becoming their own journalists, as the famous slogan of CNN suggested. These observations point out to the potential of new technologies but these incentives do not determine the outcomes of how these instruments are actually adopted and put into use.

While Hallin and Mancini's seminal work on media systems still provides an appropriate point of entry for comparative journalism research, it calls for a number of qualifications. One way to deal with them is to conceive neither news media nor media accountability as *systems* of orderly arrangements (Oxford English Dictionary) but to understand them as *fields* whereby practitioners and users negotiate their relationship to external (state and market) and internal forces (other practitioners) (Bourdieu, 2005; Benson, 2006).

According to the Bourdieuan view, positions in the field are not merely manifold but they are also to some extent structural. The positions given actors hold in the journalistic field depend on their level of autonomy and their possibilities to exert influence on other actors in the field. It is hardly possible to conflate news professionals into any coherent category. Instead many of them hold different positions, for instance, with regard to how their media outlets are situated in the news market (elite vs. popular), to their organizations statuses (editors vs. rank and file journalists) or to their specific job assignment in the desk system (online vs. offline, business news vs. international news). All these relationships and structures are at play, as media organizations or groups of journalists reflect upon their objectives, problems and solutions.

At the backdrop of media organizations and journalists, the field theory helps acknowledging, for instance, that not all journalists within the same media system have same attitudes towards media accountability, nor that they would have equal chances to introduce or dismiss new practices. Field theory is also useful for situating other actors than professional journalists in the analysis of media accountability practices and understanding how media blogging, posting online comments or uploading news parodies to YouTube may strive for recognition in the journalistic field and aim at influencing practices of professional journalism. Given that they are initially outsiders to professional journalists may either enhance or impede their influence depending on the situation in the field.

Rather than overblowing the importance of regular Internet users and occasional contributors to public communication, field theory helps taking into account that there may be structural restraints in that influence (Vos et al., 2011). Obvious structural forces are always

somehow geared into other actors displayed in the model of media accountability above: the state, market, professionalism and the public (audience).

### *Innovations in media accountability: From instruments to practices*

Technological innovations tend to generate passionate reactions in society. That is definitely the case with the Internet, but before the Web it was equally assumed that the telegraph, radio and other communication technologies would revolutionize social structures and redefine relationships, activities and habits (Mosco, 2004; Curran, 2011). In order to take a necessary analytical distance to the social adoption of technologies, we need to understand that innovation is a social process that involves social actors making decisions about how to incorporate technologies into their everyday practices. It is a process locally situated and historically embedded (Boczkowski, 2004).

In the case of media accountability, there can be a temptation of focusing on the technology as a set of *instruments* readily available to anyone who can afford to acquire them. This use of wording may lead us to think that what the improvement of media accountability calls for is a 'technological fix' and assuming that the introduction of instruments such as blogs, Twitter and the like, would solve problems of accountability in their own right. In addition, the notion of instrument echoes more than a fair amount of universalism implying that when put into use, these instruments would bring about similar consequences wherever applied.

Instead of systems, mechanisms, and instruments online media accountability is understood here in terms of *practices* (Pritchard, 2000). By practices we mean generally accessible and sustained modes of social and public agency designated by institutions or groups of publicly active people. With regard to media accountability, the main actors initiating such practices are media organizations (the online newsrooms of traditional media and net-native news projects) on the one hand, and online content providers from civil society (bloggers, grassroots movements etc.) on the other.

Inside media organizations, De Haan & Bardoel's (2010) ethnographic case study on the appropriation of accountability practices at the Dutch public broadcaster (NOS) demonstrates that the process of harnessing news technologies and working methods in the newsroom is far from straightforward. At the first step – analytically speaking – any given instrument, such as a newsroom blog, is *implemented* when the management decides to develop it. Then, this instrument needs to be *incorporated* into daily routines of some of the journalists working in the newsroom. Then, the idea of functionality of applying the instruments needs to be understood and gradually shared among journalists and finally *internalized* as a necessary and useful part of their professional remit. We could add that some practices end up being *consolidated* when they are performed over time regardless of the specific individuals assuming

them. At that point, the implemented practices have become part of the principles and habits of the newsroom.

These four steps seem to constitute a path dependency whereby the progress from one step to the next adds the likelihood of transforming an instrument into practice. What makes this process undetermined is the fact that a social context in the process is also extended in each step. Decisions made in news organizations about the implementation may be taken among a small group of editors convened in the same meeting room. Incorporation takes place in the newsroom that is informed by a set of cultural conventions; some of them are explicit, other may be implicit or even not articulated at all. Internalization stipulates a positive feedback not merely from the news organization and media managers but also from users outside the media organization. Thus, any implementation of an instrument is inherently a social experiment that may or may not result in a consolidated practice.

Establishing media accountability practices from *outside* media organizations would appear at least equally complicated given that the initiative to implement a particular online instrument and ensuring its internalization and consolidation would not be supported by full-time and fully-paid resources as is usually the case with media-driven development projects. Nonetheless, there is empirical evidence that even individual actors more or less unaware of each other have been able to create new cultural practices while harnessing digital technologies. Charles Leadbeater (2008: 14) reminds us that two weeks after its inception in January 2001, Wikipedia provided no more than 31 dictionary entries. Five years later, the amount of entries reached almost one million. The case of Wikipedia is illustrative not merely of its unprecedented expansion but also of its uniqueness. Even if the technologies were widely available, parallel and equally enticing success stories are much more difficult to find.

New online applications, such as Facebook or Twitter, provide one potential path to media accountability practices. Recent studies on digital activism (see, Joyce, 2010) suggest that new types of public agency may stem from opportunities opened by separate incidents or *cases*. It was in the middle of popular demonstrations in Iran, Moldova and Belarus – and later in Tunisia, Egypt and Syria – that individual protesters learnt to use Twitter in mobilizing new demonstrations and enabling people in other parts of the world to witness these events even in the absence of international news correspondents.

In the same vein, whatever incidental events may become *cases* whereby new approaches, instruments and practices may be proposed and experimented with. Rather than being triggered by technological possibilities and communication devices in their own right, media accountability may arise from citizens' and journalists' efforts to deal with topical problems related to news coverage and addressing criticism ensuing these situations. Thus, contrary to what was earlier said about the difficulties in developing practices with new instruments, it may

be that these may sometimes emerge somewhat accidentally; as unintended consequences to attempts to solve problems at hand.

The dynamics of cases with problems and solutions adds another feature in our comparative analysis. In order to understand distinct cultural developments of media accountability in Europe, USA and Arab countries, it is not sufficient to look merely into current practices as they are, but also to cases from which new questions related to media accountability are issued and possibly, where new practices may emerge from. This holds particularly well to the developments emerging outside media organizations.

In this report, therefore, we are interested in the innovations in practices related to media accountability, rather than in the technical tools that enable them. Technological innovations – such as Twitter – trigger changes in the way newsrooms relate to their publics and vice versa, but it is only in the ways practices are performed that make any possible change an actual and significant evolution. Empirical evidence shows that online newsrooms tend to reproduce the values of traditional media, neutralizing most of the radical potential of Internet features (Paterson & Domingo, 2008).

It is emphasized in our framework that social institutions, such as journalism, and practices aimed at (self-)regulating the conduct of media organizations, are shaped by culturally-sensitive dynamics. This type of relativism does not provide fixed criteria for judging, which practices are innovative and which are not. Nonetheless, our study is set out to identify online innovations for media accountability. Our strategy for dealing with innovations borrows support from Peter Golding's distinction between *Technology One* and *Technology Two*. *Mutandis mundi*: These may be rephrased as Innovation One and Innovation Two as follows: "Innovation One allows existing social action and process to take place more speedily, efficiently or more conveniently. Innovation Two, on the other hand, enables wholly new forms of activity previously impracticable or simply inconceivable" (Golding, 2000: 171).

Following this idea, online media accountability practices may be regarded innovative, if they entail at least a possibility of transformation: an innovation that enables social action in a *qualitatively* new way. Innovation may be revolutionary but as far as social practices are concerned, they rarely are. Or more precisely, they are rarely revolutionary by design. This does not mean that they were not socially meaningful. Thus, in order to measure out the innovativeness of any online media accountability practice, it needs to be evaluated against its cultural background.

## 1.2 Research design for the empirical study

The first objective in grasping the framework described above empirically was to determine the object of the study. For doing this an initial exploration was carried out between August and October 2010, in twenty countries in order to grasp a variety of online media accountability practices initiated either by media organizations or developed outside of them.

The countries submitted to the first exploration were the following: Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Jordan, Italy, Lebanon, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Tunisia, United Kingdom and USA. With regard to each country, researchers involved in the *MediaAcT* project consulted national experts on online journalism and media ethics about what sort of online media accountability practices initiated by media organizations or developed outside media organizations they are aware of. In addition, experts were asked about topical cases whereby issues related to media accountability had been addressed and discussed publicly recently.

At the same time, data were gathered about relevant contextual factors shaping conditions for media accountability practices in respective countries. These include: surveys measuring media legitimacy, performance of existing media accountability institutions, statistics on Internet usage, and analyses on the development of online journalism. These contextual factors are important for this study for two reasons. Firstly, online media accountability practices – and any practices in the Internet, for that matter – depend on the infrastructure available. Should such infrastructure be faltering, this would effectively hinder the development. Secondly, the emergence of new social practices is always connected to presumed social problems resulting from the relationship between media and society. Should there be public awareness that the legitimacy of the news media is low among citizens, this would be a clear incentive to conceive new means for holding the media accountable.

The data-gathering process was made accessible to experts consulted in the desk study by establishing collaborative documents using an Etherpad web platform, which enabled researchers and experts to share and update the information. This data was updated at the second phase of the empirical study that included more detailed interviews with a sample of 98 experts: journalists, ombudsmen, representatives of press councils, bloggers and civic activists.<sup>2</sup>

In the interviewing phase between October and December 2010, the scope of countries for the analysis was scaled down to thirteen. The countries selected for in-depth analysis were: Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Great Britain, France, Jordan, Lebanon, the Netherlands, Poland,

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<sup>2</sup> In the *MediaAcT* project, interviews were also conducted in Austria, Spain and Switzerland based on the Interview scheme developed for this study. These interviews, however, are not analyzed in this report.

Serbia, Syria, Tunisia, and the United States. In these countries about hundred interviews were conducted. The national samples of interviewees are described in the tables 1–4 below:

*Table 1: Interviewees from Central and Eastern Europe*

	Journalists	MA institutions	Activists	Academics	Total
Bulgaria	4	2	1	1	8
Poland	3	–	1	2	6
Serbia	2	3	–	1	6

*Table 2: Interviewees from Northern and Western Europe*

	Journalists	MA institutions	Activists	Academics	Total
Finland	6	2	–	1	9
Germany	1	3	2	2	8
Netherlands	4	1	–	2	7
Great Britain	–	–	5	–	5

*Table 3: Interviewees from Southern Europe*

	Journalists	MA institutions	Activists	Academics	Total
France	5	–	–	1	6

*Table 4: Interviewees outside Europe*

	Journalists	MA institutions	Activists	Academics	Total
Jordan	5	–	4	–	9
Lebanon	2	–	3	1	6
Syria	2	–	2	1	5
Tunisia <sup>3</sup>					6
USA	1	4	2	4	11

The variety of interviewees aims to reflect the specific features of national media systems and journalism cultures, when possible. Should there be no press councils in a given country explains that media accountability institutions are not represented in the interviews (such as France, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria). In the same vein, the fact that media activists are not interviewed in Finland is due to the fact that the number of media bloggers or journalism critics is very limited. Due to a lack of institutionalized media research in the Arab world, only two academic experts in Lebanon and Syria were consulted.

Nonetheless, not all selections correspond to cultural characteristics of a given media system. Most notable exceptions are Great Britain and France wherein the list of interviewees

<sup>3</sup> The interviewees in Tunisia were granted anonymity due to the political situation at the time of interviews (end of year 2010). Thus, no information of their positions is shared either.

falls short in terms of quantity and representativity due to the limited resources allocated for the study. For instance, in order to include Great Britain in our empirical study, it was agreed that a number of bloggers would be interviewed during the one day seminar *What's the Blogging Story* held in Bristol in October 2010. This choice left out a number of experts from the interview data but this shortcoming was compensated by other means of investigation (desk study).

As a result of explorative desk studies and expert interviews, a total of thirteen country reports describing national developments were produced. These reports are published as stand-alone reports through open access at: <http://www.mediaact.eu/online.html>. On top of that, country reports constitute the main empirical reference to comparative analysis that will be reported in the subsequent chapters.

Given that no systematic empirical evidence on the characteristics and dynamics of online media accountability practices – at least not applicable for the purposes of a comparative study – was readily available, this study is exploratory by character. Due to the vastness of geographical scope, this exploration would not have been possible without extensive cooperation of researchers from different countries.

The authors of this comparative report would like to warmly thank all participants in the research project for their invaluable contributions. In addition to the authors of the country reports, we are indebted to thank all those who assisted in collecting the empirical data, arranging, conducting and transcribing interviews and providing their insights to empirical analysis. Finally, we appreciate the collaboration of our interviewees who shared with us their insights and interest in the matters of media accountability, online journalism and the Internet.



## Chapter 2: In the journalistic fields: The dynamics of developing media accountability inside news organizations

Idealtypically media accountability is a *bottom-up* process; depending on vigilant users keeping an eye on the performance of news journalism and challenging journalists into a dialogue, when necessary. Nonetheless, it has to be noted that journalism and established news organizations are not merely objects of calls for accountability. They also proactively facilitate media accountability processes by submitting themselves for scrutiny either with readers and viewers directly, or through intermediaries such as press councils or ombudspersons.

The ways how news organizations open themselves to media accountability practices to a great extent depend on the *attitudes* of editors and journalists. Attitudes, on their part, are shaped by a complex set of external and internal relations pertaining to media organizations and journalists. From the perspective of journalists, *external* relations refer, for instance, to the state and policy-makers, advertisers, and audiences as consumers or producers. *Internal* relations correspondingly, pertain to ways how media organizations regard each other as competitors over leading market positions and professional excellence, and to cultural struggles within media organizations about the direction of in-house news policies and allocation of human resources within newsrooms.

Given that in the recent years, the news media have been suffering several intense and inter-related crises: in technology, audiences, economics, and workforce (Barnhurst, 2011: 575), many things are being thoroughly re-assessed by journalists and news organizations across the world. It seems feasible to analyze the varying combinations of relationships against the concept of *field* (Bourdieu, 1996). In the line with Bourdieu, we understand journalistic fields as weakly autonomous and independent 'social universes', whereby journalists struggle among themselves to impose a working definition for the legitimate journalism (Bourdieu, 2005: 40). Characteristic to the actors of any field, according to Bourdieu, is that consensus over the vision not necessarily exceeds the presupposition that the autonomy of the field should be protected. Thus, journalists may agree in that journalism should be co-opted neither by state, market nor audiences but disagree on what counts for co-optation and how to prevent journalism from it within and across journalistic fields.

In general, journalistic fields are built on a set of tensions imposed by *heteronomous* forces derived from other fields, such as the economy and politics (market logics, political pressures) on the one hand, and *autonomous* forces (self-regulation, varying – and often self-contradicting – standards of quality in news production) on the other. Thus, the rules of the field and the ways how journalism is practiced in a given cultural context are shaped by how these forces relate to each other.

The interplay between heteronomous and autonomous forces introduce a dualism between structures and change. On the one hand, the ways heteronomous and autonomous forces face each other yield to the process of structuration, whereby the relationship between journalism and the other fields becomes fixed up to a degree. On the other hand, fields also prove to be dynamic due to external and internal factors. The conditions within the journalistic field may change externally if, for instance, a repressive regime is ousted from the political power, or if big multinational business corporations make successful acquisitions in a previously closed market. Journalistic fields may also change internally. The actors within the field may adopt varying strategies for responding to circumstances at hand. For instance, if journalism is regarded more as business than 'public calling', the actors in the field may either adjust to this discourse and make the best out of it, or they may choose to resist it by subscribing to other values for journalism. The outcomes of these strategies would depend on actors' capacities (or social and cultural capitals) to impose their views to other actors in the field (Kunelius & Ruusunoksa, 2008: 663–664).

Field theory helps going deeper in analyzing the negotiations with regard to structures and change by acknowledging that actors draw their understandings from their distinct positions and the ways they inhabit them according to their set of dispositions (*habitus*) and functions in the field. This helps us to understand, for instance, that editors in online news desk – given their specific responsibilities in the news production – may have different attitudes towards online discussion boards from those of their colleagues working in other departments of a news organization.

The structures and dynamics within journalistic fields vary from one place to another and – perhaps to a slightly lesser extent – from one moment to another. Based on what we have learnt from a bulk of media and politics studies focusing on distinct countries or regions, we can assume that, for instance, in Western Europe and the USA the degree of autonomy within the journalistic field is more strongly impinged by the economic field and market forces than state policies. From the outset, this situation clearly differs from the circumstances in many Arab countries, whereby the major tensions take place between the journalistic field and the political field (or more broadly the field of power). The Southern and Central Eastern Europe represent yet slightly different cases, albeit they are not entirely identical with each other either.

Particularly in regard to the relationship between the states and the media, journalistic fields are often conflated into national media systems. The models proposed by Hallin & Mancini (2004) provide a fruitful framework for comparative research of national journalistic fields, but this strategy may at some point run a risk of over-emphasizing the cohesive forces embedded within a particular type of media system on the one hand, and differences across media systems on the other. In order to avoid this problem we take in this chapter a cross-national look into

how the structures and attitudes, as important constituents of distinct journalistic fields, are formed in relation to a set of institutions and group actors. Our analysis of the fields does not aim to be overarching, as its main objective is to provide a framework for empirical analysis aimed at mapping out the emergence of online media accountability practices initiated by news organizations (chapter 4), or actors from outside of professional media (chapter 5).

We proceed in outlining the framework for the comparative analysis of journalistic fields by describing the relationships of news organizations to four groups of actors or institutions: (1) the state and policy-makers, (2) media market, (3) self-regulatory institutions, and (4) Internet users and their user cultures. All sets of relationships are empirically described and compared in the light of the country reports focusing on eight countries in Europe, four Arab countries, and the USA.

### *2.1 Journalistic fields and the political field*

States and policy-makers impinge on the conditions for media accountability through formal and informal interventions. Formal interventions are imposed through legislation, regulation, and media policies. Correspondingly, informal interventions on journalists' autonomy may be carried out through a set of routines, whereby political actors and journalists meet and exchange information with each other.

In conjunction to the Bordieuan concepts introduced above, state interventions may either foster or control the autonomous forces within journalistic fields. On the one hand, laws and institutional frameworks may be designed for protecting journalists' access to information and their rights for publishing their work. In addition, media policies may proactively guard the autonomy of journalism from excessive effects from the economic field in order to foster pluralism and competition in the media field. As a token of this, online news media in France were just recently entitled a right to apply for press subsidies. On the other hand, state interventions may also impose restraints to media organizations and journalists by defining more specific rules of conduct for public communication. One of the most effectively – and oftentimes arbitrarily – applied stipulation for press freedom and journalists' autonomy is to sanction acts of publishing that are said to risk 'national security'.

Actors within journalistic fields may have different opinions about the objectives and effects of formal state interventions. The debates over the role of the public service broadcasting are an appropriate example of how state interventions can trigger opposite arguments. From one viewpoint, regulation and public financing for public broadcasting may be regarded essential for the autonomy of the journalistic field as public funding is said to ensure public broadcasters to meet with their public remit. From the other perspective, state interventions are regarded

harmful as they seem to manipulate the free market and thus constraining journalists operating within privately-owned media organizations. These debates are currently extended to what would be a fair and sustainable way to finance the online media production, which entails significant economic risks to media organizations, whether they be publicly or privately owned.

While regulation and media policies encompass state interventions that are generally explicit and transparent, informal interventions are more implicit and opaque by nature. Thus, the meanings of these informal encounters and their impact on respective journalistic fields are obviously open to multiple interpretations. Precisely due to their ambiguity, the informal interventions of the political field introduce an essential element in how actors in journalistic fields perceive themselves and their autonomy.

A general reference for evaluating the effects of state intervention to journalistic fields can be found in the *World Press Freedom Index* (WPFI) compiled by the *Reporters without Borders*. Despite its methodological deficiencies, WPFI is useful in this context, as it tries to infer the effects of both formal and informal interventions to press freedom.

In its latest report, *Reporters without Borders* (2010) finds two out of thirteen countries of our sample at the top of their list (Finland and the Netherlands). Their positions (together with Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland) are credited by evidence of that the current media laws and political procedures enable journalists to work without threats to their security and restrictions for their freedom of speech.

An appropriate example for how the states impose their influence to journalistic fields at the top of the rank can be found from the Netherlands wherein the state allocates financial support for media organizations in order to stimulate research and development aimed at press innovations. *The Press Stimulation Fund* (*Stimuleringsfond voor de Pers*), established in 2009, has directed some of its funding to enhance media criticism and professional self-reflexivity among journalists (Groenhart, 2011). In this policy intervention, however, the Dutch state remains merely in the facilitative role.

*Table 5: World Press Freedom Index 2010: The rankings*

Country	Rank
Finland	#1
Netherlands	#1
Germany	#17
Great Britain	#19
USA	#20
Poland	#32
France	#44
Bulgaria	#70
Lebanon	#78
Serbia	#85
Jordan	#120
Tunisia	#164
Syria	#173

WPFI does not specify why Germany (17<sup>th</sup> place) is separated from other Northern European countries associated with the so called Democratic Corporatist Model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 143–145). Part of the blame may probably result from the prominent role of German politicians within the European political institutions, who are said to have “gained notoriety for their increasingly systematic use of proceedings against the news media and their journalists” (WPFI, 2010: 3). Apart from that the relationship between political field and journalistic field does not seem to be that different in, say, the Netherlands and Germany.

In terms of press freedom Great Britain (19<sup>th</sup>) and the USA (20<sup>th</sup>), are grouped next to Germany, albeit their media systems are situated in the North-Atlantic or Liberal Model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 198–199). In Britain, the formal state interventions in the form of media policies and regulatory bodies tend to be much more prominent than in the US. This is well illustrated by the role of Ofcom, which is the statutory regulator in the TV and radio, fixed line telecoms and mobiles. Granted with the right to file sanctions by the Communications Act 2003, Ofcom is said to impose “light regulatory touch” on media organizations (Jempson & Powell, 2011: 195). According to our interviewees, these formal interventions are perceived to have positive impact on the autonomy of the journalistic field, as these tend to mitigate the effects imposed by the market. As a matter of fact, some interviewees in Great Britain criticized Ofcom for not operating more actively as public authority and separating itself more clearly from the corporate interests of media organizations (Evers et al., 2011).

In the USA, formal state interventions to journalistic fields are generally very limited. On the other hand, the informal influences have been submitted to a set of self-regulatory practices. This means that particularly at the level of federal politics in Washington, all stakeholders engaging in exchanges of information with each other (politicians, lobbyists and journalists) are

expected to be bounded by the internal rules set by the professionals themselves. Despite the high level of professionalization – or precisely due to that – the relationship between politicians and journalists are regarded tense (Hallin, 2006). This is partly triggered by the polarization of politics strengthened during the 2000s, which is said to have enhanced partisanship within the journalistic field, and in effect, curtailed the autonomy of journalists (Domingo, 2011).

The relatively low status of press freedom in France (44<sup>th</sup>) – and also in Italy (49<sup>th</sup>) – is explained in WPMI by the documented events of violation of the protection of journalists' sources, and “displays of contempt and impatience on the part of government officials towards journalists and their work” (WPMI, 2010: 1). This testimony is compatible with the notion of *instrumentalization* with which Hallin & Mancini (2004: 92–106) describe the patterns of state-media relations within the Mediterranean media systems.

Instrumentalization denotes close interaction between politicians and journalists allowing politicians and media owners to expect news organizations to tally with their interests. This practice, in turn, draws from the historical affinities between politicians and journalists as professions, and political parties and newspapers as institutions. This sort of *political parallelism* has been characteristic to the Mediterranean countries but similar traits have been found in Central Eastern Europe and Lebanon as well. This cultural background clearly informs WPMI in ranking Bulgaria at the 70<sup>th</sup> place and Serbia as low as at the 85<sup>th</sup> place.

In Bulgaria, political communication is described as a closed-shop culture, wherein it is not uncommon that somebody from the government calls the media organizations and tells them to change the order of the news (Głowacki, 2011). In Serbia, it is reported that the professional associations of journalists maintain to be caught by the political division between pro-Milošević and anti-Milošević coalitions inherited by the protracted political transition (Głowacki & Kuś, 2011). This division of journalistic field is caused by political forces in the country and underscores the fact that journalism has difficulties in claiming independence and autonomy as social institution.

A similar situation can be observed in Lebanon. Despite being a constitutional democracy, Lebanon's political field is shaped by sectarianism. This reflects directly not merely to the political field but also to the media, which are to a great extent owned and managed by the politically organized ethnic or religious groups (Nötzold, 2009). While political parallelism is more or less institutionalized in Lebanon, it may be gradually waning in some parts of the Southern and Central Eastern Europe. Against the evaluation of WPMI, this seems plausible, for instance, in Poland (32<sup>nd</sup>), which ranks much higher than Serbia and Bulgaria. Nonetheless, journalists' attitudes towards political parallelism may vary. Kuś (2011) notes that the older generations of Polish journalists find themselves more autonomous in the face of informal

interventions from the political field than against those from the economic field, as they have learnt how to cope with the former.

From the perspective of journalistic fields, the explicit role of the state obviously merits most attention in countries where the conditions for media freedom appear the most limited. In this respect, Jordan is found at the lower half of rank (120<sup>th</sup>), whereas Syria – together with Tunisia as evaluated before ousting the autocrat regime of Zine el Abidine Ben Ali – are placed near the bottom of the rank (Tunisia 164<sup>th</sup> and Syria 173<sup>rd</sup>, respectively). In the case of Syria, *Reporters without Borders* refer to evidence of that arbitrary detentions of reporters are still routine, as is the use of torture.

In Syria, in particular, until the advent of first initiatives of online news websites it seemed as if the state not merely owned and controlled the major media organizations in the country but it also had a strong hold of the journalists; at least those who were affiliated to the Syrian Journalists Syndicate (SJS). Kraidy (2006) provides an appropriate example to illustrate the scope and precision of the explicit state regulation in Syria.

In March (2006), the six thousand employees of the Syrian Radio and Television Commission received a memorandum detailing ‘international criteria’ for the physical appearance of television anchors, hosts and presenters. Besides banning strong makeup for women, the guidelines stipulated that a television anchors’ weight could not exceed the last two numbers of their height, so, that a 160 centimeters tall newscaster could not weigh more than 60 kilograms (quoted in Pies & Madanat, 2011a.).

In Jordan, the effects of the state interventions for press freedom have been less uniform. Online journalists have only recently become subjects of the general press legislation in the country. In this process, the government broke a ‘silent deal’ with some online activists, which resulted in a slight relaxation of the constraints to the online media from what had been originally intended (Hawatmeh & Pies, 2011). Given that some actors in the journalistic field had argued for a stricter control towards the allegedly ‘unprofessional and irresponsible’ behavior of online journalists suggests that the state-media-relations are a source of tension within the Jordanian journalistic field. As a token of this tension, some actors regularly refer to the *Press Freedom Index* to voice their calls for greater autonomy, while some others tend to ignore it.

Also in Tunisia, journalists and anonymous interviewees draw a distinction between the offline and online media with regard to degree of freedom of expression. They argue that in the Internet, and more particularly in the social media, Tunisian journalists have greater space for expression and means to communicate. This may be partly endowed by the fact that the state authorities (before the demonstrations in 2011) did not impose as deep routed control – in terms of ownership or personnel politics – over the Internet as they did with regard to offline media (Ferjani, 2011). Nonetheless, this did not prevent *Reporters without Borders* to label Tunisia an “enemy of the internet”.

In our brief comparative look into the state-media-relations in thirteen countries broadly three different configurations were disclosed. Firstly, in autocratic – or to put it more optimistically – gradually post-autocratic systems, the political fields tend to impose strong and preventive influences on journalistic fields. This mode of relationship is found in Syria, Jordan and Tunisia (at least, prior to 2010). Secondly, in the cultures with traditions of political parallelism, journalistic fields are most likely to be submitted to attempts of instrumentalization by the political fields. These conventions tend to be relatively strong in Lebanon, Bulgaria, and Serbia. Even if the practice of instrumentalization was initially coined to describe the state-media-relations in the Mediterranean countries, it is debatable, whether France can be placed in the Mediterranean Model at all. It can be argued that historically the French press has been less politicized than that of Italy. Thus, also the patterns of instrumentalization tend to be less effective in France.

The third configuration of the state-media-relations is characterized by limited formal interventions and more or less regulated informal interactions between the political field and journalistic fields. This variation seems to be a predominant one in the established liberal and corporatist democracies of the USA and Western Europe.

## *2.2 The influences from the economic field*

A second heteronomous force shaping journalistic fields is the market forces. Alike with interventions from the political fields, the economic fields can be seen to be either fostering or undermining the autonomy of the journalistic fields, depending on the contexts and the frames of interpretation.

Given that news and other media contents are commodities to be sold in the market to users and/or advertisers, the impact of the market to journalistic fields is immensely important and complicated. In what follows, we mainly pay attention to three things: a set of structural features of the markets in general, varying anticipations about the future developments of media markets, and cultural consequences of the market competition within the journalistic fields. In the latter our focus will be in the differentiation and hierarchies of professional habituses among media professionals.

Economies are under the process of globalization. Nonetheless, as far as we discuss the media or news, their markets tend to be predominantly national by character. From this follows that their basic features stem from rather crude features, such as the size of the population and the aggregated purchase power of national populations. This gives us the first statistical parameter to compare economic circumstances in the countries under our analysis.



By combining census data to gross national income (GNI) per capita, we can roughly distinguish markets with regard to their *size* (small/mid/big).<sup>4</sup>

High accounts<sup>5</sup> on both parameters equal to big markets. This holds, most notably to the USA, Germany, Great Britain, and France. Correspondingly, low accounts on both parameters denote that the national markets are small. This criteria applies to all four Arab countries (Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia and Syria), and two countries from Central and Eastern Europe: Bulgaria and Serbia. The countries between these poles can be roughly labeled as mid-size markets. In this comparison, the sizes of the market in the Netherlands and Poland seem similar enough, due to the fact that two variables compensate each other: a lower gross national income in Poland is balanced out by the fact that its population is more two times bigger than that of the Netherlands. Conversely, the market in Finland designated to be small rather than mid-size due to the small population; regardless of the fact that the GNI in Finland compares to those of France, Germany, and Great Britain.

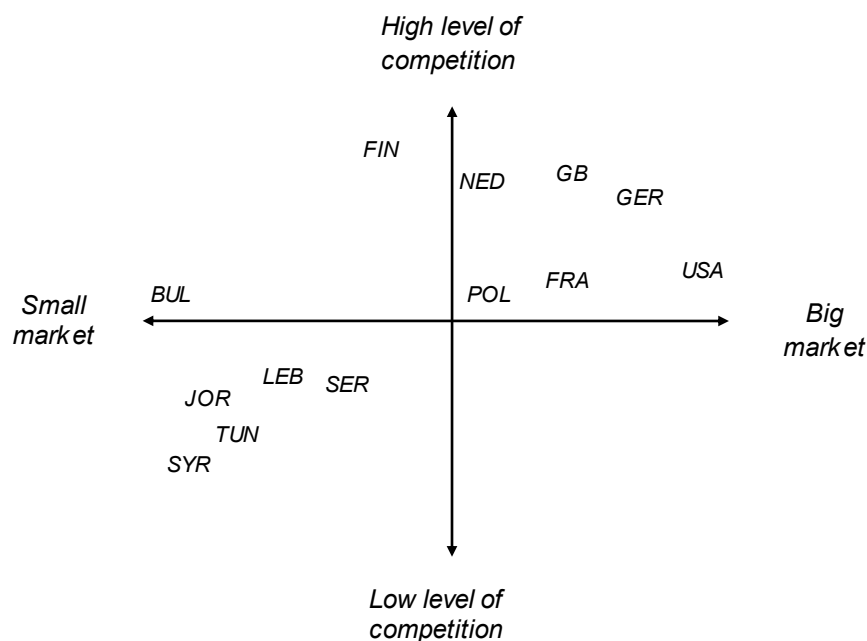
The second general variable for measuring the market condition in general is the level of competition in the respective media markets (low/high). This variable is much more difficult to measure and compare given that market dynamics vary from one context to another and consistent data on all aspects of media markets are difficult to obtain. Our comparison rests on the data on total circulation of newspapers, which is evaluated against the size of the national populations. This gives an idea to what extent media markets are full or saturated. The higher the saturation per cent is, the more media organizations need to compete with each other to attain audiences and advertisers. Correspondingly, the lower the saturation per cent is, the bigger is the size of potential audiences that media organizations may pursue to attain. A rough illustration based on statistical data on both variables is provided in the figure 2 below:

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<sup>4</sup> The census data are drawn from US Census Bureau <http://www.census.gov/population/international/>, Gross National Income data from World Bank <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.PP.CD>, and total circulation of newspapers from national media statistics.

<sup>5</sup> The equation used is the following: Size of the market = Population (million) x Gross National Income Per Capita (1000 \$). The threshold for big markets is > 1 000 000; the margins for mid-size market are from 500 000 to 999 999; the threshold for small market is < 499 999.

Figure 2: Illustration of the structures of media markets



The size of the market (illustrated in the horizontal axis of the diagram) is elemental to the journalistic field, as it prescribes to a certain degree the ecology for media organizations and how these can pursue positions in the given journalistic field. Idealtypically, bigger markets provide better incentives for media organizations than smaller ones because of their greater potential in attracting audiences and advertising revenues. In the affluent and abundant markets media organizations also have it relatively easier to acquire capital to be invested on content production than the ones in smaller markets. In addition, the dynamics of big markets is more likely to result in differentiation within the news and media industry. Groups of actors in the media economy field may try attract either large audiences nationally or regionally, or alternatively attempt finding distinct niches for their potential clients. Conversely, in smaller markets less alternative business opportunities exist, and adhering to those tend to pose bigger economic risks for media organizations.

On the other hand, economic dynamics in big markets also tends to prompt in centralization of media ownership and management, which is said to aim at reaping huge synergies and financial benefits from the media production, journalism and news included (Picard, 2010: 369). Due to economic imperatives imposed on the media, journalistic fields are at risk of becoming subsumed to economic interests. This would lend support to a line of thought that regards journalism merely as business. Conversely, in smaller markets it is likely that less intensive pressures for making and increasing profits are imposed on media organizations. This may help considering journalism more separate from the economy, and thus foster the autonomy of the journalistic field.

The level of competition within the media markets (illustrated in the vertical axis) tends to depend on the cultural legacy of newspaper readership as well as the infrastructure and policy designs for the electronic mass media (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 22–25). The media competition seems more severe in the countries with a long record of high readership of newspapers and well-developed systems for duopolic broadcasting<sup>6</sup> (for instance, the Netherlands and Finland). More recently, these media markets have witnessed a gradual – rather than abrupt – introduction and expansion of online communications platforms. One notable exception to this is France, wherein the level of media competition is regarded high, even if the history of the press as well as the pattern of the emergence of the Internet are different from others (ibid. 90; Balland & Baisnée, 2011).

Correspondingly, media markets of lower level of competition are marked by weaker traditions of mass readership of newspapers, less established systems of broadcasting as well as more inchoate forms for online communication and Internet user cultures. Nonetheless, this background suggests that the most radical changes in the economic contexts may be taking place in these media markets, most notably in the Arab countries.

Contrary to media economies in Europe and the USA, the media organizations in Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Syria have not been submitted to a serious economic crisis within the last decades. This is due to the fact that Arab media markets have been running through profound transitions for several years, which underscores their governments' cautious opening of the economy. This has resulted in the rapid growth in advertising expenditure especially from the bank, telecommunications and real estate sector. Prior to the tide of demonstrations sweeping across the Arab world, the analysts presumed that the advertising revenues would continue to grow in the coming two years (Dubai Media Club, 2009).

Along with this general trend of liberalizing their economies, regimes across the region opened their media markets for private media enterprises especially in the broadcasting and entertainment sector. The other factor, particularly important for the online media market, is the ongoing efforts by regimes to improve ICT infrastructures and thus enlarge the number of potential Internet users (cf. UN, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c). Though Internet advertising is still low compared to other media, it is expected to grow around 50 per cent in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria and 24 per cent in Tunisia until 2013 (Dubai Media Club, 2009). These expectations, of course, have been called into question by the recent political developments. It seems plausible that in Tunisia the development will be even faster, whereas in Syria the media markets are likely to move in the opposite direction.

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<sup>6</sup> Duopoly refers here to coexistence of public and private broadcasting and relatively stable relationships between these two in terms of their market positions and attitudes towards media policies (Jauert, 2003: 189).

Market transformations have had some groundbreaking implications for the journalistic fields in Jordan, Syria and Tunisia, as they have opened new lines of competition among the actors in the field. The most notable divide has emerged between private and state-owned media organizations. While the latter's financial basis is (partly) guaranteed by state financing, the former have to rely primarily on advertising and thus they need to follow a more economically driven logic. This is most visible in Jordan where both developments culminated in an online news outlet boom. No less than eighteen net-native online news outlets face competition with another six online versions of daily newspapers over the market of no more than million potential daily Internet users. This competition has resulted in an overlap of two different competitive patterns: an economic divide between the financially well-situated daily newspaper websites and newcomers in the news business on the one hand, and an institutional divide between online-only vs. online-legacy media on the other.

Another particularity of the Arab countries is the huge market of Pan-Arab media such as *al-Jazeera* or *Al-Arabiya* for the TV, *Al-Quds Al-Arabiya* or *Al-Hayat* for the newspapers and *Al-Bawaba* or *Elaph* for online news. These media outlets have tremendously contributed to an increase in competition, foremost on national television markets and international news section, traditionally a very important feature in Arab journalism (Mellor, 2007). The media competition ranging from outside national journalistic fields has often resulted in a unification of local media against Pan-Arab media. This yields in a professional contest over local and national news (Nötzold & Pies, 2010).

While changes in the economic fields and how they are reflected in journalists fields tend to re-energize journalistic fields in Arab countries, the dynamics in Central and Eastern Europe appear to be more ambiguous. Given that the size of the media markets in Bulgaria and Serbia are rather small, many media organizations find themselves struggling for their economic survival. Even if the Polish media market have a greater potential for expansion, particularly the online development is halted by technological bottlenecks and seemingly entertainment-driven audience demand (Kuś, 2011). This triggers news organizations to optimize their short-term economic rewards by maximizing Internet traffic through celebrity news and limiting their costs of production.

A number of interviewees, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe but also Great Britain, described a negative scenario that assumed that under the current economic environment online publishing enables news production in its cheapest and easiest mode. This argument suggests that a great deal of news published online is mainly or partially constructed from second-hand material, provided by news agencies and public relations. Davies (2007) estimated that about eighty per cent of daily news production in Great Britain fit to that category. The same

argument was reiterated by an interviewee in Serbia suggesting that good journalists can be distinguished from bad ones roughly with the same ratio:

You have maybe twenty per cent good journalists, and eighty per cent are those who are just copy pasting and adapting the news from news agencies. (quoted in Głowacki & Kuś, 2011.)

With regard to market forces, the journalistic fields in Western Europe (Nordic countries included) and the USA appear to clearly stand out from the Arab countries and Central and Eastern Europe. Nonetheless, in a closer look it seems important to note significant differences within this group of countries. The most divergent case of them is obviously the USA, where the seemingly favorable market circumstances (big population and high level of income per capita) have not prevented the media from an unprecedented economic crisis. According to Pew Research Center (2010), total newspaper circulation in the USA dropped more than ten per cent from 2003 to 2009<sup>7</sup>. As a result of this newspaper publishers cut nearly 50,000 jobs between June 2008 and June 2009 (Barnhurst, 2011: 577). Thus, one prominent influence that the economic field is imposing to media field is simply rationalization of invested resources.

In the meantime, the rationalization also re-energizes an opposite dynamics, whereby media outlets and groups of media professionals undergo a process of differentiation. As a result of this process new media organizations may enter the journalistic fields and the media markets. As a token of this a number of so called 'net-native' news projects have been established in the face of the economic crisis, particularly in the USA. News services, such as *Huffington Post*, *Politico* and *TBD.com* do not represent a full-fledged alternative as yet to prominent media organizations that provide news both offline and online. Nonetheless, they do add a new element to the journalistic field in the USA. In the light of expert interviewees, the online newcomers in the US seem to embrace media accountability more eagerly than many of the established media companies. This is partly their business strategy, as they try to build an interface with audiences without the help of the brand effect of the veteran news outlets. (Domingo, 2011.)

As noted above, France represents yet another distinct case with regard to the relationship between journalism and the media market. This is due to the fact that online news production was introduced to France a bit later than to other Western European journalistic fields. This historical delay has been instrumental in reintroducing and rearticulating a line of division between two poles of professional habituses: generalized and intellectual position on the one hand, and specialized and economic position on the other (cf. Benson, 2006). These positions have preceded the introduction of online news but these have been translated into another binary opposition between "noble journalism" and "devalued journalism" (Estienne, 2007; quoted in Balland & Baisnée, 2011).

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<sup>7</sup> <http://stateofthedia.org/2011/newspapers-essay/#fn-5162-2>

In this constellation, noble journalism is taken to refer to offline print press and devalued journalism to online news. In a way this is just a reflection of the long lasting divide between the professional/intellectual pole and the commercial one. The novelty is that online journalism blurs the medium-based traditional distinctions as these practices tend to enter directly into the newsrooms: the arrival of online journalists with highly distinctive profiles (age, education, conception of news, etc.) to traditional newsrooms fosters cultural clashes within the media companies. This antagonism seems to pave way to explicit and implicit cleavage among French journalists that situates younger generations of journalists to the side of online journalism that underscores their technological savviness, and separates them from traditional virtues of literary journalistic tradition and the privileges ascribed to its representatives.

The responses of journalistic fields in the Netherlands, Germany, and Finland to the influences of market forces share a great deal with those described above. First of all, actors in the respective fields tend to acknowledge that market imperatives have a stronger hold on media organizations and journalists. This leads journalists to think that the profitability has become an indispensable lifeline for all media organizations, and investments in online news production are regarded necessary in order to survive in the media market. In the face of our expert interviews and the literature about the future of newspapers suggests that this conclusion, whether or not it be warranted, seems to have wiped across all journalistic fields placed at the upper side of the diagram: from Finland to the USA (see, Vehkoo, 2011; Downie & Schudson, 2009).

This professional attitude tends to lend support to the idea that *market accountability* (De Haan & Bardoel, 2010) becomes a predominant yardstick for the quality and legitimacy of journalism. With regard to these many actors in the Dutch and Finnish journalistic fields regard other means of holding media accountable secondary. The editor-in-chief interviewed in the Netherlands puts it as follows:

Everybody thinks it is important [to be accountable to the public]. I think it's important, but we don't do it very well. However, it's at the bottom of our priorities, because there is always something more important in the rush of the day. Moreover, it [media accountability] may be interesting for just a small group of people. (quoted in Groenhart, 2011.)

In sum, media market constitutes an important feature to all journalistic fields. Nonetheless, the influences from the market are not uniform either in terms of time or place. In Arab countries, positive anticipations in regard to the scope and diversity of public communication are vested in the process of market liberalization. However, this process is far from automatic, and the current political developments in these countries will be crucial for the course of the direction in the near future. In Central and Eastern Europe media markets are evidently in a situation of protracted transition. In the midst of that process, the uncertainties over the economic security

of market triggers uncertainty in the respective journalistic fields. This uncertainty clearly delimits the autonomy of journalism.

While the historical and cultural foundations for the autonomy of journalistic fields are more robust in Western Europe and the USA, these fields, too, are shaking due to economic uncertainties. Given that the economic scenarios are negative in the markets in general and media markets in particular, it seems likely that the economic implications for the autonomy of journalistic fields are negative rather than positive at the moment.

### *2.3 Institutions for self-regulation and journalistic fields*

Institutions related to self-regulation of journalism are basically designed to keep the state – and to lesser extent the market – at distance from news production. As institutional arrangements, self-regulation is most typically executed through press councils and in-house press ombudspersons. Both of these institutions are expected to implement and interpret good conduct of journalistic practices as defined by the professionals themselves. The representative status of those who take responsibility of conceiving codes of ethics is usually derived from professional organizations, such as unions of journalists and the like.

The institutions for self-regulation constitute a potentially prominent group of actors within journalistic fields. Self-regulation is a relevant component to journalistic fields even if these institutions were not fully developed or if they do not exist at all. This would mean that journalists lack a buffer against the interests of other actors in the field: the state, advertisers, or audiences. In this situation, actors within a given journalistic field may voice an interest in establishing institutions for self-regulation, which may trigger changes within the field.

#### *Professional associations*

Professional associations denote the principles of corporatism, whereby people with the same functions in the society organize in order to attain equality between themselves and gain influence with regard to their employers and the society as a whole (Gregg, 2007: 109). With regard to journalism and journalists, four types of organizations can be identified in our sample: *representative* (assuming high rate of membership, a distinct social status in a given society, and direct influence on journalistic fields), *decentralized* (organizations mainly at lower level imposing an indirect influence on journalistic fields), *divided* (unions pulled by political or sectarian divisions and imposing influence mainly to their particular enclave in journalistic fields), and *exclusive* (confined access to membership, and thus often co-opted by forces external to journalism).

*Representative* journalists' union can be found in Western and Northern Europe (i.e. Germany, the Netherlands, and Finland in our sample). In these countries, journalists' unions have been major drivers of professionalism. In their early years, the unions suffered from political division but no later than in the 1930s and 1940s – as corporatism became fully consolidated in respective societies – journalists' unions, too, developed into strong and unified organizations (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 171).

Due to their prominent status in the labor market policies, professional associations in Germany, the Netherlands and Finland have assumed an active role in safeguarding the autonomy of journalism through conceiving principles and institutions for self-regulation. The principles for self-regulation are customarily articulated in the form of codes of ethics, which have until recently received high level of acceptance among journalists and publishers. Nonetheless, a number of surveys conducted among journalists suggest that the legitimacy of the ethical codes, and simply an awareness of their existence – seems to be waning. In the early years of 2000s, no less than 95 per cent of union members in Finland considered their ethical codes useful and helpful to their work. In 2008, this opinion was shared by no more than 44 per cent of respondents. In the latter study, three out four journalists argued that economic interests are increasingly placed ahead of journalistic-ethical principles (Heikkilä & Kylmä, 2011: 54).

In the USA, journalism is undoubtedly recognized as distinct occupational community and social activity, with a value system and standards of practices of its own (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 217). Unlike in democratic corporatistic systems, the prominent status of journalism in the USA was not achieved through collective organizations or professional unions but it was pursued by more individualized ethos and efforts. As a result of this also the principles aimed at safeguarding the autonomy of journalistic fields have been conceived without formal coordination by collectively representative union. In the face of this cultural heritage, newsrooms tend to resist the idea of having external or co-regulative bodies to oversee their activities. Thus, forces aimed at safeguarding the autonomy of journalism in the USA have been decentralized by character (see, table 6 below).



Table 6: The status of journalists' unions in journalistic fields

Bulgaria	Representative
Finland	Representative
France	Representative
Germany	Representative
Great Britain	Representative
Jordan	Exclusive
Lebanon	Divided
Netherlands	Representative
Poland	Divided
Serbia	Divided
Syria	Exclusive
Tunisia	Exclusive
USA	Decentralized

In Central Eastern Europe and Lebanon, journalists' unions have been formed in the conditions of political disintegration. This has resulted in several unions striving for the right to represent the profession and defend its interests. For instance, the Polish journalistic field has been introduced to three competing unions, each of which have produced their own codes of ethics (Głowacki & Urbaniak, 2011). In Serbia and Lebanon journalists associations have agreed on a common code of ethics but this has not wiped out the politically-driven divisions of media professionals. Bulgaria seems somehow an exception as a code of ethics was worked out in cooperation of journalists and non-governmental organizations. The fact that also politicians worked as midwives in the process has been taken as to signal the weakness of the journalists' association (Głowacki, 2011).

In many Arab countries, journalists' professional unions have been *exclusive* either in regard to journalists' position to the state or the type of media outlet they work for. A poignant but extreme example is Syria, where professional associations – not merely that of journalists – have been intimately connected to the state. Moreover, the political elites in the country have aimed to get a hold of online journalists (who are not even members of the association), as they have been active in developing the code of ethics distinctively for news websites but not for the traditional media.

In Jordan and Tunisia, the exclusiveness of journalists' union tends to be decreasing. In Jordan, net-native media were just recently allowed to become members of the Jordan Press Association (JPA) and formerly strong ties to the regime are slowly loosening. In Tunisia, a similar tendency seems at least possible, as the journalistic field is gradually rearranging itself in the post-autocratic era. In addition, in many Arab countries journalists try to engage in cooperation with non-governmental organizations in order to work out codes of ethics

independently from the states. At this moment, these codes have not managed to win wider acceptance in the respective fields as yet (Pies et al., 2011).

### *Press councils*

Press councils represent a predominant institution, whereby reported allegations against unethical conduct of journalism can be tackled within the means of self-regulation. At the moment, press councils do not exist at all in France and Arab countries. Instead, they have assumed a central place within journalistic fields in Western and Northern Europe (Germany, the Netherlands and Finland) as well as Great Britain. Nonetheless, in all these countries press councils have faced increasing criticism from journalists, audiences and policy-makers. This criticism is partly directed at specific procedures of the councils. Press councils have also become vehicles for addressing other divisions among journalists and media organizations, whether or not these differing interests pertain to ethics of journalism.

At the core of procedural criticism is an argument that press councils are unable to maintain the quality of news. This is said to result from their lack of sanctioning power, and – in Great Britain and Germany – their inability to encompass members from the three main actors: journalists, publishers and media users. While in Great Britain the journalists are left out from the Press Complaints Commission (PCC), in Germany it is members from the audience who are not involved in the protocols of German Press Council, Presserat. In the former case, the institutional design of the PCC yields in criticism that regards the press council external to journalism, and thus, not a genuine part of self-regulation aimed at safeguarding the autonomy of the field. This argument adds merely a nuance to criticism against the PCC that has been stated by journalists, members of the audience and even by the independent reviewing committee set by the PCC itself (Evers et al., 2011). In the latter, the absence of audience representation triggers arguments about professional insulation in the journalistic field and encouraging readers and viewers to search for alternative ways to criticize media (Eberwein et al., 2011).

In Central and Eastern Europe, press councils are more novel institutions. Nonetheless, there, too, the press councils seem to suffer from procedural problems. In Serbia, the council has remained more or less inactive, whereas in Bulgaria the press council is held back by the fact that rules of ethical conduct have not been subscribed by all major news organizations. This obviously undermines integration and consistency in how ethical conduct is imposed on news organizations. It is not clear, whether the organizational divisions would be surpassed in the future but at the moment, in terms of self-regulation the journalistic fields in Central and Eastern Europe are marked by uncertainties.

As a token of suspicion or outright mistrust of journalists towards press councils, a survey suggested that sixty per cent of journalists in Germany have the impression that the influence of the German Press Council on journalistic reporting is marginal and that its procedures remain obscure (Reinemann, 2010, quoted in Evers & Eberwein, 2011). This may more signal a decreasing influence of the professional poles to national journalistic fields and the increasing influence from the commercial pole. This interpretation also draws support from France, where the press council has not launched despite a long professional debate. In this debate the press council is supported by actors who identify themselves with the literary and intellectual traditions of journalism, whereas their opponents at the commercial pole of the journalistic field tend to reject or ignore the proposal.

*Table 7: The existence of press councils in the thirteen countries under analysis*

Country	Press Councils
Bulgaria	Yes
Finland	Yes
France	No
Germany	Yes
Great Britain	Yes
Jordan	No
Lebanon	No
Netherlands	Yes
Poland	No
Serbia	Yes
Syria	No
Tunisia	No
USA	Yes

It is suggested that the decreasing trust in press councils points out specifically to popular media outlets and to the inability of the councils to interfere with their practices. This may trigger a division of professional identity between journalists working in media organizations labeled as 'quality' and those of 'tabloids'. This distinction in the field has been for a long time evident in Great Britain and Germany, and it may be gaining force also in the Netherlands and Finland, where editors and journalists working for popular media pay less and less respect to the verdicts of press councils.

In addition, the press councils are blamed of not getting a grip on the changes pertaining to online news. This argument is voiced by interviewees both in Western and Central Eastern Europe. An online news editor interviewed in Finland disclosed his slightly ambiguous attitude towards the Council for Mass Media as follows:

It's fine that the Council pursues the credibility of journalism and is willing to campaign for it. Nonetheless, every time the Council comes out to say something about the internet, I'm a bit puzzled. Their perspective is so deeply entrenched in traditional journalism. (quoted in Heikkilä, 2011.)

The quote suggests that professional attitudes towards self-regulation practices may be dividing among journalists. In the case of Finland, it seems that journalists working at the legacy media (print newspapers, television and radio) tend to evaluate self-regulation procedures more positively than online journalists. This tension has prompted the press council to upgrade its procedures to better include the concerns related to online journalism to its remit. The emerging tensions within the Finnish journalistic field have not, however, decreased the rate of memberships in the Journalists' Union nor the number of news organizations subscribing to the Charter of the Press Council.

### *Ombudspersons*

Ombudspersons employed by media organizations to monitor their ethical conduct and consulting with audience feedback constitute another practice of self-regulation. In the same vein, as press councils, ombudspersons are set out to safeguard the quality of news production and public trust to media institutions. In the Netherlands both institutions – the press council and ombudspersons – coexist, whereas in other media systems ombudspersons usually constitute an alternative to press councils. Thus, ombudspersons are a well-established practice in the USA but practically nonexistent in Great Britain, Finland and Central Eastern Europe (see, table 8 below).

*Table 8:* The existence of ombudspersons in the thirteen countries under analysis

Country	Ombudspersons
Bulgaria	No
Finland	No
France	Yes
Germany	Yes
Great Britain	No
Jordan	No
Lebanon	Yes
Netherlands	Yes
Poland	No
Serbia	No
Syria	No
Tunisia	No
USA	Yes

In countries with a long tradition of ombudspersons, such as the USA and the Netherlands, this institution seems to be in decline. This is to some extent explained by the economic crisis, which

has given news organizations incentives to reduce investments in the tasks related to accountability. Decisions to lay off ombudspersons have also been justified by the Internet: The US interviewees argued that ombudspersons are becoming obsolete, as journalists can be personally responsive to their readers. In the meantime, some news organizations have done the opposite by hiring ombudspersons just recently and regarding them assets in their competition for reputation and niche in the media market (Domingo, 2011; Domingo & Heikkilä, forthcoming).

In-house ombudspersons can also be found in some media organizations in France, Lebanon and Germany. In the former two, ombudspersons seem to represent a surrogate in the protracted transition towards establishing the national press council. Given that the French journalistic field is characterized by a number of divisions and tensions, the odds for reaching a collective agreement on the principles and support for a national press council appear rather thin, though (Balland & Bainée, 2011). The same is true for the case of Lebanon (Pies et al., 2011)

Self-regulation institutions that aim to be independent from the state or political system seem virtually non-existent in Jordan, Syria and Tunisia. In some cases the codification of professional ethic codices and institutions designed for safeguarding ethical standards of journalism have been initiated by the states. In Tunisia, for instance, the *High Communication Council (Conseil Supérieur de la Communication, CSC)* was set out to advise the president on media matters (Ferjani, 2011: 186). The establishment of more independent institutions for self-regulation is obviously a long process, which may only begin by identifying various stakeholders in the journalistic field. As noted by one of our interviewees in Tunisia, especially online journalists and Internet news services tended to lack such recognition.

We have to first establish our legitimacy among public institutions' leaders; some of whom don't even know that we exist and consider us a group of playful teens. (quoted in Ferjani, 2011.)

In sum, self-regulation has been subjected to questions and criticism in places where press councils and collective support for ethical codes have existed (Great Britain, Germany, the Netherlands and Finland). In the meantime, in those journalistic fields wherein the procedures for self-regulation are more novel (the Central and Eastern Europe countries), or still under consideration (France, Lebanon), the uncertainty about the status tends to prevail. In all these options, the principles and institutions of self-regulation continue to be highly topical issues for respective journalistic fields. This turbulence is likely to trigger in clashes of attitudes among actors in the field.

Jordan and Syria are at the moment more far off from establishing press councils or hiring press ombudspersons governed by the principles of self-regulation. Nonetheless, it depends on the dynamics of post-revolutionary developments, in Tunisia but also indirectly in Jordan and

the consequences of current violent ruptures in Syria when and how the same issues would be addressed in these journalistic fields.

#### *2.4 Journalistic fields and the Internet user cultures*

Readers and viewers tend to constitute the *raison d'être* for media organizations, whether they publish media contents offline or online. Users are regarded essential roughly for three reasons: Firstly, they help providing adequate economic basis for media organizations to operate in the media market. Secondly, users help sustaining public legitimacy of the news media, which in turn enables media organizations to assume their positions as important hubs of public communication and legitimating journalists' social roles as gatekeepers, watchdogs, storytellers etc. While the two former aspects emphasizing the role of users in the journalistic fields pertain to any news media, the third one is more distinctively connected to online journalism: namely, the potential of Internet to engage users to interaction with newsrooms and participating in the news production.

Due to heavy rhetorical load invested on users and audiences, the professional attitudes of media professionals towards users tend to invoke broad generalizations to begin with. Users' impact on the media and journalistic fields may be saluted as necessary catalysts in redeeming the future of professionalism journalism. This attitude is most explicitly articulated by outspoken pamphlets of digital futures (Rheingold, 2004; Leadbeater, 2008; Benkler, 2006). On the other hand, the impact of Internet users are also evaluated in extremely pessimistic tone, whereby "the internet is killing our culture and assaulting our economy", as Keen (2007) provocatively puts it in the subtitle of his book. These polarized discourses are not unknown to professional attitudes of journalists either. More often than that Internet user cultures tend to facilitate both hope and fear within news organizations. Thus, they represent equally ambiguous ingredients to journalistic fields as the uncertainties over media markets.

A number of studies on Internet users suggest that the Web is not predominantly a news medium for them (Eurobarometer, 2010). A majority of individual online visits are associated with using e-mail, engaging in interpersonal communication and connecting to online services. As far as public communication is concerned, reading online newspapers is far more popular than postings to blogs or online discussion boards. This generalization, however, yields in varying Internet user (sub)cultures, which are connected to journalistic fields in many different ways. While the ways how actual practices aimed at holding the media accountable are emerging in different countries will be described and discussed in chapter 4 it is sufficient here to point to three dominant discourses about the impact of users on journalism. These discourses are

derived from interviews conducted in the *MediaAcT* project as well as extensive literature on respective journalism and media cultures.

In the first discourse, the most important feature of Internet users is deduced from their qualities as seemingly ('good') political citizens. Secondly, the impact of Internet users is described as almost the opposite based on a number of references to allegedly low level public debate in online environment. Thirdly, Internet user cultures are made sense outside the realm of (good or bad) citizenship and regarding them as distinct features of commercial culture and commodification of online news and journalism. While all these perspectives are used with regard to specific countries and their journalistic fields, these are emphasized differently with regard to distinct user cultures.

The line of thought focusing on Internet users as potentially politically active citizens tends to be the strongest in the USA and Great Britain. This is partly due to the fact that these countries can boast of the largest groups of Internet users as well as the longest history of Internet uses and online journalism. In the USA, Internet users' combined interest in politics and media is said to stem from the polarization of American politics (Hargittai et al., 2008). This has helped establishing a solid basis for online commentary that endorses either the conservative or liberal agenda and criticizes the news media from bias towards the opposite ideology. The vibrancy of politically motivated media criticism, however, seems to trigger counter-force within the American journalistic fields, as journalists tend to regard themselves neutral or detached from politics and thus they prefer protecting themselves from this sort of criticism to exposing themselves to it (Domingo & Heikkilä, forthcoming).

In this framework, many journalists tend to regard Internet user cultures risks to their professional autonomy and social status. On the other hand, many of our interviewees are hopeful of Internet users precisely due to the potential confrontations. Given that newspapers are taken to represent "obsolete means of disseminating news" and print news are said to be "seriously plagued by a lack of interaction with audiences", the Internet user cultures seems to provide solutions for both problems. In Great Britain, the Web is often regarded instrumental in giving a voice to public criticism against the excesses in tabloid journalism. While this attitude is not a new thing, the opportunities to render it public and influential are said to have increased significantly due to the Internet (Evers et al., 2011).

The political impact of Internet user cultures is mentioned in Bulgaria where the online environment seems to have introduced new groups of users to national news, previously unattainable by the offline media. An interviewee noted that Bulgarian emigrants (or 'ex-pats') tend to contribute richly to the public discourse. Here the contribution does not refer so much to the Bulgaria journalistic field but to the legitimacy of online media as public arena.

We have a very educated community that lives abroad. Especially people who emigrated recently are reading the online editions and they very actively participate in discussions. And this is where you can actually see the real debate going on. (quoted in Głowacki, 2011.)

The impact of emigrants has been noted, for instance, in Tunisia as well. Nonetheless, their contributions are not necessarily treated as positively, as noted by the anonymous interviewee:

We have two kinds of news commentators. Some of them, living abroad, don't read the rules and let off steam. I'm sometimes shocked by violent reactions and inappropriate comments. (These are)... unpublishable! The second category is the silent majority, who participate in the "non-opinion culture" They can read you but they do not always have the confidence to tell what they really think. (quoted in Ferjani, 2011.)

This quote discloses dual attitudes towards users and their contributions to the journalistic fields. On the one hand, users are regarded useful and smart and thus adding to public legitimacy of the news media as 'good citizens'. On the other hand, they are characterized as passive, unconstructive, and ultimately counter-productive to news professionals' remit. Thus, Internet cultures are regarded to be controlled by 'bad citizens'. The latter idea is vehemently brought forth with regard to the journalistic fields in the Netherlands, Finland and Poland. In the Netherlands, a prominent feature in the Internet users cultures points to provocative political rhetorics used by political groups of the right-wing and reinforced by so called shock-blogs (Evers & Groenhart, 2011: 115). These phenomena seem to result in division with regard to principles of freedom of speech. While shock-blogs and postings to online discussion boards are often labeled as "irresponsible", the actors in the journalistic field tend to see themselves the opposite.

Also in Finland, it is noted that the level of debate in online discussion boards tends to be different from that of professional news. This observation lends support to professional attitude whereby news organizations do not take online discussions seriously, let alone that journalists would participate in them. Given that most online newspapers – not merely in Finland but everywhere else, too – host and moderate online discussions yield in controversies about the ownership of these platforms and responsibilities in their ethical conduct. The institutions for self-regulation have adopted different policies on the matter. In Germany, for instance, news organizations are regarded responsible of all content published in their websites, whereas the press council in Finland (CMM) is still considering its policy.

A third generalization about Internet user cultures perceives users outside the realm of participating citizens ('good' or 'bad'). Instead, it conceptualizes Internet users as components of consumer cultures. At the core of their activities are their selections of what they choose to read, and this activity is centered upon their 'clicks' and the Internet traffic or 'buzz' resulting from individual clicks. The attitudes from the journalistic fields tend to be highly divided. On the one hand, statistical data on clicks is regarded genuine and unmanipulated user feedback, which is



supposed to have a higher command on news policies. On the other hand, the 'tyranny of the buzz' is considered a serious threat to the quality of news and professional autonomy of journalists.

These differences of opinions are not easily mapped out geographically. Instead, they tend to create divisions within national journalistic fields. This division seems particularly intense, for instance, in France, wherein it reinvigorates the old antagonism between the intellectual and commercial pole (Baisnée & Balland, 2011). The same constellation can be found in most of the other countries as well.

Given that all three discourses are at play, as media organizations try to connect with Internet user cultures, it can be fairly said that professional attitudes are highly mixed and ambiguous. This – together with varying influences drawn from the political fields, media markets and professional communities of journalists – demonstrates that online practices for media accountability are being developed and experimented with in a highly complicated symbolic environment.

### Chapter 3: Accountability practices online: Contributions of the newsrooms

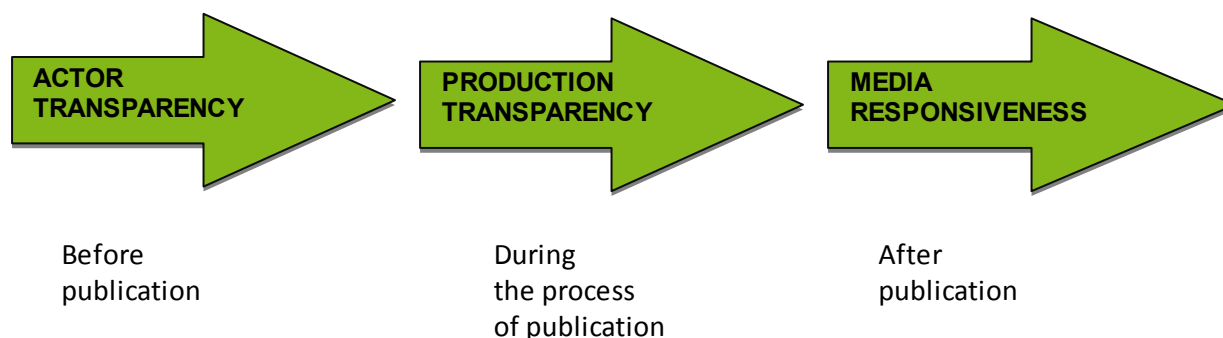
In chapter 2, an analytical gaze was imposed to how varying changes in the social, technological and economic environment of the media are being interpreted in journalistic fields. In this chapter our focus will be directed at how varying tensions within the respective fields are being taken into managerial control within news organizations, and what sort of practical implications are emerging at the level of online news practices as results of the opportunities and threats imposed by the Internet.

Even if it may look from the outset that practically anything would be possible in the Internet, in terms of introducing new practices this is not the case. Merely due to the large number of options available and uncertainties pertaining to their usefulness, news organizations need to make strategic choices about which set of practices they choose to launch and experiment with, and which ones they prefer to dismiss, ignore, or postpone.

Our interest in this chapter lies in how the vast opportunities of the Internet are being deployed by news organizations in order to foster media accountability in the online environment. From the perspective of news organizations, media accountability can be operationalised into two normative objectives: transparency and responsiveness. Neither of these principles are necessarily regarded as top priorities by news organizations. Thus, their status among other goals will depend on the strategic insights of the media management over, whether the improvement of transparency and responsiveness would be useful for them in professional or economic terms. Does it lend support to their working definitions of 'good journalism'? Are the investments in media accountability practices technically feasible? Is it economically viable to experiment with them?

As noted in the introduction, media accountability needs to be understood as a *process*. Thus, it seems viable to pay attention to how media organizations facilitate incentives for media accountability with regard to different phases of news production (see, the figure 3 below). In this vein, varying practices may be distinguished taking place (1) *before* the act of publication, (2) *during* the production, (3) *after* the production.

Figure 3: Three phases in the media accountability process, adapted from Evers & Groenhart (2010)



In this chapter, our focus will be on media accountability practices initiated by news organizations operating in eight countries in Europe (Bulgaria, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Poland, and Serbia), four Arab countries (Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Tunisia), and the United States. Given that practices and the degree of how they have been established at the level of news production vary from one country to another, we distinguish three categories. A given practice appears to be ‘widespread’ in a given news culture, if it is applied by several online news services on a regular basis. Online media accountable practices are regarded ‘partly applied’ if some online news organizations have that practice, while others implement it very rarely. In the third category, a given media accountability practice is regarded ‘not available’ if it is not identified in the given news culture.

### 3.1 Practices for actor transparency

The first level of a comparative research underlines media accountability and transparency practices with respect to norms and information on ‘who stands behind the news’. Thus, the comparative research on *actor transparency* involves practices of media organizations providing contextual information about their ownership and ethical codes, as well as about the journalists producing the news stories. In what follows a descriptive and comparative analysis of the prevalence of each of these practices will be provided.

#### *Public information on company ownership*

Public information on media ownership is instrumental in specifying how media organizations are integrated into the market. In general, it is difficult to find a systematic pattern of how corporate information is provided online (see, table 9 below).

*Table 9: The prevalence of public information on company ownership published online*

Country	Public information on company ownership
Bulgaria	Partly applied
Finland	Widespread
France	Partly applied
Germany	Partly applied
Great Britain	Widespread
Jordan	Partly applied
Lebanon	Partly applied
Netherlands	Partly applied
Poland	Partly applied
Serbia	Partly applied
Syria	Partly applied
Tunisia	Partly applied
USA	Widespread

In many cases publication of information related to company ownership is required by the national corporate law, as in the case of the Finnish (Heikkilä, 2011) or the Press and Publications Law in Jordan (Pies & Madanat, 2011a). However, general tendency proves that there are not many provisions defining where such data should be made public.

Good examples of the practice are found in Great Britain, where public information on company ownership in regard to the largest media owners is easily accessible. These media corporations include: the Guardian Media Group, Independent News and Media, Trinity Mirror, News International, Associated Newspapers, Northern and Shell, BBC, ITV, and Channel 4 (Evers et al., 2011). In the Netherlands, the practice of publishing information about media ownership is miscellaneous, as not all media outlets have decided to describe their funding principles in accordance to relations with society (Groenhart, 2011).

Also in Germany, Poland and the USA, where the practice has been partially introduced, general data is published directly on the websites. Nonetheless, more specific information is more difficult to reach. The expert interviewees in these countries noted that additional research is necessary when one wants to discover 'who stands' behind a given media organization (Evers & Eberwein, 2011; Kuś, 2011; Domingo, 2011).

The lack of user friendliness when it comes to corporate information is often explained by the assumption that media ownership is important and interest information for just a small group of people; mainly professional investors. Be that as it may, this explanation does not give away suspicions of that media organizations do not always regard their structure of ownership as genuinely public information. This interpretation seems valid, for instance, in the case of Bulgaria, where the incomplete and confusing media and corporate laws have resulted in the emergence of media groups with unclear origins and financial opacity. For instance, New

Bulgarian Media Group that owns both terrestrial and cable TV channels, daily newspapers, one weekly paper and several websites gives no information about its ownership structures in its websites (Głowacki, 2011).

In Lebanon and Jordan, publicly accessible information about media ownership is usually vague irrespective of the fact that in Jordan, online newspapers are stipulated to “clearly publish the names of the proprietor, the chief editor, the manager and the printing house” according to the Press and Publications Law (Art. 22, PPL) (Pies & Madanat, 2011a). Similar statutes have been reinforced in Syria as well. This stipulation, however, bears not much significance, as the Syrian media market is controlled by political power, and citizens usually know who owns which media (Pies & Madanat, 2011b).

### *Published mission statements*

Mission papers have the function of articulating political affiliations of given media organizations. In a less politicized news cultures, mission statements may also subscribe to broad principles related to the normative functions of the public sphere, such as: promoting freedom of speech, ensuring equal access to public information, safeguarding cultural diversity, or sustaining national identities.

Even if the digital environment provides almost unlimited space for media organizations to render themselves visible to users, the practice of publishing mission statements is not widespread, at least not outside the Liberal media system (see, the table 10 below).

*Table 10:* The prevalence of mission papers published online

Country	Published mission statements
Bulgaria	Partly applied
Finland	Partly applied
France	Partly applied
Germany	Partly applied
Great Britain	Partly applied
Jordan	Partly applied
Lebanon	Partly applied
Netherlands	Partly applied
Poland	Partly applied
Serbia	Partly applied
Syria	Partly applied
Tunisia	Partly applied
USA	Partly applied

In the USA, approximately 80 per cent of media outlets have decided to publish their mission statements in the online space (Domingo, 2011). Nonetheless, the general trend in the USA

suggests that the information provided by mission papers appears to be vague, neutral and generic. As one of the experts interviewed in US, Tim Vos, states:

General mission statements are there, but there are no forward looking revolutionary mission statements that say that this is where we stand politically or this is the kind of journalism we are going to do. (quoted in Domingo, 2011.)

In Great Britain, only a few media organizations, including *The Independent*, *The Guardian* and *The Evening Standard* have harnessed the online space to inform about their mission. An even more prominent example is the BBC, which has set a procedural reference to other public broadcasters in defining its mission, vision and values with respect to quality, creativity, diversity, and public trust respectively (Evers et al., 2011). In some European countries, including Serbia, France and Bulgaria, published mission statements in the Web are not recognized at all.

A large number of examples of published mission statements are observed in the Arab countries, as in the cases of Lebanon and Jordan (Pies et al., 2011; Pies & Madanat, 2011a). Also in Syria, many media organizations are publishing their mission statements although there is no legal obligation to do so (Pies & Madanat, 2011b).

### *Published code(s) of ethics*

Enabling Internet users to access the codes of ethics can be seen instrumental in learning about the set of principles that are assumed to direct journalistic work. Generally, publication of codes of ethics in the case of news media organizations may refer to two different types of self-regulatory documents:

- external codes of ethics, elaborated by journalistic associations (self-regulation) and further supported by a given media organization,
- internal (in-house) code of ethics, developed by a media organization in order to set out good practices for organizational behavior.

Based on the inventory in regard to thirteen countries, remarkably few media organizations have published the external codes of ethics on their news websites (see, table 11 below). This seems especially peculiar, in Germany, Finland, and the Netherlands, wherein the external codes of ethics have been generally acknowledged among the journalists' profession. In addition, published internal news policies tend to be even more rare phenomenon in Finland, whereas in Germany the practice of publishing in-house policy documents seems to be getting stronger (for instance, in WAZ Media Group). The same tendency has been recognized in France as well (for instance, in *Le Monde*).

Table 11: The prevalence of code(s) of ethics published online

Country	Published code(s) of ethics
Bulgaria	Partly applied
Finland	Partly applied
France	Partly applied
Germany	Partly applied
Great Britain	Widespread
Jordan	Partly applied
Lebanon	Not at all
Netherlands	Partly applied
Poland	Partly applied
Serbia	Partly applied
Syria	Partly applied
Tunisia	Partly applied
USA	Partly applied

Again, the practice of publishing both external and internal codes of conduct tends to be most systematically applied in Great Britain. These include, for instance, *BBC Editorial Guidelines*, the *Editor's Code of Conduct* (for newspapers), *Ofcom Broadcasting Code*, the *Advertising Standards Authority Codes*, the *National Union of Journalists' Code of Conduct*, the *Chartered Institute of Journalists' Code of Conduct*, and *The Guardian Editorial Code* (Evers et al., 2011). However, even in this case, some problems related to this practice might be observed. As one of our interviewees in Britain mentioned:

This is tremendously important so that consumers know the standards by which a particular media outlet is performing, the standards it expects from its journalists, the red lines it has in terms of ethics and generally how it expects to behave, so it sets out its stall in terms of how it wants to produce its content and how ethically it expects to do so – consumers can have confidence in this code and can hold the producers up to scrutiny if they feel they are not meeting it. Sadly, I don't really know of many media outlets that have this. (Steven Baxter; quoted in Evers et al., 2011.)

In news cultures, wherein self-regulation holds a more marginal role, the limited visibility of published external and internal codes of ethics is apparent. This holds particularly to countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Despite the fact that both the code of ethics and the National Council of Journalistic Ethics exist in Bulgaria, there are still a large number of media organizations that have either decided not to sign the code, or have declined to publish it on their websites. A lack of professional recognition clearly reflects on its status, as mentioned by Anna Arnaudova, former TV journalist:

[It] is something that stays on paper but is not implemented in practice as it should be. (quoted in Głowacki, 2011.)

Distinction between theory and practice together with the low level of journalistic professionalization explain that media organizations in Poland, Serbia or the Arab countries are

faced with the same problems. In fact, in all the cases mentioned above, the opportunities created by the Internet in their own right do not seem to enhance transparency of news policies. Thus, the Internet is described a “sleeping mechanism for the time being” (Głowacki, 2011). This suggests that the effective uses of the online tools in order to enhance ethics in journalism require that parallel practices exist outside the Internet as well. This is clearly the case in Arab countries and Central Eastern Europe.

### *Profiles of journalists*

Another practice fostering actor transparency in the online space is the publication of profiles of journalists. This can be seen instrumental in providing information directly about the varying competencies of individual reporters responsible of news items and indirectly about the staff policy of a given news organization. Profiles of journalists may also include contact information and thus encourage users to engage in interaction with journalists.

Attaching news reports with additional information about its responsible author or producer may seem technically straightforward. Nonetheless, it is this practice aimed at fostering actor transparency, in particular, that triggers ambiguity at newsrooms. Therefore, the profiles of journalists tend to be unsystematically published by news organizations in all thirteen countries. In seven out of thirteen countries, only some online news organizations applied this practice regularly. On the other hand, profiles of journalists were totally absent only in the Lebanese online news services (see, table 12 below).

*Table 12:* The prevalence of profiles of journalists published online

Country	Profiles of journalists
Bulgaria	Partly applied
Finland	Partly applied
France	Partly applied
Germany	Partly applied
Great Britain	Partly applied
Jordan	Partly applied
Lebanon	No
Netherlands	Partly applied
Poland	Partly applied
Serbia	Partly applied
Syria	Partly applied
Tunisia	Partly applied
USA	Partly applied

Publishing journalists' profiles tends to be most sensitive issue in the Arab countries given that the political power tends to have a strong hold on news production. Thus, for instance in Syria, profiles of journalists are published only in the state-owned online newspapers, while



journalists operating outside of them wish to remain anonymous (Pies & Madanat, 2011b). It seems logical that this practice may not change insofar as the state-media relationship remain intact.

From the perspective of news organizations in more open political systems and economies, the basic motive for publishing journalistic profiles is to provide 'a human face' of the newsroom's work. This is regarded instrumental in increasing the public trust in journalism. In addition, the profiles are said to serve critical readers, as necessary accessories for their interpretations, as Thomas Mrazek (of Germany) observes:

It is important for readers to see in detail what kind of professional background an author has, when he is reporting on a big economic scandal. Does he really have business acumen from his education or through other experiences? (quoted in Evers & Eberwein, 2011)

Another incentive for developing profiles of journalists appears to be purely promotional. Given that profiles are not systematically used, they tend to boost the professional status of particular reporters. Self-promotion, whether it serves individual journalists or the media outlets they work for, invokes controversies among journalists, for instance, in Finland. The aversion of journalists stem from the fact that the published profiles tend to highlight the role of individual journalists, albeit news production is usually based on teamwork (Heikkilä, 2011). On the other hand, some interviewees, such as Robin Meyer-Lucht from Germany, finds this practice useful despite of its exclusiveness:

Naming authors and showing them to users is important for reasons of branding of a journalistic product. This will create a stronger bond between journalists and audience. The name of a paper is a brand and the name of a well-known editor a sub-brand (quoted in Evers & Eberwein, 2011.)

However, some experts underline specific cultural implications of publishing profiles of journalists. At the backdrop of the polarization of politics in the USA, Michael Schudson points out that the disclosures of journalists' personal backgrounds may be counter-productive for news organizations.

Would it be useful to know that 80-90 per cent of editorial staff at the NY Times and Washington Post voted for the Democrats? The result of publicizing that event would be to confirm the views of the political Right that you can't trust these media. ... [Journalists] believe in facts, in holding their own views to themselves, in balance of sources... That is more important to what you see in the paper than the personal affiliations of the employees. (quoted in Domingo, 2011)

Given that actor transparency tends to open journalists to ongoing critical debates with the public, online news organizations in the USA have adopted different policies with regard to journalists' profiles. In general, those publishing the profiles tend to be in minority (represented, for instance, by *New York Times*, *New Yorker*, and online-only *Salon.com*). The parallel pattern can be found Great Britain, wherein it is mainly online versions of the quality newspapers that

endorse publishing journalists' profiles (*Guardian* and *Telegraph*). This triggers a paradox that seems amusing to the critics of mainstream news media.

[We] know more about most bloggers than we do about journalists working for the big names of old journalism. (Steve Outing; quoted in Domingo, 2011)

### *3.2 Production transparency*

The second level of analysis of the newsrooms' contribution to media accountability take place *during* the news production. Thus, production transparency denotes practices whereby news organizations provide users with additional information about the items they publish. This information may be relayed, for instance, by enabling users to access initial sources of information, or explaining professional judgment informing the process of publication in a newsroom blog. Production transparency may also be pursued more broadly by soliciting outside contributions to be used in the news; texts, images, and videos created by users to be published side by side with contents produced by staff members.

At the level of principles, online news organizations show a great interest in the forms of production transparency. However, due to a large number of differences with respect to managerial decisions as well as the level of journalistic professionalization, these opportunities have been harnessed very unevenly. In what follows a descriptive and comparative analysis of the prevalence of practices pertaining to production transparency at online news organizations will be provided.

#### *Authorship stated of each story (byline)*

Information about authorship seems to be a basic indicator for production transparency. As general practice in the offline media outlets it is connected to the usage of full names in longer texts (pieces of content) as well as abbreviations in shorter news materials. This practice is rather consolidated and rather systematically applied in online news production as well. However, given that a significant part of online texts are rather short, the proportion of journalistic products with bylines is generally lower than in the traditional press or broadcasting.

The usage of bylines has been observed as one of the most crucial features of making news production transparent in Great Britain. Bylines underlining authorship of each story are widely available, although there is also a tendency to publish a story from news agency under a generic guideline (Evers et al., 2011). In addition, bylines tend to be coupled with an e-mail address enabling users to call for responsiveness on the part of journalists. The uses of bylines, however, trigger ambiguity, as not all news items solely stem from the designated author. Instead, these

may be pulled from press releases, news agencies, or other media outlets. Nora Paul, interviewed in the USA, points out that:

[It] is the mix of authorship and information sources used that isn't always transparent [unlike the practice of bylines specifically suggests]. (quoted in Domingo, 2011)

According to the findings, there are still a large number of country cases where production in connection to bylines is not transparent at all (see, table 13 below). This observation is highly relevant to countries in Central and Eastern Europe, where the bylines do not represent an established practice as yet (with the minor exception of Poland).

*Table 13:* The prevalence of bylines published in connection to online news

Country	Authorship stated of each story (byline)
Bulgaria	Partly applied
Finland	Widespread
France	Widespread
Germany	Widespread
Great Britain	Widespread
Jordan	Partly applied
Lebanon	Partly applied
Netherlands	Widespread
Poland	Widespread
Serbia	Partly applied
Syria	Widespread
Tunisia	Widespread
USA	Widespread

In Arab countries the situation is more complicated, since some journalists are obliged to publish the bylines, while in some other cases they are not defended by law and publication of certain content may cause negative consequences for them. For instance, in the case of Tunisian *Assabah*, *Attounissia*, *Tunivisions* and *Tuniscope*, articles are posted often without any references to authors. When taking into account a large number of signed articles, bylines contain the full name or the initials or pseudonym of the author (Ferjani, 2011).

In Syria, besides being “legally encouraged” to publish their authorship, journalists consider bylines as their professional duty (Pies & Madanat, 2011b). Similarly to this, the usage of bylines in Tunisia has been defined as indicator and an important feature of professional journalism development (Ferjani, 2011). Also in Lebanon bylines constitute an established practice, especially within online newspapers (Pies et al., 2011).

*Precise links to sources in stories*

The development of online platforms and Internet revolution has had a huge impact on the newsroom daily work, offering a possibility to publish precise references and links to sources for news. In an opinion of Steven Baxter, the usage of links to original sources is crucial:

[Instead] of being told what the source material is, the consumer/reader can just find out for themselves instantly with one click. This is transforming the way people see and receive news, how sceptical they are of unsourced or unattributed quotes or stories, and so on (quoted in Evers et al., 2011.)

However, in taking a closer look at the current developments in a large number of selected countries, one may come to the conclusion that this practice is in reality far from the quoted assumptions and level of its consolidation is relatively low (see, table 14 below). For instance, the rich array of links offered by BBC or *Guardian* represent an exception rather than a rule for online news media in the Great Britain (Evers et al., 2011).

*Table 14:* The prevalence of links to original sources published in online news

Country	Precise links to sources in news stories
Bulgaria	Partly applied
Finland	Partly applied
France	Partly applied
Germany	Partly applied
Great Britain	Partly applied
Jordan	No
Lebanon	No
Netherlands	Partly applied
Poland	Partly applied
Serbia	Partly applied
Syria	No
Tunisia	Partly applied
USA	Partly applied

Also in Finland they are used generally unsystematically. This is said to result from the uncertain veracity of the original sources (Heikkilä, 2011), and simply from the limited human resources allocated to the busy newswork (Evers & Eberwein, 2011). In addition to that it was noted in the interviews that links to original sources of information are reportedly blocked from online news items due to commercial reasons. It was argued by the interviewees that news policies explicitly discourage publishing external links as they would take users away from the news service and prompt that they would not want return. This news policy was coined “portal thinking” by Ulrike Langer interviewed in Germany (Evers & Eberwein, 2011).

Portal thinking may explain that ‘deep links’ tend to be more widely used in non-profit media organizations rather than in the privately-owned commercial news media. In addition, it

appears that instead of providing links to external sources of information, online media organizations prefer links to their previously published materials. All this suggests that online newsrooms tend to be heavily influenced by advertising (marketing) and/or information technology (IT) departments, which in turn are compelled by economic imperatives set by the media management.

### *Newsroom blogs discussing production*

Rapid development of blogs as flexible and easy-to-use protocol for communication may be harnessed by professional newsrooms as well as ordinary Internet users. On top of its numerous functions, blogs provide for online news organizations an additional means of disclosing the background regions of news production to citizens. This objective may be pursued, for instance, by newsroom blogs, which aim to describe and explain news stories in progress and editorial decisions informing their production.

Despite the fact that online news services have taken a prominent role in expanding and enriching the blogosphere (Domingo & Heinonen, 2008), the number of journalists' blogs or newsrooms blogs aimed at fostering production transparency prove to be rather small (see, table 15, below).

*Table 15:* The prevalence of newsroom blogs fostering production transparency

Country	Newsroom or journalists' Blogs discussing news production
Bulgaria	No
Finland	Partly applied
France	Partly applied
Germany	Partly applied
Great Britain	Partly applied
Jordan	No
Lebanon	Partly applied
Netherlands	Partly applied
Poland	No
Serbia	No
Syria	No
Tunisia	No
USA	Partly applied

The low level of adaptation can be observed in almost all the cases. Blogs focusing on production transparency tend to be most prominent in news cultures, whereby the blogosphere in general appears to be flourishing: Great Britain and USA. Nonetheless, even in these countries only few of them deliberately deal with issues regarding news production. *The Editor's Blog* and the *Sports Editor's Blog* run by the BBC being notable exceptions to the rule (Evers et al., 2011). Also,

in the Netherlands, newsroom blogs hosted by in-house ombudspersons or reader's editor constitute a sustaining practice for production transparency. Yet, given that not all ombudspersons are active online – and that their number in general is declining – suggests that the prominence of newsroom blogs may be gradually decreasing rather than increasing (Groenhart, 2011).

Due to the lack of explicit emphasis on production transparency at the level of newsroom policies and media management, journalists' blogs tend to focus on their special areas of interests. Thus, while blogs mainly deal with topics journalists are covering at that moment, these postings may touch upon production transparency but in a rather unsystematic manner. Given that maintaining blogs may be associated with either unpaid extra work or a hobby by journalists, their status as fixed or established media practice is doubtful. This uncertainty may be even more warranted, as the editors tend to encourage journalists to become active in seemingly more effective online platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter (Balland & Baisnée, 2011).

#### *Collaborative story writing with citizens*

The recent developments of the Internet – most notably the advancement made in connection to Web 2.0 and social networking sites – help pushing the idea of production transparency even further. At the moment, Internet users are able to actually participate in the news production by sending their photos, videos and texts to news organizations. News organizations all around the world have taken a keen interest in these options. Nonetheless, given the radicalism and professional ambition embedded in the collaborative production, it is not surprising that practices implementing its possibilities are not widespread as yet (see, table 16, below).

*Table 16: The prevalence of collaborative news production at online news organizations*

<b>Country</b>	<b>Collaborative news production</b>
Bulgaria	Partly applied
Finland	Partly applied
France	Partly applied
Germany	Partly applied
Great Britain	Partly applied
Jordan	Partly applied
Lebanon	Partly applied
Netherlands	Partly applied
Poland	Partly applied
Serbia	Partly applied
Syria	Partly applied
Tunisia	No
USA	Partly applied

Probably the best-known distinct example of collaborative news production so far is the *Guardian's* attempt to pool resources with Internet users to investigate the expenses of the British members in the Parliament. This crowdsourcing project initiated in Spring 2008 and completed more than a year later was elemental in giving the *Knight Batten award for innovation in journalism* to the *Guardian*. In the meantime, *Guardian* has aimed at elaborating practices for crowdsourcing under the title of data journalism that occasionally draws support from the users.

A number of examples in collaborative news production can be found, for instance, in France and Finland. In France, *Mediapart.fr* offers the possibility to its subscribers to run their own news production, whereas in Finland the online version of *Aamulehti* has assigned a group of “online correspondents” to operate as regular gatekeepers to the immense digital information flows on the Internet (Heikkilä, 2011). These experiments may help in expanding the scope of online news as well as the types of expertise employed for news production. Consequently, a part of productive force of online journalism would be outsourced to interested collaborators. Even if this tendency seems valid, the actual impact of collaborative news production – glossed under various labels such as citizen journalism, hyper local journalism, user-generated content etc. – on production transparency appears to be a gradual and mainly indirect one. Given its complexities, this development surely needs to be observed and analyzed in the future.

### 3.3 Responsiveness

The third level of practices fostering media accountability pertains to responsiveness of online media organizations. Thus, practices for responsiveness would be designed for the following objectives: acquiring user feedback and criticism; engaging in dialogue with users, and rendering this interaction meaningful to the public. For online media organizations specifically, responsiveness pertains to, for instance, managing errors in the news, encouraging tip-offs for potential topics, and the presence of media ombudsperson-like institution in the Internet. In what follows a descriptive and comparative analysis of the prevalence of each of these practices will be provided.

#### *Correction buttons*

The Code of Ethics approved by the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) in the USA states very explicitly: “Admit mistakes and correct them promptly!” The same principle, often echoing the same uncompromising tone, is reiterated by most ethical guidelines for online journalists as well. In practical terms, however, the procedures for managing error correction in online news production differ from those of offline media. For newspapers, television and radio, correction of errors represent explicit ‘acts of public confessions’, as the corrections aim to address the

seemingly same audience that had been imposed to the error in the previous news product. Conversely, in the online environment errors in the online news could be recovered immediately after they have been noticed; with or without informing the users about it. Thus, online news production enables media organizations to cover up their mistakes, if they choose to try to do so.

Our inventory on online correction policies points out Internet users are usually entitled to send feedback to newsrooms digitally. These opportunities may be used for signaling news desks of errors. Nonetheless, more sophisticated procedures designed for the online environment, such as correction buttons, have been adopted very unevenly by news organizations (see, table 17, below).

*Table 17: The prevalence of distinctive correction policies for online news services*

Country	Correction buttons
Bulgaria	No
Finland	No
France	Partly applied
Germany	Partly applied
Great Britain	Partly applied
Jordan	No
Lebanon	No
Netherlands	Partly applied
Poland	Partly applied
Serbia	No
Syria	No
Tunisia	No
USA	Partly applied

Correction buttons are distinct from feedback forms in a number of ways. Firstly, they make users explicitly aware of the possibility that information provided by news may be incorrect and the right of notifying errors ascribed to each news story. Secondly, correction buttons leave a public mark to other users of that the truthfulness of the given news item has been questioned and that the news organization can be expected to cross-check the facts and publish the correction.

Correction buttons are put into practice by a few media organizations in the USA, and to lesser extent elsewhere (for instance, in Spain). The limited spread of this practice may partly come down to the fact that the very idea of correction buttons has not been introduced to online news organizations. As the interviewees in Finland and Poland were informed of this practice, they immediately started to think about experimenting with it (Heikkilä, 2011; Kuś, 2011).

The actual development of correction policies and practices may face with professional resistance within newsrooms, though. For instance, Ulrike Langer, who refers to the case of



Germany, doubts whether news organizations would be willing to change their old habits when it comes to accepting errors publicly (cf. Maier, 2007).

Journalists consider themselves to be in a more prominent expert position than the readers: We explain the world to you. In this frame of mind it is impossible for journalists to be liable to errors. Often journalists are not the real experts in certain fields and in every detail. In those cases, they should gratefully accept legitimate criticism and publicly thank for that. By correcting mistakes, quality and credibility will improve. (quoted in Evers & Eberwein, 2011.)

### *Ombudsperson-like institution*

In the offline media, in-house ombudspersons tend to represent the practice for responsiveness. Ombudspersons may, of course, assume online presence for themselves. This would entail that ‘ombudsperson-like’ practices were established to online news services. These would include ombudspersons’ regular blogs, reviews of recent feedback from users, resolutions of controversies between the newsroom and users etc. Nonetheless, our inventory suggests that such practices are rare indeed (see, table 18, below).

*Table 18:* The prevalence of ombudspersons in online news organizations

Country	Ombudsperson-like institution
Bulgaria	No
Finland	No
France	Partly applied
Germany	Partly applied
Great Britain	Partly applied
Jordan	No
Lebanon	Partly applied
Netherlands	Partly applied
Poland	No
Serbia	No
Syria	No
Tunisia	No
USA	Partly applied

Examples of fostering media responsiveness through ombudsperson-like institution may be observed in some media organizations in the Netherlands and Great Britain. However, the examples are so limited that their emergence seems radically unbalanced with the increasing volume of media output and plausible contradictions between media producers and users. Thus, Steven Baxter would like to see a much greater use of ombudspersons by media organizations today:

They are not used nearly enough. At their best, they show that the newspaper is not only willing for other people to check its facts but also that they’re prepared to accept and act on criticism. However, that ombudsman needs to be genuinely independent and able (and willing) to criticise the newspaper if/when that is deemed necessary. I

think it would take a lot of time and some quite critical adjudications before any trust was reached. There would also need to be a requirement for the newspaper to implement particular changes following criticism. (quoted in Evers et al., 2011.)

### *Online comments in news*

The final practice designated to media responsiveness in the digital environment pertains to user comments published in connection to online news. Unlike many others described above the opportunities to comment on news are diffused very widely across countries and types of media outlets (see, table 19 below).

*Table 19: The prevalence of online comments in online newspapers*

Country	Comments in news
Bulgaria	Widespread
Finland	Widespread
France	Widespread
Germany	Widespread
Great Britain	Widespread
Jordan	Widespread
Lebanon	Partly applied
Netherlands	Widespread
Poland	Widespread
Serbia	Widespread
Syria	Partly applied
Tunisia	Widespread
USA	Widespread

The usefulness of online comments as means of holding news media responsive tends to vary from one place to another. It appears that online comments add an important feature to public discourse in countries wherein other proper institutions for expressing popular voices have been missing. This points out, for instance, to Serbia, where the online platforms developed by *B92.net* had assumed a prominent role already by the end of the Milošević era and these have been able to maintain their position to date (Głowacki & Kuś, 2011). Also, in Arab countries, online news comments constitute an important social and political practice, albeit their emergence is hampered by the state policies and the reluctance of media organizations to establish such practices. For instance, in Tunisia prior to the Arab Spring in 2010, media organizations closely affiliated to the state did not facilitate user comments at all in 2010. While some others – such as *Essabah.com*, *La Presse.com* and *Alchourouk.com* – did, they chose only to receive user comments but did not publish them (Ferjani, 2011). It seems clear that should online commenting become free in the current political circumstances in Tunisia and other Arab countries, it would be a significant step towards transparency of public communication.

Whether this would render news organizations more responsive to comments criticizing them is, of course, a different matter.

In news cultures with longer traditions of online news comments, a number of doubts have been casted on the practice. Due to the sheer volume of online comments, their spontaneity and unruliness, many news organizations are struggling with how to deal with them. In most countries from West to Central and Eastern Europe and the USA, the interviewees noted that poor quality of comments, hate speech, violations of people's dignity are not infrequent in online comments. This puts a high pressure on the process of moderation at news desks. Due to these obstacles our interviewees observed that many news organizations regard online comments as readers' domain and in effect, deny them as effective (or even legitimate) tools for responsiveness.

### *3.4 Social media use by journalists*

From the perspective of online news organizations, social media constitute an additional distribution system for mass communication. Thus, online news organizations try to encourage Internet users to share professionally produced news items with their friends and relatives through Facebook, Twitter, Google Groups etc. and preferably, persuade them to visit the websites where the piece of news was initially published. In addition, news organizations conceive social media as important sites for discussions, which may – in one way or another – contribute to news reporting by bringing forth new insights and viewpoints.

Due to their role as extensions of online news production, the social media opens itself for online news organizations to develop new practices that may aim at fostering actor transparency, production transparency and responsiveness. Given that this opportunity has just recently been opened to news organization, our analysis on the emergent practices is arguably very thin. It may well be outdated as well, given that our explorative study took place in 2010. Nonetheless, in what follows we describe the practices identified in our study.

#### *Actor transparency through social media*

Social media platforms may become useful tools when strengthening the level of actor transparency. For instance, official accounts created on Facebook enable news organizations to publish information about themselves: company ownership, mission statements, codes of ethics, and professional profiles of individual journalists and reporters. These sort of practices are slowly emerging but the scale of their diffusion cannot be seen very clearly as yet.

### *Social media and production transparency*

The opportunities of harnessing social media for fostering production transparency seem even more important. This is due to the fact that social networking sites may be appropriated for crowdsourcing and soliciting user-generated content. This potential may give rise to process journalism, whereby news texts prepared by journalists would no longer be treated as final products, but rather as works-in-progress. This objective may be seen positive in terms of media accountability, as stated by Klaus Meier:

When a journalist receives feedback from outside the newsroom, this leads to an improvement of the product. In ‘process journalism’ the contents are developed in cooperation with the audience. (quoted in Evers & Eberwein, 2011.)

Although “process journalism” harnessing the social media seems to be developing, the level and shape of this development vary from country to country. In many cases, its impact on production transparency seems limited, or indirect at best. For instance, in Great Britain, Twitter is reported as being commonly used as a source for stories in connection to celebrities and famous people. In Bulgaria, media organizations use social network sites in order to attract new audiences or develop new topics, but they are seldomly used for elaborating the coverage of politics or economy (Głowacki, 2011). An interviewee from France said that Twitter served as a supra newsroom organization since “journalists tend to rely and correspond more on Twitter with colleagues than other media” (Balland, Baisnée, 2011).

At the moment, the uses of social media tend to be hampered by the fact that newsrooms are just learning what to do with them. This situation is well illustrated by how the online editor Paula Salovaara of Finland describes Facebook:

Facebook is becoming more and more important and we are just learning ways of taking advantage of it in sourcing. In addition to journalistic goals, Facebook is useful in boosting internet traffic to our platform. We have noted that the traffic from Facebook already exceeds the traffic coming from the most popular news aggregation site in Finland. (Heikkilä, 2011.)

### *Social media and responsiveness*

Social media with all of the tools supporting interactivity and participation might be harnessed for fostering responsiveness of news organizations. These practices – albeit widely available – have not become very established yet. This may be due to experiences with online news comments, particularly in Western Europe and the USA, where public exchanges with users – particularly if they are critical towards the performance of journalism – are not highly regarded.

## Chapter 4: Accountability practices online: Contributions from outside the newsrooms

In pure numbers of producers and contents produced in the Internet, 'ordinary Internet users' operating outside media organizations clearly stand out as immensely important social and cultural phenomenon. As such, Internet users continue to be the Persons of the Year, as designated by *Time* magazine in 2006. Nonetheless, in terms of establishing distinctive and sustaining practices for holding news media accountable the role of Internet users tends to be much more limited.

In what follows we aim to map out broadly online media accountability practices that stem from activities outside media organizations. Instead of delineating them as distinct practices, we pay attention to a selection of groups of activities and modes of action on the Internet that are associated with the objective of holding media accountable. Three 'locations' seem relevant for this sort of exploration: media activism, media bloggers and the role of social networking sites (social media). Considering that most of the practices initiated by citizens are far less institutionalized than those fostered by the media, this chapter illustrates cases that have been influential in triggering media accountability in the online environment. Cases may not be easy to generalize, but they allow us to untangle the actors and dynamics of practices that are still not consolidated.

Some of the cases will be presented below in designated boxes. All examples are taken from the national reports conducted in thirteen countries. As noted in the introduction, the country reports are available at the MediaAcT website at: <http://www.mediaact.eu/online.html>

### 4.1 Media activism

The most institutionalized form of media criticism outside the newsrooms are non-profit and academic organizations devoted to monitor the quality of news coverage. In most cases the Internet has simply become a more efficient way for them to share their findings and recommendations. As a token of this, French and Serbian organizations used the Web as a space for debate. In some cases, online initiatives fill in an existing void, as in the case of Jordan, where before the creation of *Sahafi.jo* there was no research center publishing systematic data about the evolution of the media market. In Western Europe these organizations for media analysis are often linked to universities and foster debates on ethical and professional issues in journalism. In the USA, institutionalized media criticism is very influenced by political polarization, with many organizations having a clear ideological program.

Most organizations share the general goal of fostering independent and responsible reporting. Online media literacy was another important goal, especially in Lebanon, while

Internet development and freedom was the focus of Bulgarian and Syrian organizations. The Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Speech publishes a list of blocked websites and promoted an online campaign to achieve an independent distributor for print media, as the government monopoly was used for censorship purposes.

Interviewees doubted that their work had a decisive influence on the quality of journalism. The political polarization of society had negative effects on the efficiency of the work of the organizations of media criticism in the USA and in Lebanon. Journalists in Jordan were initially uncomfortable with the program on media accountability broadcasted online and offline by a community radio (see Case 1, below), but the journalists in charge of the program say their colleagues have learned to accept criticism. Citizens send in suggestions of topics to cover, and therefore actively participate in the accountability debate.

### **Case 1: Eye on the Media (Jordan)**

*Taken from Pies & Madanat (2011a)*

“Eye on the Media” (EoM) is a weekly radio program on AmmanNet (on and offline) which started in 2004. It is one of the programs run by the Community Media Network and directed by Sawsan Zaidah. This weekly program monitors the coverage of controversial topics in all media outlets in Jordan and discusses them in terms of professionalism. The program itself is produced by professional journalists and guests are invited – some at least from the media field – to discuss the subject provided by the news room staff.

The goals of EoM are reflected in the topics and the way of dealing with it: Initiating discussion among the profession about subjects of “professional ethics and standards such as objectivity, impartiality, accuracy, even coverage, relevance to the audience” (Sawsan Zaidah). A recent example for that is the episode on the disclosure of Wikileaks documents and the way journalists should handle the publication of such documents in the Jordanian context.\*

The main achievement of EoM according to Sawsan Zaidah is that it got journalists and chief editors used to criticism and to the idea of being accountable:

In the beginning of the program journalists were not yet used to come under criticism and were irritated as we would mention their names and the newspaper (otherwise what's the point behind criticism), but we also praise what is good. We used to receive a lot of angry comments which we also publish online. (Sawsan Zaidah, 27.10.2010)

[Chief Editors'] interaction is very good and sometimes more than the others [journalists and citizens]. For example, most of the episodes host an editor-in-chief; unless the topic is directly related to editors-in-chief then they constitute most of the guests. Most of them interact in various degrees and, more than other guests, they later on put suggestions into action because our focus is on professionalism more than the political or legal underpinnings. So editors-in-chief are more concerned in developing their outlets. (Sawsan Zaidah, 27.10.2010)

\* <http://www.eyeonmediajo.net/?p=2752> [20.12.2010]

## 4.2 Media bloggers

Bloggers represent a small minority of Internet users in the countries analyzed, however they have an important role in mobilizing citizen criticism of the media. While social networks are working effectively to raise awareness on specific cases of bad reporting, bloggers that specialize in media criticism offer a more systematic oversight and act as clearinghouses for citizen-driven media accountability (see Case 2). They receive suggestions of cases from their readers, articulate the criticism and give visibility to the proposals. Blog posts usually focus on reporting errors found in mainstream media articles, discuss ethical implications of the media approach to an event, or highlight bias or lack of coverage of a topic.

The USA, Great Britain and Germany are the only three countries where interviewees identified a lively blogosphere scene with a relevant number of blogs devoted to media criticism. In Germany media discussion was one of the central topics of the overall blogosphere, while in the US the debates on media quality were usually linked to political issues. In many cases, a media watchblog would follow a specific media outlet, and tabloids were the main choice in Great Britain. Other bloggers that did not focus on media matters would still refer often to issues of media accountability.

In other countries it is hard to find blogs regularly dealing with media accountability issues, even if some journalists are bloggers themselves. In specific occasions bloggers (including professional journalists) comment on the shortcomings of media coverage and highlight topics that media do not cover. This is specially significant in countries like Jordan, where there are topics that are taboo for mainstream media, and therefore enter the online public sphere through the blogosphere. A citizen journalism initiative (*7iber.com*) fosters that citizens share this kind of news that are neglected by the media, discuss journalistic clichés and round up discussions on current events by Jordan bloggers. In some cases media end up picking up an issue initially published by *7iber.com*. Technology and media industry trends attract more attention than journalistic quality in Finland, Bulgaria and Poland.

In countries with online censorship there were anyway some few blogs dealing with media criticism, but journalists felt their contributions were useless, as the governmental control over media was self-evident. Articulating public criticism was very hard in Syria or in Tunisia before the revolution. A phenomenon related to watchblogs is media satire and parody, which can be found in the US, Germany, Finland, and the Netherlands. The most popular products were mock-ups of television newscasts shared on YouTube or dedicated websites. Humor was the strategy to convey criticism in this case.

The effects and legitimacy of these media blogs is questioned by our interviewees. They acknowledge that they provide an important space for media criticism that was not as visible

before. While it is hard to see actual changes in newsroom practices due to the articles of media bloggers, journalists admit that they read them. Research by Vos et al. (2011) in the USA suggests that bloggers see themselves as outsiders to the journalistic field, and their main aim was pushing journalists to keep up with their professional standards. But the most immediate beneficial effect of media blogs was fostering critical thinking among news readers. The main problem of many of the blogs in all the countries is their subjectivity and lack of consistency in publishing. Also, interviewees stress that blog posts often focus on errors, without making constructive criticism.

Despite the fact that there are examples of bloggers forcing the media to cover issues they overlooked, admit errors and, in some cases, fire journalists for their bad conduct, these cases are rather anecdotal. The snowball effect of very controversial topics makes the media pick up on a topic initiated by bloggers, but in most cases newsrooms stay isolated from blogger criticism. In the USA, journalists have articulated good arguments to protect themselves from criticism: Blogs are perceived by journalists as partisan, and the professional neutrality principles dominating the newsrooms are reinforced as a protection towards criticism, with the effect of limiting responsiveness (see Case 2). Interviewees accepted that there was blogger media criticism that focused on fostering good journalism, but insisted that most of it had political motivations. This second group of bloggers is what deters journalists from being more open to criticism, as they tend to be very aggressive even if they have a point in their criticism.

### **Case 2: Torture or enhanced interrogation (USA)**

*Taken from Domingo (2011)*

NPR decided to use the phrase “enhanced interrogation” instead of “torture” even after Bush was out of the White House and the case started to be investigated. “The comments of their users were brutal in their criticism,” recalls ethics scholar Tim Vos. There were a lot of bloggers taking this on and that drove people to the website, which used the comments in news to point out their anger. NPR did not really respond to that criticism. “They were dismissive about bloggers being far left, dismissive of the critique,” says Vos. The ombudswoman ended up writing up\* the reasons for the choice of the conceptual phrase, arguing that journalists should not take sides in this discussion, and the loaded content of “torture” as a crime was not acceptable when there had not, thus far, been a trial of the situation. She acknowledged having received “a slew of emails.” Bloggers were the mobilizers of this uproar. For Vos, this means that traditional accountability institutions, such as the ombudsperson, faces new pressures: “Bloggers are amplifying these messages, sending people to those sites to comment, there is a relentlessness in keeping the story alive that makes the ombudsperson less likely to dismiss it.”

\* [http://www.npr.org/blogs/ombudsman/2009/06/harsh\\_interrogation\\_techniques.html](http://www.npr.org/blogs/ombudsman/2009/06/harsh_interrogation_techniques.html)



### 4.3 Social networks

Bloggers are usually active users of social networks like Twitter and Facebook and some interviewees argued that more and more media criticism starts and develops in these spaces. Blogs may then have the role of articulating criticism, elaborating the arguments, but social networks are more effective at pointing out a questionable journalistic piece (usually with a link to it), sharing the arguments of bloggers (in many cases through a message posted by themselves that links to their blog post), and disseminating it as other users resend the message to their followers. Two cases from Finland (3) and Germany (4) show different ways how social media play a role in media criticism.

#### **Case 3: Columnist in the spotlight (Finland)**

*Taken from Heikkilä (2011)*

In January 2010, the media columnist Kaarina Hazard described the recently deceased former member of the parliament and ex show wrestler, Tony Halme, in a critical light. This column was regarded derogatory by some readers, who by initiative of the host of a reality TV show established a group in the Facebook to insist on *Iltalehti* sacking Hazard. This act of mobilization, in turn, triggered establishing a few Facebook groups to support Hazard and public pleas opposing her sacking.

The news media immediately recognized the emergence of these political groups and subsequently affixed media attention on the case for some time. The public debate followed Hazard's public apology and the paper's decision not to sack her. The public exposure of the case resulted in a large number of complaints about Hazard to the Council for Mass Media (CMM), which subsequently upheld the complaint.

#### **Case 4: Supreme satisfaction (Germany)**

*Taken from Evers & Eberwein (2011)*

In the interviews by the MediaAcT project, several experts referred to examples of Twitter being used as an instrument of media accountability. The most notable case focused on Katrin Müller-Hohenstein, anchorwoman at ZDF German Television, who had used the phrase "innerer Reichsparteitag" when Miroslav Klose scored a goal in the match of the German national soccer team against Australia at the 2010 World Championship in South Africa. The phrase had been customary in the colloquial language of Nazi Germany, where it was used to describe a personal state of "supreme satisfaction". Hearing it uttered by a popular TV presenter caused an uproar – first of all among Twitter users, who commented on the verbal lapse in real time. Only afterwards was this criticism picked up by bloggers and professional media journalists, who carried the debate into the mainstream media. In the end, ZDF had to apologize publicly, promising that a blunder like this would never happen again.

There is a need for empirical research to fully understand the dynamics for media criticism in social networks, but the interviewees pointed out some crucial aspects based on cases from their respective countries. Facebook has a bigger user base than Twitter in all the countries analyzed,

with a different profile of average user, and that seems to influence how debates on journalistic quality develop. In countries where Twitter is more consolidated, like the USA, the Netherlands or Germany, the fact that its users are an information-intensive minority of Internet users and that Twitter is a public space, makes criticism spread very quick. However, experts are skeptical about the efficiency of these debates, it is hard to demonstrate that they have a positive effect on newsroom practices. Those few journalists using Twitter regularly to give a behind-the-scene look at their work are the most clear example of the benefits of an active public: They get feedback and corrections from their readers, and acknowledge them.

Facebook activity related to media accountability tends to revolve around 'groups' created to promote an idea. In many countries Facebook groups dealing with media matters tend to focus on general claims: Tunisian users criticize the media and political establishment and claim that citizens are the real media; Bulgarian defend civil liberties. We have not found stable Facebook groups devoted to media criticism, but rather groups created *ad hoc* to protest against a specific media company or journalist after a specific incident. These groups may gather thousands of supporters in few hours, but they are short-lived and disappear in few weeks whether they have been effective or not in triggering action from the newsroom or a media regulatory body. Most of the Facebook groups are generated by moral evaluations of media performance: Lack of respect to the deceased or to the privacy of respected celebrities. Most of these *ad hoc* groups foster that users sign a petition.

In some countries the Facebook group promoters explain users how to submit a complaint to the press council, therefore connecting the online practice of media accountability to the established institutionalized mechanisms. Significantly enough, Finland, which does not have a lively blogosphere, is one of the countries where there were several cases of Facebook groups fostering complaints to the press council. The interplay between blogs and Twitter in Great Britain resulted in the Press Complaints Commission getting the record number of 25,000 complaints for one article (see Case 5).

### **Case 5: Death of a star (Great Britain)**

*Taken from Evers et al., (2011)*

*Daily Mail* columnist Jan Moir wrote an article about the death of singer Stephen Gately, which was published in November 2009 - the day before his funeral. She claimed the singer's death was 'not a natural one' despite the fact he died of pulmonary odema. The column was discussed on blogs, on Facebook and on Twitter, where Stephen Fry sent his million-plus followers a link to comments on the media watch blog Enemies of Reason. A link to the complaints form was distributed around Twitter. Eventually, 25,000 people complained to the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) – the most complaints about a single British newspaper article ever. This demonstrated the power and speed of the 'blogosphere' in challenging the media and eliciting responses.

Moir and the *Mail* dismissed the complaints as a part of a 'mischievous online campaign'. However, the *Mail* changed the headline (from 'Why there was nothing 'natural' about Stephen Gately's death' to 'A strange, lonely and troubling death...') and removed all adverts from the online version of the article when people started contacting the paper's advertisers. Marks and Spencer were reported to have requested their ads be removed from the page.

The PCC rejected all the complaints against Moir's column, including one from Gately's civil partner. In a lengthy judgment the PCC said upholding the complaints would mark a 'slide towards censorship' as they emphasised matters of taste and decency were outside their remit. Although a post-mortem had ruled Gately had died from natural causes, the PCC ruled that Moir's claim the death was 'not natural' could 'not be established as accurate or otherwise'. The PCC's decision led to another outpouring of criticism online.

Polish Internet users seem to act more like consumers than like citizens, and the most remarkable petitions were for a newspaper to set up a Facebook page and a radio to create an iPhone app. Facebook groups on media accountability issues are rare and with few followers. There were Internet protests against the publication of the picture of the dead body of a Polish journalist, killed in Iraq. A website was also created to criticize the political involvement of the director of a radio network (see, Case 6).

### **Case 6: The radio director (Poland)**

*Taken from Kuś (2011)*

We may also find a significant example of audience involvement in media activity, when listeners of Channel 3 (public radio) organized themselves against director Jacek Sobala and his political involvement. Jacek Sobala gave a speech during a political meeting for Jaroslaw Kaczynski, before the Presidential election. Listeners were critical of the general political bias of Sobala's activity and lack of journalistic impartiality in Channel 3's broadcasts. The listeners started a website against Sobala\*, organized protest manifestations next to Channel 3 venue etc. and made a complaint to National Broadcasting Council. Finally, Sobala was sacked, and although it was not directly related to the listeners' protests, they had weakened his position.

\* <http://www.przviacieletrojki.org.pl/#stro-na-glowna>

Media accountability practices by citizens on Twitter and Facebook have in common that they are not systematic and institutionalized, but rather momentary and chaotic. They are unprecedented because they involve much more media consumers critically evaluating the work

of journalists than ever before. Therefore, they achieve one of the main goals of accountability, that is, engaging citizens in active evaluation of media performance. But their effectiveness is questionable because volume is not necessarily a guarantee of consequences. The lack of institutionalization and the fact that in many cases newsrooms are not directly involved in the debate makes it hard for these initiatives to produce actual changes in the work of journalists.

Bloggers and media activism organizations provide a more continuous supervision of journalistic quality, but newsrooms try to stay isolated from this criticism by denying their influence or their impartiality. Cases found in the different countries suggest that citizens' ability to put pressure on the media to be more accountable is more effective when there is a combination of online tools (blogs, social networks) and established channels for media accountability. Press councils seem to have a new opportunity to regain centrality, legitimacy and efficiency if they can produce reasonably fast responses to citizen complaints fostered by social media. They should do an effort to educate the public on media literacy and journalistic ethics to help them articulate their criticism in more effective ways. The cases show that, if accountability institutions do not take this responsibility, social networks may just produce criticism that is too superficial, anecdotal and lacking sound grounds to become useful for the media to improve their reporting.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

The assignment for studying media accountability practices on the Internet oozes a certain amount *universalism*. Firstly, as noted in the introduction, media accountability denotes general principles about responsibilities of the media that may well be – or at least, should be – applicable anywhere in the world: ‘Admit your errors and correct them promptly!’ Secondly, the Internet appears to be a truly universal platform, as hundreds of millions people connect to it through the same software, applications and practices. Internet users all around the world access to online news through Mozilla or Explorer browsers, and they may share them with others through Facebook or Twitter, and when necessary, post their own comments in blogs or online discussions boards.

In this report we have very much gone against the grain of this universalism. This attitude may be rephrased as follows: When studying the *online media*, we cannot take online out of offline, since both forms of delivery are intimately inter-connected. This is simply because to a great extent same contents are transmitted in both digital and analogical channels. Correspondingly, when studying online news, we have to acknowledge that online news production is a part of journalism as social institution. As social institution, journalism is a historical construction, and the specific professional norms, roles and attitudes informing journalists go beyond their distinct jobs and assignments. Finally, if we want to study and understand journalism as profession and social institution, we need to look into how journalism relates to other social institutions, such as the fields of politics and economy. Given that all these factors have an influence to how journalism operates and how it can be held accountable, we need to take them all into account.

These complexities may help us to understand the central result of our explorative study: Online practices for media accountability have been developed very unevenly in the thirteen countries submitted to our analysis. Thus, technological instruments and incentives do not travel around the world too easily; neither do they bring about similar social consequences irrespective of time and place. One of the obvious qualifications for harnessing online instruments to foster media accountability boils down to the level of economic and technological development. Countries in the Northern hemisphere, and more precisely in Western Europe and the North America clearly have it easier to invest on upgrading their media production and practices for public communication.

Interestingly, many of these countries – most notably the USA and Great Britain – have recorded relatively low figures in the public legitimacy of the media. In the surveys, no more than 18 per cent of British citizens say they have trust in the press (TNS Opinion & Social 2011). Therefore, the observation that the online environment in Great Britain and the USA tend to

accommodate more media accountability practices than in other countries, seems logical and in a way reassuring: The attempts to establish practices to hold the news media accountable are most numerous in countries where the lack of media legitimacy seems most articulate. At the same time, it should be noted that very few of our interviewees in Great Britain or the USA assumed that online media accountability practices would change the situation dramatically. Rather than solving the tensions between media professionals and citizens once and for all, watchblogs, newsrooms blogs and the like, may at least help addressing and negotiating those tensions.

Our analysis points out that the conditions for media legitimacy may be deteriorating in Western and Central Eastern Europe. In the former, this is signaled by journalists' decreasing trust in their professional autonomy and the effectiveness of self-regulation in safeguarding the ethical standards of news production. These concerns have been faced by journalists in France, Germany, the Netherland and Finland. If these concerns prove to be valid in the long run, this would call for practices for media accountability; either through updating and upgrading their institutions for self-regulation, or independently from them. In Central and Eastern Europe, news organizations are faced with similar doubts about the fate of professional autonomy. Unlike their counterparts in Western Europe, news cultures in Bulgaria, Poland and Serbia do not have robust traditions for self-regulation.

Arab countries introduce very different scenarios for the development of media accountability practices. On the one hand, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Tunisia clearly lack those practices. On the other hand, their political instability – which is more explicit in Syria and Tunisia than in Jordan and Lebanon – may invoke a social process wherein democratization of these societies and transparency and responsiveness of public communication may support each other. Despite their inter-connectedness, it is clear that democratization is more decisive than media accountability. The latter may not develop without the former.

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