2 Research methods in the JoIn-DemoS project

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Methodology and work program

Although media innovation research has become popular in the last decade, there is still much to be done in terms of theoretical conceptualization of innovation and empirical studies (see Chapter 1 on the theoretical framework). Communication science has generated broad knowledge, e.g., about the drivers of innovation in journalism. However, there are still research gaps on how traditional media companies and start-ups introduce innovation and associated data. What are the goals; what factors promote or hinder their implementation; what is the technique to evaluate their impact on society? Our research project, Journalism Innovations in Democratic Societies (JoIn-DemoS), tackles these deficits and challenges. We investigate the impact of innovation in legacy and contemporary news media on the quality of journalism and its role in a democratic society and, furthermore, the influence of specific preconditions on the emergence of individual innovations, as well as their societal impact.

The first aim of the JoIn-DemoS project was to identify the most important innovations in journalism over the past ten years in Austria, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Based on this data, we examined the implementation of the innovations and their influence on society in the five countries. The comparative perspective also aims to find out what influence the respective national media system has on the development and introduction of innovations in journalism. The applied methodology is primarily qualitative but combines qualitative with quantitative techniques in a triangulation. In the following, the individual research questions are first presented before the methodological designs developed for each are explained in more detail.

Overview of the research questions

The first empirical step was to identify the most important innovations in journalism in the countries participating in the research project from 2010 to 2020. The central research question was as follows:

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- *RQ1: How can innovations in journalism be distinguished, classified, and evaluated in the five countries?*
  The identification of the most important innovations in journalism serves as the basis for the following empirical studies. To gain insights into how the innovations were implemented in traditional media companies and start-ups (the second empirical study), country-specific paradigms of each category were chosen. Those examples in the context of each respective innovation either played a particularly formative role or could be regarded as a best-practice paradigm. The research question was therefore:
- *RQ2: How are innovations implemented in legacy media and start-ups?*

The following subquestions were specified for RQ2:

- *RQ2.1: What were the aims of the innovation?*
- *RQ2.2: What factors have promoted the development and implementation of the innovation?*
- *RQ2.3: What factors have inhibited the development and implementation of the innovation?*
- *RQ2.4: How is the impact of innovation in journalism on society assessed?*

In the third empirical step, the focus was on the question of how employees involved in innovation projects in journalistic media companies and start-ups evaluate the innovation and its influence on the quality of reporting. In essence, the subquestions regarding RQ2 were adopted but played out to a larger number of employees. The qualitative expert survey conducted as part of the second empirical study was thus supplemented by a quantitative, online survey with staff of journalistic organizations. The survey of the employees generated three broader insights into each innovation: (a) the aims; (b) the supportive and obstructing aspects of implementation on the levels of the macro- (media system and politics), meso- (media organizations and editorial staff), and microlevels (individual persons); and (c) the social added value.

The three empirical studies in the JoIn-DemoS project occurred in distinct phases over a period of about two years. The realization of the individual studies in the five countries, on the other hand, proceeded in parallel. Following these studies, the results were considered holistically and in relation to each other. A theory-based analysis of the data took place at the end. Based on an intensive theoretical study of the country-specific media systems, media policy, media organization, and the respective journalism culture, the differences and commonalities of the empirical results ought to be explained (see Part III, "National Framework Conditions for Innovation in Journalism"). By relating the empirical studies to each other and on the basis of the theory-based analysis, the following questions should also be answered.

- *RQ3: What implications for media professionals can be derived from the empirical findings?*
- *RQ4: What theoretical added value do the studies of innovation research in communication science offer?*

In this sense, the project was always based on the idea that the scientific findings should provide impulses and food for thought for journalistic practice and innovation research. For example, the insights gained could guide media professionals in how to implement innovations in journalism sustainably and successfully. The implications for journalistic practice are presented in condensed form in Chapter 28. The methodological approaches and the empirical findings of the JoIn-DemoS project shall contribute to the theoretical foundation of innovations in journalism research. Chapter 29 is therefore dedicated to the theoretical added value of the JoIn-DemoS project on journalism research.

Methodological design for research question 1: how can innovations in journalism be distinguished, classified, and evaluated in the five countries?

To approach "a research problem from more than one viewpoint" (McNabb 2021, 363), it might be helpful to use a variety of methods and elaborate a more complex study design, and the mixed-methods design offers this possibility. "The *mixed methods approach*" gives, McNabb explains, "researchers the ability to validate their results by linking the data extracted from one method with data collected by other means and in other forms" (2021, 363). Thus, by combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the findings can be substantiated: "Applying a complementary method in the design may help to corroborate the findings developed by a single method" (McNabb 2021, 363).

The project, in the first phase, developed a complex study design guided by the numerous research questions that was predominantly qualitative but also included quantitative data collection and analysis steps in the sense of mixed methods. Through the mixed-methods study design, we could "mix data types and mix logics of interpretation" (Olsen 2022, 3). The combination of assorted methods by triangulation helped to reduce the vulnerability of the empirical findings (Häder 2019, 288).

To identify those innovations in journalism that were significant in the five countries in the period from 2010 to 2020, a qualitative research approach was chosen. Since there was scant empirical knowledge on innovations in journalism, this research gap was closed with the help of qualitative guided interviews with journalism and innovation experts. Interviews with experts "are a widely-used qualitative interview method often aiming at gaining information about or exploring a specific field of action" (Döringer 2021, 265). This semi-standardized form of questioning enables the interviewees to provide more than just keywords and allows the interviewers to follow up on

any ambiguities during the interview situation (Brosius et al. 2022, 111). The benefit of these qualitative data goes "beyond simple description of events and phenomena; rather, they are used for creating understanding, for subjective interpretation and for critical analysis" (McNabb 2021, 241).

To obtain as holistic a view as possible of innovations in journalism, the sample of interviewees was divided into three categories: (1) *media-creating actors* who, in our understanding, work directly for media companies, for example, as editors in chief, and are thus responsible for the production of journalistic content. (2) *Media-assessing* and *media-advising actors* who, for example, as jury members, are responsible for awarding prizes for special journalistic achievements or advising media companies as members of external innovation labs. (3) *Media observing actors* who observe and study journalism and innovations from a scientific perspective and include communication scientists and journalism researchers. Based on this classification, a sample of at least 10 to 23 people was created for each country, in which all the expert groups outlined earlier should be represented. The researchers deliberately selected the experts based on factual considerations (Brosius et al. 2022, p. 69), i.e., their special practical and theoretical knowledge of innovations in journalism. In addition, a balanced proportion of gender and age played a decisive role in the development of the expert sample. Finally, a total of 108 journalism experts across the five countries were asked about what they considered to be the most important innovations in journalism in the last decade. The expert interviews were mainly conducted online via video call, as personal interviews were difficult because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated restrictions. This first empirical study was mainly conducted in the period from winter 2020 to spring 2021.

To ensure comparability of the results, the project developed a questionnaire that was used across all five countries. The questionnaire was essentially divided into two categories of questions. The first asked respondents to list what they considered the ten most relevant innovations in journalism in the period from 2010 to 2020. The guide to the questionnaire explained that innovations could refer to various entrepreneurial levels, such as production, organization, process, or commercialization, by which the experts avoided being influenced in their naming of innovations in journalism by either a specific conceptualization or a concise definition of the term. In order to obtain at least ten mentions of innovations, further innovations in journalism were asked. Therefore, the questionnaire provided various memory aids that the researchers were able to draw on during the survey. Following the survey, the interviews were transcribed, partly with the help of the transcription software Trint. In some cases, the interviews were coded immediately while listening to the audio file of the interview.

The first step of analysis, following the procedure by Meuser and Nagel (2009), coded all the innovations in journalism mentioned by the experts during the interviews, which enabled around 1,000 mentions of innovations to be identified across all five countries. Based on the context and reasons given by

the experts, the mentions of innovations were then bundled into innovation areas. The initial clustering of the mentions of innovations occurred at the level of the individual countries. Subsequently, the clusters were compared across countries and aligned with each other based on jointly developed definitions. In this way, a total of 49 uniform innovation areas were developed inductively across the five countries. The clustering made clear that, for example, collaborative-investigative journalism, the introduction of paywalls, and data journalism were considered to be important innovations in journalism in the past ten years across all five countries. However, country-specific areas of innovation could also be identified. For example, editorial quality management systems (EQMS) were only considered an innovation by the Swiss experts.

To identify the 20 most important innovations in each country from a normative point of view, an evaluation matrix was developed and applied to all innovation areas. It consisted of three parameters: (1) *number of mentions* of innovations within an innovation area: one point was awarded for each mention by an expert, which meant that each innovation area could receive a maximum of 20 points; if the expert named an innovation where they were involved, e.g., in the development of the innovation, only half a point was awarded; (2) *impact on society*: a high impact on society was rewarded with ten points, a low with zero points. The assessment of the impact on society was based on the United Nations' Social Sustainability Concept and Bruns' (2014) innovation concept; (3) *impact on the industry*: if the impact of the area of innovation on journalism was classified as incremental, five points were awarded. If the influence was rated as radical, ten points were awarded. This differentiation between incremental and radical innovations was primarily based on Christensen (1997) and Tidd and Bessant (2005). Thus, the maximum number of points that an innovation area could receive was 40. The awarding of points was up to the individual country teams. The result was a list per country with the 20 most important innovations (see Table 2.1).

Meier et al. (2022) published the results of the first study, in which 8 of the total 49 innovation areas were present in the 20 most relevant innovation areas in all five countries in the study. These included data journalism, collaborative-investigative journalism, engagement on the basis of data, news on social media, diversity and inclusion, paywalls/paid content, AI/automation, and new organizational forms and teams. New digital storytelling, citizen participation, mobile media services and live journalism, audio/podcast and tools, and management/remote work were important areas of innovation (top 20) in four countries each. Fact-checking, membership models, newsletters, media labs, and donation and crowdfunding were considered top innovations in journalism in three countries each. There were 17 areas of innovation that only one, or at most two, countries considered the most important in journalism. The decisive factors for the identification of these most important innovations were not only the naming by the experts but also the scoring by the scientists. Meier et al. (2022, 711) also "found significant differences in journalism innovations between countries with different media cultures, but also within the

Table 2.1 The 20 most important, evaluated by country experts to a maximum of 40 points, areas of innovation by country for 2010–2020 in the JoIn-DemoS project

Austria	*Germany*	*Spain*	*Switzerland*	*United Kingdom*
Collaborative-investigative journalism (26.5)	Collaborative-investigative journalism (33.5)	Data journalism (33)	Start-ups (32)	Data journalism (29.5)
Mobile media services and live journalism (25.5)	Engagement on the basis of data (31.5)	New (digital) storytelling (30.5)	Citizen participation (27.5)	New (digital) storytelling (29)
Data journalism (23.5)	Citizen participation (30)	Fact-checking (28)	New organizational forms and teams (27)	Engagement on the basis of data (28.5)
Paywalls and paid content (23)	News on social media (30)	News on social media (26.5)	Data journalism (26.5)	Collaborative-investigative journalism (28.5)
Diversity and inclusion (23)	Data journalism (27)	Mobile media services and live journalism (26)	Targeting (26)	Fact-checking (21.5)
Audio/podcast (22)	New (digital) storytelling (25.5)	Membership models (23.5)	New (digital) storytelling (25)	Local journalism (21.5)
Start-ups (20)	Constructive journalism (25)	Audio/podcast (23)	AI and automation (24)	Tools and management/ remote work (21)
Tools discourse quality (19)	Audio/podcast (24)	Newsletter (21)	News on social media (23.5)	Citizen participation (20)
Personal/digital meetings (18)	Membership models (24)	Paywalls and paid content (21)	Engagement on the basis of data (19)	Diversity and inclusion (19.5)
New organizational forms and teams (17.5)	Diversity and inclusion (22)	Tools and management/ remote work (21)	Local journalism (18.5)	AI and Automation (19)
AI and automation (17)	Fact-checking (22)	Para-journalistic actors (20)	Quality management (18)	Mobile media services and live journalism (18)
News on social media (17)	New organizational forms and teams (19)	AI and automation (19)	Para-journalistic actors (18)	Constructive journalism (17.5)

Citizen participation (17)	Paywalls and paid content (19)	Engagement on the basis of data (19)	Collaborative-investigative journalism (18)	Paywalls and paid content (16.5)
Newsletter (16)	Science journalism (19)	Foundation funding (19)	Tools and management/ remote work (16)	Niche media (16)
News only TV channel (16)	Mobile media services and live journalism (17)	New organizational forms and teams (17)	Diversity and inclusion (16)	Foundation funding (16)
Engagement on the basis of data (15)	AI and automation (16)	Collaborative-investigative journalism (17)	Audio/podcast (13)	Media labs (14)
Media labs (15)	Donations and crowdfunding (15)	Diversity and inclusion (17)	Paywalls and paid-contend (13)	Other financing models (14)
Video by print media (15)	Tools and Management/ remote work (15)	Science journalism (17)	Newsletter (12)	Membership models (14)
Entrepreneurial journalism (13)	Corporate culture (14)	Media labs (17)	Niche media (10)	New organizational forms and teams (13.5)
Donations and crowdfunding (12)	Other financing models (14)	Branded content (13.5)	Donations and crowdfunding (10)	News on social media (13)

Source: JoIn-DemoS project research data

D-A-CH countries that share similar media systems and journalistic cultures." Meier et al. (2022) suggest the rise of journalistic start-ups in Spain can be seen as a reaction to the numerous layoffs in the context of the economic crisis in 2008, whereas in Central European countries, such as Switzerland, only later did start-ups take on a significant role. Moreover, Meier et al. (2022, 711) define the aspect of cooperation as an "overarching principle in journalism on many levels" that is manifest, for example, in the innovation area of collaborative, investigative journalism, under which cross-media house (and international) cooperations with a view to investigative research are summarized. Holistically, this study can be seen as "the first attempt to sort out the hitherto complex and opaque field of journalism innovations, to identify fields of innovations and to justify them methodically" (Meier et al. 2022, 712).

Methodological design for research question 2: how are innovations implemented in legacy media and start-ups?

In the second empirical step, the 20 most important areas of innovation were examined in greater depth through the case studies. The aim was to find out how traditional journalistic media organizations and start-ups developed and implemented these innovations. First, each country selected a media organization or start-up for each of the project's most important areas of innovation. The selected units could be considered formative for the respective area of innovation, either because it implemented early on a specific area of innovation or had a lighthouse role. One hundred case studies were thus conducted across countries. For the innovation area of collaborative-investigative journalism, for example, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ)* was chosen as a case by the researchers in Germany because *SZ* initiated the revelations of the Panama Papers and can thus be considered a best-practice example for this innovation area. Regarding the innovation area of fact-checking, in the case of Spain, for example, *Maldita.es* was chosen because it played a pioneering role in the Spanish media market in debunking fake news.

To find out more about the goals of the innovations, the supporting and obstructive aspects as well as the potential influence on society, qualitative, guideline-based interviews were conducted with experts. However, the status of the experts in the case studies differs from the role of the experts in the first study. The experts interviewed here are, without exception, representatives of the case studies – i.e., they are media practitioners who were familiar with the respective area of innovation in their media company and had either or both a responsible task and a managerial role. Regarding the innovation area of donations and crowdfunding, for example, *Dossier* was selected as a case study in Austria because it was considered a first mover of this financing strategy. Florian Skrabal, the founder of *Dossier*, was interviewed as an expert on this area of innovation. To give the interviewees as much freedom as possible in their response behavior, the questions were formulated in an open-ended way. One to three experts were interviewed for each innovation area in the five countries. If media organizations can be considered pioneers or leaders in more than one

area of innovation, the corresponding media organizations were selected for several case studies. In addition, the decision in favor of a media company was also influenced in part by its size, geographical location, and newness or permanence. *Dossier*, for example, was not only chosen as an example in Austria for the area of innovation donations and crowdfunding but also for collaborative-investigative journalism. In total, 137 media professionals were interviewed across countries, mainly from autumn 2021 until autumn 2022. Similar to the first empirical study, the experts in the case studies were generally interviewed online via video call. In some cases, personal face-to-face interviews were also conducted on the premises of the media organization. See Table 2.2 for the selection of journalistic media organizations, editorial offices, or formats as examples in each country for the study of the respective innovation. The table starts first with the innovation areas that occur in all countries. At the bottom of the table, those areas of innovation are listed that were mentioned only occasionally.

The interviews with the 137 media professionals that were conducted across countries were then transcribed and examined with content analysis methods. Following Mayring's strategy of structuring within the framework of qualitative content analysis, the central variables (goals of innovation/facilitating and obstructive factors/societal impact) were deductively derived from the guideline (Mayring 2022, 96–103). This strategy of structuring includes developing categories before analyzing the data material to then systematically record all those text elements that can be subsumed under those categories (Mayring 2022, 96). The analysis software MAXQDA and Microsoft Excel were used for the coding process. To be able to compare the data across countries, the codes were subsequently transferred into a uniform Excel data mask. In this way, the researchers were able to compare and correlate the data and identify similarities, but also differences, for example with a view to the aims of the innovation. In each country team, the most important findings from the interviews were summarized in working documents together with general information about the selected media organization.

The quantitative online survey, as the third empirical step, was conducted in spring 2022. The questionnaire that was created with the help of the survey tool Qualtrics consisted of a total of seven closed questions. The main purpose of the online survey was to obtain employees' assessments of the implementation of an innovation area in the respective media company. For example, on a five-point Likert scale, they were asked to rate various aspects, such as the importance of interdisciplinary teams or the role of state media funding, in terms of their significance for the introduction of the particular area of innovation in their media company. To increase the response rate to the online survey, the experts who were interviewed in the case studies were asked to forward the survey to their employees. Eventually, responses from a total of 239 people across the five countries were evaluated. The following overview shows the number of study participants, broken down by area of innovation and selected journalistic media company (see Table 2.3). The number of participants includes all those who took part in the survey for a specific innovation area across all countries.

Table 2.2 Areas of innovation (n = 35) and country-specific representatives, ranked by incidence across all five countries

Name of Innovation	*Austria*	*Germany*	*Spain*	*Switzerland*	*United Kingdom*
Data journalism	ORF ZIB data team	BR Data	Datadista	NZZ visuals team	Our world in data
Collaborative/ Investigative	Dossier	Süddeutsche Zeitung	Civio	Tamedia	Bellingcat
Engagement on the basis of data	Vorarlberger Nachrichten (Ländlepunkte)	Ippen Verlag	El Español	Ringier Inc.	Financial Times
News on social media	Zeit im Bild ORF ZIB	3	4	SRF tagesschau	BBC
Diversity and inclusion	Biber academy	Auf Klo	Pikara Magazine	SRF	Black Ballad
Paywalls/paid content	Kleine Zeitung	Bild-Zeitung	El Mundo	Tamedia	Financial Times
Automation	APA Media Lab	Rheinische Post	Newtral.es	Software Lena	Urbs Media
New organizational forms and teams	Kleine Zeitung	Mainpost	El País	Südostschweiz	The Bureau of Investigative Journalism
New digital storytelling	—	Der Spiegel	RTVE	Reflekt	BBC
Citizen participation	Regionalmedien Austria (Regionauten)	Westfalenpost	—	20 Minuten/ Tamedia/TX Group	Bristol Cable
Mobile media services and live journalism	Der Standard	n-tv	Diari Ara	—	The Times
Audio/podcast	Erklär mir die Welt	Die Zeit	Podium Podcast	Durchblick	—
Tools and management/ remote work	—	VRM	El Heraldo de Aragón	We.Publish	—
Fact-checking	—	BR Faktenfuchs	Maldita.es	—	Full Fact
Membership models	—	Steady	eldiario.es	—	The Economist
Newsletter	Falter.morgen	—	Kloshletter	Heidi.News	—
Media labs	APA Media Lab	—	El Confidencial	—	BBC
Crowdfunding	Dossier	Correctiv	—	Hauptstadt	—
Journalism start-ups	Die Tagespresse	—	—	Bajour	—

Local journalism	—	—	—	Tsüri.ch	The Bureau Local
Constructive journalism	—	Perspective Daily	—	—	Tortoise
Foundation funding	—	—	porCausa	—	The Conversation
Para-journalism	—	—	Mr Underdog	individual company	—
Science journalism	—	Science Media Center	Materia	—	—
Niche media	—	—	—	Babanews	On Our Radar
Other financing models	—	Relevanzreporter	—	—	Axate
Targeting	—	—	—	RSI	—
Quality management	—	—	—	Radio Central/ Sunshine	—
Tools discourse quality	Der Standard	—	—	—	—
Personal/digital meetings	Der Standard	—	—	—	—
News only TV channel	Puls24	—	—	—	—
Video by print media	krone.tv	—	—	—	—
Corporate culture	—	SWR X-Lab	—	—	—
Entrepreneurial journalism	diesubstanz.at	—	—	—	—
Branded content	—	—	Vocento	—	—

Source: JoIn-DemoS project research data

Table 2.3 Areas of innovation, selected country-specific media initiatives, and number of participants

Area of innovation (in alphabetical order)	*Selected country-specific media initiatives*
Automation	*Austrian Press Agency* (AT), *Rheinische Post* (DE), *Newtral* (SP), *LENA* (CH), *Urbs Media* (UK)
Audio/podcast	*Erklär mir die Welt* (AT), *DIE ZEIT* (DE), *Podium Podcast* (SP), *Durchblick/Blick* (CH)
Corporate culture	*VRM* (DE), *Heraldo de Aragón* (SP), *We Publish* (CH)
Citizen participation	*RegionalMedien* (AT), *Heimatcheck/Westfalenpost* (DE), *20 Minuten/Tamedia* (CH), *Bristol Cable* (UK)
Collaborative-investigative journalism	*Dossier* (AT), *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (DE), *Civio* (SPA), *Tamedia* (CH), *Bellingcat* (UK)
Data journalism	*Österreichische Rundfunk* (AT), *Bayerischer Rundfunk* (DE), *Datadista* (SP), *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (CH), *Our World in Data* (UK)
Diversity and inclusion	*Biber Academy* (AT), *Auf Klo/funk* (DE), *Pikara Magazine* (SP), *Chance 50:50* (CH), *Black Ballad* (UK)
Donations and crowdfunding	*Dossier* (AT), *Correctiv* (DE), *Hauptstadt* (CH)
Engagement on the basis of data	*Ländlepunkte/Vorarlberger Nachrichten* (AT), *Ippen Media* (DE), *El Español* (SP), *Star* (CH), *Financial Times* (UK)
Fact-checking	*#faktenfuchs/Bayerischer Rundfunk* (DE), *Maldita.es* (SP), *Full Fact* (UK)
Media labs	*Austrian Press Agency* (AT), *El Confidencial Lab* (SP), *BBC News Lab* (UK)
Membership models	*Steady* (DE), *eldiario.es* (SP), *The Economist* (UK)
Mobile and live journalism	*Der Standard* (AT), *n-tv* (DE), *Diari Ara* (SP), *The Times* (UK)
New (digital) storytelling	*Der Spiegel* (DE), *RTVE Lab* (SP), *Reflekt* (CH), *BBC Global News* (UK)
Newsletters	*Falter* (AT), *Kloshletter* (SP), *Heidi.News* (CH)
Paywalls and paid content	*Kleine Zeitung* (AT), *Bild* (DE), *El Mundo* (SP), *Tamedia/TX Group* (CH), *Financial Times* (UK)
News on social media	*Zeit im Bild/ORF* (AT), *Tagesschau/ARD* (DE), *Sphera Sports* (SP), *SRF tagesschau* (CH), *BBC* (UK)
Tools and management/ remote work	*VRM* (DE), *Heraldo de Aragón* (SP), *We Publish* (CH)

Source: JoIn-DemoS project research data

In summary, the numerous, diverse research questions of the project required the complex methodological program just outlined. Especially the inductive formation of innovation categories based on the experts' explanations in the first empirical study has proven to be a successful method for clustering. This enabled the study to ensure that the mentions of innovations were grouped together with a view to their specific innovation potential. This method, as well as the scoring matrix that JoIn-DemoS created, can be further developed and fruitfully adapted for other journalism research projects.

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