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# INVESTING IN ONLINE VIDEO NEWS

## A cross-national analysis of news organizations' enterprising approach to digital media

**Antonis Kalogeropoulos and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen**

*Research on news organizations' approach to digital media in the 1990s and 2000s generally found that most organizations adopted a defensive approach. Since then, both digital media and news organizations have continued to develop, and we cannot simply assume that the approach remains the same. In this paper, we analyse how a purposive sample of 19 news organizations across three different countries approach online video news—chosen as a paradigmatic example of the current move towards a more mobile, platform-dominated, and video-enabled digital media environment. On the basis of semi-structured interviews with senior people across the sample, we argue that most news organizations today adopt a far more enterprising approach to digital media than that found in the 1990s and 2000s, and invest in what they see as promising opportunities in an uncertain environment. We find that decisions to invest in online video news are shaped primarily by a perception of what audiences want, what platforms like Facebook and Google/YouTube prioritize, and the prospect of lucrative video advertising. Editorial considerations seem marginal. The enterprising approach and the considerations behind it are broadly similar across the organizations and countries covered, with exceptions (some broadcasters and German news organizations).*

**KEYWORDS** comparative research; digital media; Facebook; Google; innovation; journalism; online video news; platforms

### Introduction

In the early years of digital media, most news organizations' approach to technological change and innovation was largely defensive, reactive, and pragmatic (Boczkowski 2004). Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, a range of studies from across the world found that much of the journalistic profession (e.g. Deuze 1999) and most news organizations (e.g. Domingo 2008) hesitated to pursue the potential opportunities offered by digital media. But more than 20 years into the rise of digital media, we cannot simply assume that this remains the case. As Web 1.0 was followed by Web 2.0 and internet use has moved from desktops and websites to smartphones and apps, many news organizations now have years of experience of navigating a constantly evolving digital revolution. In this paper, we argue that the ways in which many of them do so have changed in important ways.

We focus specifically on online news video as a particularly important example of how news organizations are navigating a "second wave" of digital disruption characterized

by the rise of smartphones, social media platforms, and a video-enabled internet (Meeker 2016; Newman et al. 2016). Online news video is particularly important to study because (1) the format enables the production, distribution, and use of forms of digital news content that were previously more constrained by the limitations of hardware and connectivity, (2) because the distribution of online news video is in most cases premised in large part on the development of the products and user base of platform companies like Facebook and Google (through the video-hosting site YouTube), and (3) because it offers a potentially lucrative source of advertising revenue in an otherwise challenging business environment. Online news video thus represents the intersection between the editorial opportunities of digital media, the rise of platform companies that increasingly define the digital media environment (Gillespie 2017; Nielsen and Ganter 2017; Van Dijck 2013), as well as a potentially important part of the business of digital news. It is a new frontier in journalism, like the websites scholars have studied previously, a paradigmatic example of how news organizations navigate current digital developments.

To understand how different kinds of news organizations in different countries engage with online news video, we examine how a range of digital-born, print legacy, and broadcast legacy news organizations across the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany are developing their video offerings. On the basis of 26 semi-structured in-depth interviews with senior editorial figures as well as people with commercial and technology roles across a purposive sample of 19 different news organizations, we argue that many news organizations today have a far more aggressive and enterprising approach to digital media than the defensive approaches researchers found dominated in the 1990s and the 2000s. By an enterprising approach, we mean that many news organizations today show initiative, invest, and take risks in ways that are qualitatively different from what used to be the case. The majority of the organizations we analyse here have now converged on a similar, short-form, platform-oriented, and mobile-friendly approach to online news video, often with an emphasis on emotionally engaging content. This investment is seen as a calculated risk in an uncertain and constantly changing environment.

The pace at which news organizations have developed their online news video offerings differ somewhat depending in part on organizational type and national context. Digital-born news media have often been first movers and invested aggressively in video, but many national newspapers and news magazines have been equally enterprising. Broadcasters, whose audience and business has generally been less disrupted by digital media than that of their print counterparts, in many cases are somewhat more conservative (as newspapers were in the past). This suggests that the way in which legacy news organizations (which include both print and broadcast) approach digital media is shaped by the degree to which their legacy operations are disrupted and by how much experience they have of dealing with digital disruption. These organizational differences between digital-born, newspaper, and broadcast organizations are more pronounced across our sample than differences between the three countries we cover.

Looking more closely at the factors that motivate news organizations to pursue the opportunities offered by online news video, we show that a perceived audience demand for video, the perception that large platforms, especially Facebook, are encouraging and rewarding video, and the higher advertising rates associated with video are central considerations for most organizations. None of our interviewees highlighted editorial or journalistic ambitions as key to their investment in video. Our analysis demonstrates elements of continuity with previous empirical research in that, while more enterprising, most news

organizations are still pragmatically focused on institutional imperatives (like making money) and guided in part by their “visions of the audience” (Anderson 2011). But it also shows how news organizations’ approach to digital media is increasingly aggressive and willing to take risks by making uncertain bets, and that what bets will be made is influenced in part by perceptions of what platform companies will privilege. These results in turn underline the growing importance of avoiding “newsroom-centric” research approaches focusing specifically on journalists, who may not be the most important actors driving developments in digital journalism (Lewis and Westlund 2015; Nielsen 2012), compared to the influence of perceptions of audience demand, commercial considerations, and news organizations’ sense of what platform companies will privilege.

In the first part of the article, we show how our analysis builds on and goes beyond existing research on digital innovation in news organizations. In the second part, we present the cases, data, and methods we rely on. In the third part, we document the kind of enterprising approach we argue many news organizations are taking, before turning in the fourth part to the central factors we suggest shape how they approach online news video. In the fifth part, we examine differences and similarities across organizational types and countries, before turning to a concluding discussion.

### Digital Innovation in News Organizations

During the first wave of the digitalization of news in the 1980s and the 1990s, researchers explored how news organizations engage in digital innovation and how it affected news production and distribution practices, as well as the business of news. For instance, Domingo’s study of Catalan newspapers’ websites in the early 2000s shows that online journalism evolved rather than revolutionized journalistic culture: “Traditional journalistic culture was as important in the mind-set of the members of online newsrooms as the utopias” (Domingo 2006, 515).

One of the most prominent studies on digital innovation is Boczkowski’s (2004) research on how American newspapers developed their digital editions, from videotext in the 1980s to internet Web pages in the 1990s. One of his main findings is that news organizations waited before engaging with digital innovation since they wanted to understand whether technological and social developments were becoming mainstream. According to Boczkowski, the early years of digitalization were characterized by a tendency to protect the print versions of the newspapers which news organizations saw as their “core business”. Thus, they did not invest in more promising projects with potentially higher revenue in the future but, rather, in short-term benefit projects. When it comes to the use of journalistic content online, Boczkowski found that the main practice of American online papers during the early period of online versions of newspapers was to repurpose their print content for the website. Producing original content specifically for their websites was less common (Boczkowski 2004).

Thus, Boczkowski concluded that innovation for American newspapers at that time was reactive, defensive, and pragmatic. Other studies had similar findings (Deuze 1999; Domingo 2006). This approach was attributed to a “fear-driven innovation culture” that shaped the way publishers engaged with digital media in the 1990s and 2000s (Nguyen 2008). Historical studies show a similar resistance in the past, for example to the integration of wirephoto in the 1930s (Zelizer 1995).

Both the digital media environment and news organizations themselves, however, have continued to change, and we cannot simply assume that news organizations’

approaches to digital media remain the same. Digital media in the 1990s and even 2000s represented a relatively small part of the overall media environment, were primarily accessed at home via desktop computers, and traditional media were still dominant in many ways; whereas in the 2010s, digital media use accounts for more than half of time spent with media in many high-income countries, is increasingly accessed through a range of other devices including personal portable smartphones, and is in many ways dominated by platform companies like Facebook and Google who account for a large share of attention and advertising, and play a central role in how people find and access content from news organizations (Meeker 2016; Newman et al. 2016; Nielsen and Sambrook 2016). In this constantly changing environment, news organizations have tried to become more adaptable and seek to innovate (Küng 2015; Pavlik 2013). Case studies of individual news organizations show that new journalistic values have evolved in the 2010s as the digital media environment changed, including an increasing interest in participation, interactivity, and immediacy (Usher 2014). In light of these changes in both the digital media environment and potentially in news organizations themselves, we argue it is important to update our understanding of how different kinds of news organizations in different contexts approach digital media.

The specific example we focus on is online news video. Despite its growing importance (and years of experiments), there is relatively little research on this topic. Video has been examined as a case before, for example by Amy Weiss and David Domingo (2010) and by Mary Bock (2012). Weiss and Domingo looked at how broadcast newsrooms in the early 2000s managed the challenge of uploading videos online. Their findings showed that in that case, technological innovation in the online newsroom was adopted in a fast manner because the traditional newsroom was also interested in digitizing video material and, as a result, online journalists did not have control over the development process. However, their study deals specifically with digitizing existing video material. Bock (2012), in contrast, focuses primarily on the work practices of individual multi-media journalists operating as “one-man bands” producing video journalism for broadcasters and for websites in the early 2000s. In this study, we build on these early studies and look at online news video at a point in time where more and more online video content is produced specifically for digital platforms, rather than repurposing of content originally produced for legacy platforms. The ways in which most news organizations produce online video news furthermore reflects how the digital media environment has changed since the studies conducted by Bozckowski, Domingo and Weiss, and Bock, in that most online video news is produced first and foremost (1) to be viewed on smartphones rather than on personal computers and (2) distributed via platforms like Facebook and YouTube rather than on the websites of news organizations themselves. On the basis of these developments, we therefore ask:

**RQ1:** In the second generation of the digital revolution in the news industry, how do different news organizations engage with online news video?

Apart from differences regarding the organizational type highlighted above, we are interested in identifying factors that influence the production of online news video by news organizations. We explore these in an inductive and open-ended way in our interviews in part based on previous research, and in part on the basis of our own understanding of how the digital media environment is changing (as outlined above). We are particularly interested in four possible factors.

First, given the centrality of existing journalistic norms and values and to inherited newsroom culture in previous research on digital journalism, we are interested in the extent to which editorial and journalistic ambitions influence how news organizations engage with online news video. For instance, some journalists perceived data journalism as an opportunity to do better investigative reporting (De Maeyer et al. 2015). Others saw the opportunities of audience's participation in digital news as an ideal (Usher 2014). Journalists perceiving video as an editorial opportunity for storytelling could be a factor influencing the production of online news video.

Second, given the organizational imperatives facing news organizations, more than anything the battle for audience attention, we are interested in the degree to which news organizations' "visions of the audience" influence their approach to online news video. Anderson's study showed that the ways in which editors and others in news organizations envision the needs and desires of the audience influence editorial decisions, since journalists are "taught to respect quantitative feedback about what it is that audiences want" (Anderson 2011, 564). In the news organization he studied, website traffic was radically shaping news values. Similar findings have been documented in more recent studies (Lee, Lewis, and Powers 2014; Vu 2014; Welbers et al. 2016). A "vision" of audiences as wanting more or no news videos could influence whether and how news organizations develop news video. Today, in practice, that vision of the audience is at least in part informed by audience metrics supplied by the very platform companies which are promoting video as the future of digital content.

Third, then, we want to understand the degree to which platforms like Facebook and Google (in the case of video to a large extent through its video-sharing site YouTube) influence news organizations' approach to online news video. These platform companies rarely create their own content, but they shape how users (and news organizations) connect and prioritize certain types of content (Gillespie 2017). In addition, we know that these platforms are currently pushing video (e.g. Jackson 2016). Mark Zuckerberg in 2014 predicted that the Facebook NewsFeed—an absolutely central source of audience reach for many news organizations—would be "mostly video" in five years (Miners 2014). Scholars also argue that platforms like Google and Facebook have become so powerful that they have evolved into infrastructures, and this is reflected in the way they treat news content (Plantin et al. 2016).

Fourth, and finally, given that news organizations have to cover their cost, in most cases on a market basis, we are interested in how business considerations influence online news production. As mentioned above, both digital-born outlets and legacy outlets face problems with monetizing their content online (Newman et al. 2016). At the same time, online news videos have higher advertiser rates and higher click-through rates than banner advertising (Hoelzel 2014), something that could be a factor leading to its production.

On the basis of these interests, our second research question is:

**RQ2:** What are the main factors influencing news organizations' decision to invest in online video news?

### *Organizational Type and Country-level Differences*

From previous studies, we know that a factor that may influence how news organizations adopt is their organizational type and legacy. The usual dichotomy is between legacy

or digital-born news organizations. Research has highlighted how organizational legacies influenced the way traditional outlets adopted innovation. Nguyen (2008) argued that traditional outlets' fear of technology led them to implement defensive strategies, a phenomenon also described by Boczkowski (2004).

However, more recent research (Usher 2014) has suggested that an outlet with a long legacy (*The New York Times*) was increasingly investing in multimedia production (including an approach with online news video) even though they faced problems related to legacy: thus, a question for our study is the influence of legacy in video production today when (1) the problems of many legacy news organizations are more pronounced than 2010 and (2) video is becoming increasingly prominent.

However, when exploring how online news video is adopted, we expect that the audio-visual focus of some outlets will be another factor that could influence how online news video is adopted in news organizations. Broadcasters have the capacity to produce video, but that does not necessarily translate to online news video. We expect broadcasters to be in a similar position as newspapers used to be in the 1990s. Video is now increasingly watched via digital media, as text was becoming then, and broadcasters start to show some first signs of significant audience loss (Nielsen and Sambrook 2016). Newspapers have to learn how to produce video news, but on the other hand, they might have stronger incentives than broadcasters to engage with online news video. In addition, recent research showed broadcaster videos tend to be broadly more conventional than print organization videos (Bock 2016). Thus, our expectation is that different starting points in video production influence the way news organizations adopt online news video.

Cross-national variation could also influence the production of online news video. For instance, we have seen that audiences in Germany have not embraced digital media as quickly as audiences in some other Western European countries (Hasebrink and Hölig 2016). In addition, some publishers in France and Germany are reluctant to deliver their content on social media platforms (Cornia, Sehl, and Nielsen 2016), something that could influence the production patterns of news videos in these countries. All these suggested factors in video production concerning types and countries bring us to the third research question:

**RQ3:** How do different news organizations in different countries produce online news video?

### Cases, Methods, Data

To address our research questions (how do news organizations engage with online news video, what are the factors that shape their engagement, and how does engagement vary across organizational types and countries), we conducted 26 in-depth semi-structured interviews with people working with video in a purposive sample of 19 different news organizations in three countries. In each organization, we interviewed one to three people working with video (exclusively or not) in editorial, commercial, and technology roles. The majority of our interviewees had senior roles with job titles like Head of Digital, Head of Video, or Editor-in-Chief. For the purposes of this paper we refer to the interviewees by their title and the organization they work in. The news organizations sampled for interviews span three countries (United States, United Kingdom, and Germany) with different media systems (Hallin and Mancini 2004), and they represent

three different kinds of news organizations: broadcasters, newspapers, and digital-born outlets.

Our sample of news organizations is a purposive sample intended to ensure that our data-set included (1) multiple different organizations of each type (digital-born, print, broadcast), (2) examples of each type of organization across different markets, including organizations outside the, in many respects, unusual US market (the three countries covered), and (3) inclusion of cases mentioned by other interviewees as interesting examples of online news video (so we included an element of snowball sampling).

The print outlets are: *Wall Street Journal* (United States), *USA Today* (United States), *Washington Post* (United States), Trinity Mirror Regionals (United Kingdom), *The Guardian* (United Kingdom), *The Telegraph* (United Kingdom), *The Economist* (United Kingdom), *Spiegel* (Germany), *N24/Die Welt* (Germany), and *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (Germany). The broadcaster outlets are: BBC (United Kingdom), BBC World Service (United Kingdom), *N24/Die Welt* (Germany),<sup>1</sup> Fox News (United States), CNN International (United Kingdom), and ITV News (United Kingdom). The digital-born outlets are: *Huffington Post UK* (United Kingdom), *Quartz* (United States), *AJ+* (United States), and *Now This* (United States).

The sample is not entirely symmetrical between the countries, and does not include some high-profile cases, including the frequently studied *New York Times*. This reflects in part differences in industry structure, in part that not all organizations approached agreed to be interviewed. Because all our research from the outset underlined that investments in online news video require significant resources, we have not included local and regional newspapers and smaller, hyperlocal digital-born news media in the sample. The purpose of our design is not to do in-depth case studies of individual organizations, as has often been done in journalism studies. Instead, our aim has been to produce a data-set that captured a breadth of different organizations (digital-born, print, and broadcast) and contexts (three countries) to enable us to offer a more general analysis of how news organizations are approaching online news video.

The interviews were semi-structured and touched upon the opportunities and challenges related to the process of producing online news videos, the distribution process, as well as their thoughts on current and future monetization. Nineteen interviews were recorded during in-person meetings in newsrooms or conferences, and the rest were recorded over the telephone or webcam meetings. The recordings were later transcribed. Most of the interviews were conducted by the lead author with the exception of five cases where colleagues undertook the interviews after thorough discussions with the lead author. All interviews were transcribed and subject to an open coding guided by the research questions outlined above. We identified the findings presented below inductively on the basis of our primary interview data.

In each interview, we covered a range of issues including editorial, commercial, and technological aspects of online news video production. Most of our interviewees had responsibilities across all three domains. We have adopted this approach in light of the growing number of calls for research on technological change in news organizations that break with “newsroom-centric” approaches focused exclusively on the editorial side, and arguing for the importance of more systematically



considering commercial and technology considerations (Lewis and Westlund 2015; Nielsen 2012).

### An Enterprising Approach to Video

A central finding from our interviews is that most of the news organizations covered have adopted a far more enterprising approach to online news video than previous research would have predicted. Unlike studies that have found that news organizations primarily build their digital offerings around repurposing of already-available content and often wait before pursuing new opportunities till these have become mainstream (e.g. Boczkowski 2004), we find that many news organizations are aggressively investing in online news video, producing content specifically for this purpose, developing distribution strategies tailored to mobile and social video, and are taking a calculated risk by betting on what they see as a promising opportunity in an uncertain and evolving environment. As a digital consultant of the BBC World Service told us: "I think what we have to do is not be careful to be playing catch up, but to be on the curve or ahead of the curve". Video is now prioritized, as the Director of Editorial Video at the *Washington Post* explained: "The win for us is when we can put as much of our video, video in our video player into stories in our site as possible". Thus, video teams are part of the editorial discussion. The Head of Video from *The Guardian* told us that their video team is

in every conversation from the start. You have to be in the conversation from the start and people have to be behind it, and you have to make sure you're not cutting across each other ... [Our Editor-in-Chief has] really been instrumental in bringing video right to the centre of absolutely everything.

The prioritization of online news video in some news organizations is evident by the growing number of video-ready journalists in news organizations, even as jobs are cut elsewhere: "We're currently recruiting for video editors and video producers to work across our regional newsrooms, to ensure that we get the best content when we're creating, finding, and displaying it in the most appropriate ways", as the Digital Innovation Editor of Trinity Mirror told us. The aggressive vocabulary in these quotes reflects the approach of most news organizations when it comes to video. This approach is in clear contrast with the development of technologic innovation during the early stages of digitalization, as described in earlier studies by Boczkowski, Domingo, and others discussed above.

Despite the fact that most of the cases we cover were investing in online news video, a few were more cautious: the *Süddeutsche Zeitung's* Head of Video working on video explained their approach:

We do [invest in video] a little bit. From the journalistic point of view, I do believe that there's added value to video, not for all topics maybe, but for many. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* is very much a text house or it's a newspaper. It's an old newspaper with a couple of hundred journalists who have no intention to produce video. It's just not what this place is known for. I don't even think it's a bad thing because I'm sure that many things are easily better told just using text.

He also played down his newspaper's approach to new video technologies such as virtual reality or live videos: "We're too small and not well resourced enough to be

front runner in every of those new possibilities". (Given this is the view at a major national newspaper in Germany, the challenges facing much smaller regional and local publishers are clear.) However, outlets like *Süddeutsche Zeitung* were a clear minority in our sample. Most prioritized online news video and invested in it, often heavily, and often in a situation characterized by dwindling resources.

### *Enterprising Approach Coupled with Uncertainty*

While most publishers in our sample prioritize video, they are uncertain about its future. In the past, uncertainty was one of the reasons behind news organizations' defensive approach to adopting new technologies. The more enterprising approach we identify here is not based on certainty, but on a willingness to invest and take a risk. Uncertainty is still present in news organizations: "Who knows what's going to happen in six months' time. It's the pace of change that I think scares everyone. No one knows. And it's a pace of change which is completely unknown. No one knows what Facebook's going to do", as the Head of Video at *The Guardian* told us.

Several broadcasters, such as ITV News, were somewhat more sceptical of the potential of online news video: "To some extent you could argue video is the last great hope ... but I don't think video is going to be the saviour. There will be masses and masses of video out there", as the Head of Digital told us. These quotes echo our finding that news outlets from all types of news organizations are openly uncertain about the future of online news video, even as they invest heavily. People are taking a calculated risk.

In digital-born organizations the sentiment was similar. The *Huffington Post UK's* interviewee described an environment of constant uncertainty:

We have to imagine what newspaper executives were thinking in the mid-90s when they looked at the internet and thought, "Wow, is that an opportunity or not?" And the smart ones would've thought, "Yes, this is an opportunity to tell stories in a completely different way". And as journalists, they would have gotten that. And we're in that privileged position now, but that opportunity changes every 18 months or so. And so when we talk about the future, "What's the future of media? Is video the future?" That future changes every 18 months.

### **What Shapes Investment in Online News Video?**

Given that many publishers acknowledge the uncertainty in the current digital environment and are sceptical about its future, why do they invest in it? Starting from the four different kinds of possible factors outlined above, on the basis of our interviews, we identify three main factors: (1) a perception that the audience wants more news video, (2) a pull from platforms prioritizing video, and (3) monetary incentives. We do not have any clear evidence that the production of online news video was driven by editorial or journalistic considerations, issues that rarely come up in the interviews. This is a conspicuous absence and underlines the importance of going beyond the newsroom when studying news media organizations and how they change and deal with digital media (Lewis and Westlund 2015; Nielsen 2012).

*Visions of Audience*

Most interviewees argue that their audience expects news video, and thus present their investment as a response to audience demand. This was put in a straightforward manner by the Head of Video from the Telegraph Media Group:

I think the foremost motive [for investing in online news video] is that, in this day and age, consumers expect to see video content in their news feed. It's just we are beyond the realms of it being an option. It's just an essential part of our coverage.

*The Huffington Post UK's* Director of Video makes a similar point:

That's how we see the opportunity of video: there's huge audiences looking and consuming video, and as storytellers, we naturally should want to reach them, and through video, that that's a big opportunity that we've got to really focus on.

Following the audience is also Trinity Mirror's reason for becoming involved with video according to the interviewee: "Video and audio, actually, is something that we know is really important to our audience". Overall, most interviewees argue that the audience wants to see video, and that their investment will meet their demands.

However, there are exceptions to this approach. The Head of Digital of ITV News in the United Kingdom believes that the increase in entertainment video viewership is audience-driven but is sceptical about whether audience wants to watch online news video:

I think video in general is audience-driven. I think there's great growth. [But] is there growth in news [specifically]? I think it's difficult. I think the jury is out. Clearly, when it's must-watch video, then it's absolutely audience-driven—pandas and skateboarding dogs or buses exploding across London Bridge and things like that.

While there is good evidence that viewing of short, entertaining, and engaging video clips on social media sites has increased rapidly, and premium video-on-demand viewing is also growing, it is much less clear that online news video consumption is increasing at a similar pace (Kalogeropoulou, Federica, and Newman 2016). It is interesting to note here that while available audience data suggest audiences are not necessarily flocking to consume online video news and few interviewees articulate a clear rationale for why they believe that audiences want online video news, most suggest that current investments in video are at least in part about expected future audience demand.

*Responding to Platforms' Priorities*

This expectation is directly and frequently explicitly linked to the ways in which platforms like Google (through its video-sharing site YouTube) and especially Facebook are increasingly prioritizing video content. Our interviews document the widespread belief among publishers that if they post native online video in social networks their audience reach will be increased. This is because platforms currently rank videos high in their algorithms. Especially Facebook has made several public statements in 2016 about changing the NewsFeed algorithm to prioritize video (e.g. Kant and Xu 2016). In the meantime, publishers are shaping their videos to suit the platform on which they are posting their videos. It is important to note that the majority of news organizations covered are primarily building their online news video offerings around social platforms—especially Facebook—and

prioritize off-site distribution and reach over attempts to draw audiences to an on-site offering on their own website or app.

Our interviewee at CNN International told us:

[To increase audience reach] you have to work within Facebook's algorithm rules and they have stressed that natively uploaded video will help you do that now because there's a big push for video on Facebook. So to get referrals back from Facebook you have to embrace video.

A similar sentiment was documented on *AJ+*, an outlet that solely produces videos for off-site consumption, as the Editorial Lead told us:

The audience is becoming more and more comfortable in those spaces [platforms] and are starting to expect to come across news and other types of content in those spaces. The fact that the algorithms are serving them something that they know they're going to like because of their past behaviour just makes it an easier place to go ... At the same time, Facebook in particular is pushing its videos, you know they've improved the player, they've improved the experience and they've been pushing it.

*The Telegraph's* Head of Video also talked about the importance of being prominent on Facebook:

Facebook, you've got to be in that space. There aren't many commercial benefits, direct commercial benefits to being in the Facebook video space, but it's such a significant market that we focus quite heavily on ensuring the best of our Facebook-friendly content is published on that platform. It's really important to ensure that we're there and we're front and centre with the best of the videos.

The need to be present in platforms also influences the format of videos which need to be platform-ready. For instance, as the Head of Digital of ITV News said:

How do we take the stories or different stories and cover them from an online video perspective? I think the answers lie depending on the platform, and depending on the story. So the sort of things we're looking at are on social media, particularly Facebook, Twitter—how do we tell a story in, say, 30 seconds?—and particularly when people haven't got sound—is really important. But on YouTube, which is more of a sit-back medium, how do we tell that story in a slightly different way?

The quotes above reflect that very different publishers in terms of organization type or legacy have a very similar approach towards platforms and respond to what major platforms seem to privilege and reward. However, not all news outlets follow platforms' algorithm tweaks in the same way. One of the exceptions in our sample was the German news magazine *Spiegel*, who say they prioritize quality over distribution:

I don't have the resources. We don't have a Facebook team, a homepage team, a mobile team. Sometimes I'd like to have those teams, but I also think, "It's quality that counts". Especially the quality of the story. The making of it a little later, but is the story good? Then it will work on our website, it will work on mobile, it will work on Facebook or other social media as well.

*Monetization Opportunities*

Another motivation for publishers to engage with online news video is monetization. This is a recurring theme in our interviews. Publishers can charge more for video advertisements than banner advertisements. The Digital Editor of Trinity Mirror said: "Obviously, videos commercially are very attractive for our advertisers", and similar sentiment from a BBC World Service's Digital Consultant: "Video is one of our things that we monetize well internationally, as I'm sure if you talk to any other commercial partner, part of the reason for foregrounding video is always the revenue opportunity".<sup>2</sup> *The Telegraph's* Head of Video explained the difference in the commercial value between text and video pages:

A page with video on it is worth ten times as much as a page without a video on it, at least, in terms of commercial value. In terms of advertising value, a page with video on it is worth so much more so it's quite simple really.

Thus, video advertisements that pay more than text advertisements are leading publishers in producing their own news videos. However, there is scepticism about the future of video advertisements as a monetization model. This is reflected in our interview with the Editor for New Initiatives from *Quartz* working on video. "I think one of the mistakes I think a lot about that's made is really by insisting that video be something that you can make money from". The Deputy Editor from *The Economist* said:

As soon as everyone's doing something it's not necessarily strategically brilliant thing to do. This doesn't mean you shouldn't do it, because you probably have to. But the idea that we're all going to get rich on video advertising, it ain't going to happen.

Many outlets that engage in online news video are also sceptical towards the current advertisement model of online news video. However, they are investing in it because they expect that platforms like Facebook and YouTube will develop new opportunities for future monetization. *The Huffington Post UK's* Editor-in-Chief outlines their plan:

We might get some pressure to play that short game, but we want to engage users now on those platforms, and we know that the monetization will come. I mean, Facebook isn't going anywhere. And we are working on partnerships with all the platforms that we know will be helpful in the future. And we think that it will honestly drive better advertising experience. The model right now with running a pre-roll ad is not sustainable, especially with new competitors coming in like Netflix.

*AJ+'s* Editorial Lead had a similar view:

I know that Facebook is experimenting with allowing publishers to actually monetize through their videos, which will become a source of income. The same thing like in terms of video on YouTube, there is that means for monetization. I think everyone is still trying to figure it out ... The whole thing is diversified, so where you're going to get your money, you're going to get a little from Facebook, you get a little from YouTube, you might get a little from a subscription somewhere, you might get a little money from promoted content, brand new content.

Thus, while online video news is in most cases not currently profitable, many news organizations invest in it in part because they believe that platforms will deliver both audiences and eventually opportunities for monetization. In today's digital environment, video may

not be the main revenue stream, but publishers hope that it will be one of many streams that will help them sustain their business. Realizing this commercial aspiration is in large part dependent on Google and Facebook, a powerful illustration of the platform risk that publishers increasingly face (Nielsen and Ganter 2017). For a few, platforms' interest in video has created a very immediate return, as Facebook has paid a set of partner media organizations including *BuzzFeed* and the *New York Times* up to \$3 million each for producing live videos and posting them on the platform (Perlberg and Seetharaman 2016).

### Differences in Video Production

Throughout the previous sections we saw that many different news organizations have adopted an enterprising and aggressive approach towards online news video. However, different outlet types had different starting points and thus different journeys when producing online news video, as seen below. It is important also to highlight that country-level differences in the video approach were not pronounced in our study. We found that most news organizations from all three countries we examined have a broadly similar enterprising approach towards video, and had similar incentives in investing in it. However, we should note that in Germany we observed more scepticism from the outlets we sampled towards online news video investments compared to the United Kingdom and the United States, perhaps in part due to the fact that the audience in Germany is generally older and relies less on digital media than audiences in the two other countries covered (Newman et al. 2016).

#### *Broadcasters and Their Video Legacy*

Broadcasters have a video legacy and a large video archive. However, their video experience comes with a television video vocabulary, workflows, and content management systems that may constrain the development of digitally native offerings—the way print norms, production processes, and infrastructures limited newspapers' forays into digital. As a Product Manager of the BBC told us:

The advantage that we obviously have is that we have a ton of video and that that put us in a place where we would think we're potentially ahead of the curve. The disadvantage is that because we're almost tighter broadcast schedules, it limits some of the innovation that we can do, because the way we produce video is around—in the UK could be around the 10 o'clock news or whatever it may be.

A Supervising Producer in CNN International stressed how broadcasters need to change to adapt to digital media:

We have to change our mind-set from being a traditional television-based organization to a digital and television organization ... When it [online news video] started there was a lot of "OK, well this will be good for digital and this will be good and, you know, we filmed this interview and it was 15 minutes long but only two minutes made it onto television, we can give the digital the whole lot". That's not how we work, if anything, we are more selective on digital. And that's a big change, because I think for a long time traditional television broadcasters saw digital as the DVD extras to the DVD.

For the Head of Digital of ITV News, the challenge is to start collecting video content that may not be relevant for television audiences but is relevant for online:

A panda rolling in snow will not make it onto one of our TV news bulletins, but it's absolutely crucial for online, and so it's spotting that, it's knowing that, and it's—and this is where the challenge is—it's actually saying—"We want to go and gather that sort of content as well"—and I don't think we're doing enough of that yet.

From our interviews, we understand that most broadcasters are moving away from the "talking heads" era, where they repurposed their existing television content for online purposes, and are beginning to pursue an online news video strategy similar to other organizations covered here, focused on short, social, mobile videos that are very different from television news. An exception in our sample is Fox News, which uses the content of their talk shows and bulletins online, since they find that their online audience prefers television content online: "We have this great repository of what is possibly considered the greatest cable news network in the country, and to not use that content would almost be a sin", as the Director of Digital Video told us.

#### *Print Outlets Doing Video*

Newspapers had a different journey than broadcasters when producing online news video. While their legacy can be a challenge in an increasingly digital media environment, they had to learn how to produce video from scratch, something that many argue give them an advantage over broadcasters. The Head of Video of *The Telegraph* described this process:

We're not bound by the constraints that traditional TV producers are bound by. We never have that problem to start with, because we're always making stuff to be online and mobile-friendly from the very beginning of the process rather than having to be someone like the BBC or ITV News, who are then first making stuff for telly and then making it for digital afterwards. We have an advantage.

The legacy of newspapers is shaping their approach according to the Head of the Video team of *The Guardian*:

I think we have more of a responsibility than people that aim stuff at a younger audience that I feel tonally we are more careful than someone like *Vice*. And I think that this is a good thing and people trust us for that. We have a slightly older audience as well and I think that's part of it. I think sometimes we can't go as far in social media as people like *Now This*.

In addition, newspapers were not video savvy from the very beginning. As the Deputy Editor of *The Economist* admits:

We weren't sure exactly why we were doing it [video] for a long time, and we weren't sure what the right relationship between video and written journalism was. I think most news organizations were in the same position. They were unsure why they were doing it, but they were sure they had to do it ... Is it [video] a side salad to a print article or is it a video version of a print article?

It should be also highlighted that given the newspaper crisis, outlets smaller than *The Guardian* or *The Telegraph* are struggling to find the resources needed for the

investments. A Digital Innovation Editor from the Trinity Mirror Regionals in the United Kingdom named the lack of resources as their biggest challenge when producing online news video: “[The biggest challenge is] resource, in terms of having reporters to film, edit, upload”.

### *Digital-born Outlets: No Need for Transitioning*

The problems that broadcasters and print outlets have with their legacy are less pronounced for digital-born outlets. As the Editor for New Initiatives at *Quartz* says:

We just don’t have an infrastructure that was built for something else. Our infrastructure is built for mobile platforms. So I think it’s just that we start so much further down that road ... A lot of the conversation in legacy media is about transitioning. And I think that absorbs a lot of attention that would otherwise be focused on the storytelling. I feel at *Quartz* everybody is really focused on the audience and serving that audience as best as we can, and that’s not something I’ve experienced in legacy media.

The Editorial Lead from *AJ+* said: “Well our competition is really not the traditional news outlets ... To be honest it’s the old broadcasters and newspapers that are actually learning from new organizations like us as opposed to vice versa”. Across our sample of organizations, we find that digital-born organizations were much faster to develop online news video than legacy organizations. The pioneers of online news video mentioned by interviewees as inspirations are generally digital-born news media like *BuzzFeed*, *NowThis*, and *Vice* who have led, while legacy news organizations have more often followed, at a variable pace.

However, not having to deal with the burdens associated with legacy is no panacea for digital-born outlets. The emphasis put on the digital distribution of video over the homepage for some digital-born outlets can be problematic for their business models. *Now This*, an outlet solely producing distributed content on social media without a home page faces monetization problems, as the Executive Producer says: “[We are] not profitable, but we are making money”. They are relying on Facebook providing monetization opportunities in their near future, since they perceive their content Facebook-friendly:

[Facebook] are motivated, because their whole goal is people spending a ton of time on Facebook, and it’s not going to be through the random kind of viral video pages that sometimes have a super hit, but for the most part it’s crap. They want quality content ... But also we understand the potential implication of platform control.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, we have examined how news organizations are approaching online video news. We find that many news organizations have a far more enterprising approach to digital media today than the kind of defensive approach scholars found in the 1990s and 2000s (Boczkowski 2004; Deuze 1999; Domingo 2008). The approach we find is still reactive and pragmatic in some ways, but far more aggressive and oriented towards taking calculated risks and investing in uncertain opportunities. The differences in how news organizations approach online video news are more clearly related to organizational differences than to country differences, and are closely tied in with commercial considerations.



Digital-born organizations (trying to build a business from scratch) and newspaper organizations (who have seen their legacy revenues decline dramatically) are the most enterprising, whereas broadcast organizations (who have so far been less disrupted by digital media) are often less aggressive. Country differences seem to matter less, though news organizations in Germany, who cater to an older population who rely less on digital media than people do in the United Kingdom and the United States (Newman et al. 2016), have invested less in online news video than their counterparts elsewhere.

Most of the organizations covered here have converged on a similar short, platform- and mobile-oriented approach to online news video. Our analysis suggests that news organizations' approach to online news video is shaped in part by factors already identified in existing research, including their visions of what audiences want and their need to make money. But their approach also seems increasingly shaped by their perception of what platform companies like Facebook and Google will privilege and feature in the distributed environments within which news organizations increasingly have to navigate (Gillespie 2017; Nielsen and Ganter 2017; Van Dijck 2013). It is striking that across our 26 interviews and sample of 19 organizations, editorial or journalistic ambitions were very rarely mentioned as part of the rationale for investing in online news video. This underlines the importance of studying not only journalists, but also other actors including managers, technologists, audiences, and outside entities like platform companies when researching change in news production (Lewis and Westlund 2015; Nielsen 2012).

We focus on online news video here because it is a particularly important aspect of the current wave of digital disruption and hence may help inform our understanding of how news organizations will approach the next wave including, for example, chatbots in messaging apps, virtual reality, and voice-operated interfaces (just as earlier studies of websites and mobile apps have informed our study). Whether this logic of generalization from online news video to other areas holds up is an empirical question. Similarly, our research covers a small purposive sample of news organizations from just three high-income democracies, and further research is needed to establish whether our findings are robust across other high-income media systems (e.g. in Southern Europe) and beyond this to news media in medium- and low-income countries. In closing, we would suggest that such further research builds on the approach we develop here by integrating insights from earlier work on developments in digital journalism without assuming that the dynamics remain stable over time, by considering not only journalists, but also other relevant actors in the research design, and by focusing in particular on the increasingly important role of platforms in structuring the opportunities and incentives that news organizations face as they navigate the constant evolution of digital media.

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## NOTES

1. N24/Die Welt is an integration of a newspaper (*Die Welt*) and a TV broadcaster (N24).
2. The BBC World Service is partly funded via advertisement, unlike the domestic BBC service.

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