

Journalism in the Hybrid Media System: Editorial

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Abstract

This thematic issue examines journalism’s role within complex, hybridized media environments shaped by platforms, algorithms, shifting logics of attention, and various actors. Bringing together empirical, theoretical, methodological, and historical perspectives from across three continents, the contributions reveal both enduring structures and transformative dynamics, offering nuanced insights into journalism’s evolving practices, societal functions, and current—as well as future—challenges.

Keywords

algorithms; attention dynamics; hybridity; hybrid media system; journalism; media logic; news media; platform power; political communication; social media

1. Introduction

Digitalization has not only changed the ways in which journalism is produced, disseminated, consumed, and financed but has also challenged the central position of journalism in the public sphere, making it one communicative form among many competing for attention and authority (Carlson et al., 2021). We live in a complex media ecosystem where human and algorithmic actors, legacy and alternative media, as well as newer and older media, observe, compete, influence, and interact with each other (Fürst & Oehmer, 2021; Reese, 2022). This leads to blurred boundaries and communication logics, raising questions about the societal function, relevance, and value of journalism, how users discern and experience journalism and its actors, and how journalists distinguish themselves, their practices, and their products from non-journalistic modes of content production (Edgerly & Vraga, 2020; Splendore & Iannelli, 2022).

In his seminal book *The Hybrid Media System*, Chadwick (2017) encouraged scholars to understand the changing logics of attention and news production, as well as shifting power dynamics within the public sphere, through the lens of a networked media environment (Russell, 2020). This thematic issue takes up this invitation and aims to bring together conceptual, methodological, historical, and empirical contributions that reflect on the changing role of journalism in the hybrid media system.

We received 45 abstracts, of which 16 were selected for full paper submissions. After a double-blind peer review and thorough evaluation by the academic editors, 10 articles were accepted for publication in this thematic issue.

2. Articles Included in This Thematic Issue

The contributions span a wide geographical range, drawing on data from various countries across three continents. Methodologically, the issue showcases the diversity of approaches in researching the role of journalism in the hybrid media system: Several studies are based on qualitative interviews, offering in-depth insights into new types of journalistic organizations, changing journalistic practices and roles (e.g., fact-checkers), the role of audience engagement and audience metrics, and the (re)negotiation of professional norms and news values amid market and platform pressures. Other articles employ quantitative and mixed methods, including network analyses as well as content analyses of news reports and social media posts to explore the alignment and attention dynamics between traditional and newer media or the characteristics of content from different actors on different media channels. The thematic issue also includes methodological and conceptual contributions aimed at better understanding media ownership concentration, power relations, and the governance of epistemic threats to news quality in the hybrid media system. While most studies draw on data from the 2020s, the issue also includes two contributions that examine shorter- and longer-term developments, highlighting both current trends and historical trajectories.

The thematic issue opens with a theoretical contribution. Schneiders and Stark (2025) develop a three-stage framework—encompassing production, distribution, and reception—to analyze threats to news quality in platformized news ecosystems. Addressing the rise of new epistemic authorities and journalism’s dependency on dominant platforms, they introduce the concept of epistemic governance. Their holistic approach provides a timely tool for both research and policy to assess existing and potential media and platform governance measures aimed at safeguarding news quality and reinforcing citizens’ epistemic rights. This article deepens our understanding of journalism’s role and challenges in the hybrid media system, particularly in light of shifting power dynamics and evolving standards of news quality.

The second article, authored by Fürst (2025), examines information flows from a historical perspective. Combining a literature review with a longitudinal analysis of newspaper content from three German-language newspapers, the study investigates key phenomena characterizing information flows, such as media events, scandals, intermedia agenda-setting, and metaphors of public response. The findings reveal that terms such as “media frenzy” have been increasingly used since the mid-20th century to describe cross-media dynamics due to the diversification of mass media and digitalization. The study highlights the importance of historical perspectives for understanding the current hybrid media system.

Aleksevykh and Tomaz (2025) propose a novel methodological framework for assessing media ownership concentration in the hybrid media system. Moving beyond traditional revenue-based concentration metrics, they combine network analysis with attention-based measures to capture media power across sectors. Applying this approach to Denmark and Greece, they demonstrate its effectiveness in revealing complex ownership structures and owners' potential influences on public opinion. Their contribution offers journalism scholars and policymakers a valuable tool to analyze power relations in the hybrid media system and to discuss potential measures that could foster structural media pluralism, media quality, and journalistic autonomy.

Drawing on qualitative interviews with media professionals, the next four articles explore diverse types of journalistic organizations and examine their evolving structures and practices within the hybrid media system.

Anderson (2025) explores practices of participatory journalism based on interviews with journalists from media startups in Pakistan, Romania, Malaysia, and the United Kingdom. The comparative study shows how journalistic organizations shape their relationships with their (active) audiences and delineates the structural constraints that limit the possibilities of audience participation. On the one hand, the interviews reveal how startups aim to foster community agency and empowerment. On the other hand, they also show that the possibilities for audience participation are systematically limited by structural political, economic, and sociocultural factors.

Cazzamatta (2025) investigates how the fact-checking practices of European news agencies differ by applying a content analysis of 860 articles from fact-checking units from Reuters, Agence France-Presse, Deutsche Presse-Agentur, and EFE. The study also explores motivations for establishing fact-checking units based on expert interviews. The results reveal that fact-checking has become an integral part of news agencies' practices that aims to distinguish facts from falsehoods. In terms of falsehoods, the vast majority of articles deal with verifying (or falsifying) online rumors that spread on social media which shows how the agencies have established their new role as "gatebouncers" in the hybrid media system.

Trielli (2025) analyzes how journalists deal with Google's role as an external algorithmic editor in the hybrid media system. Drawing on 18 interviews with US journalists from news organizations across diverse newsroom types and regions, the study shows how professionals respond to algorithmic influence through resistance, relinquishment, and renegotiation. Reporters resist by upholding editorial values against algorithmic pressure, relinquish control by producing tailored "search work," and renegotiate their roles to align professional journalistic values with commercial imperatives. The study highlights shifting power dynamics between human and machine logics and demonstrates how newswork shifts in algorithmic media environments.

Rega (2025) addresses the issue of political incivility in the hybrid media system. While this phenomenon is often problematized in scholarly discourse as indicative of a deteriorating culture of political online debate, Rega focuses on the use of incivility by political journalists in the Italian context. Her study demonstrates that economic pressures as well as platform logics play a significant role in driving the adoption of incivility, which in turn gives rise to journalistic role conflicts. These conflicts are negotiated and resolved in diverse ways by the journalists involved, which goes along with a hybridization of journalistic roles.

The thematic issue concludes with three articles that present quantitative and mixed-methods research at the intersection of journalism and political communication. Focusing on specific cases and topics, these studies offer valuable insights into the dynamics and structures of the hybrid media system and the relations between news media and social media.

Muhle and Bock (2025) explore how artificial amplification and intermedia dynamics shape public discourse in the hybrid media system. By combining content and network analyses, the authors show how social media users strategically pushed a political faux pas into journalistic coverage during the 2021 German federal election. The study reveals the responsiveness of legacy media to trending topics on social media and the influence of hyperactive and automated accounts in driving visibility. It illuminates intermedia dynamics and underscores the need for greater awareness of manipulated online trends in contemporary political communication.

Luebke et al. (2025) explore to what extent media organizations and political stakeholders in Germany follow different (or similar) communication strategies on social media. Using the case of social media communication during the 2023 UN Climate Change Conference in Dubai, the authors reveal that hybridization of communication logics occurs only to a limited extent. Political actors still predominantly adhere to a political logic whereas media organizations continue to follow traditional media logic in their social media activities. This indicates that distinct media and political logics still persist in the hybrid media system.

Rounding off the thematic issue, Siegen and Vogler (2025) present a study on vaccination debates in Switzerland, analyzing intermedia agenda-setting between news outlets and social media. Drawing on 77,798 news articles and 929,431 tweets published between April 2019 and June 2022, the study employs time-series analysis to compare issue attention dynamics and their semantics. The findings show that while news media and Twitter discourses diverged before and after the Covid-19 pandemic, they closely aligned during the crisis, both in attention and semantics. The study highlights how communication flows converge toward dominant issues in times of crisis, supporting previous research on issue agendas in the hybrid media system.

3. Conclusion

Taken together, the empirical, theoretical, methodological, and historical contributions in this thematic issue offer a nuanced understanding of the transformations affecting organizations, power relations, communication logics, and attention dynamics within the hybrid media system. At the same time, they highlight the enduring influence of traditional logics and structures as well as ongoing negotiation processes that warrant further scholarly attention and investigation. Finally, the findings also imply that there is a need for regulatory frameworks that create conditions supporting high-quality news production, dissemination, and (scholarly) monitoring in the increasingly complex hybrid media system. However, journalists also need to cultivate greater professional distance from manipulated dynamics and treat online trends as “matters of concern” rather than a reflection of public opinion.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

LLMs Disclosure

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