

# Normative Commitments and Platform Logics: Understanding Journalism's Adaptive Resilience Through Coverage of Democratic Innovations

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## Abstract

This study uses participatory budgeting as a case study to examine why democratic innovations receive limited media attention, despite their alignment with journalism's civic mission. We argue that coverage of democratic innovations is structurally disadvantaged in platformised media ecosystems where algorithmic visibility, audience metrics, and economic precarity prioritise speed, sensation, visuality, and simplified narratives over procedural or complex stories. Theoretically, the article draws on traditional normative frameworks of journalism and more recent perspectives on platformisation to analyse the tensions between journalism's normative commitments and the pressures of platformisation. Against this backdrop, the concept of resilience is employed as a theoretical bridge between journalism's normative commitments and the structural dynamics of platformisation. Empirically, the study draws on 90 semi-structured interviews with journalists in seven European countries—Greece, Cyprus, Romania, Poland, the Netherlands, the UK, and Ireland—to examine how journalists navigate structural constraints while maintaining professional judgement and autonomy. The findings reveal a paradox: Journalists acknowledge democratic malaise and recognise the potential of participatory budgeting to rebuild trust and participation, yet remain reluctant to assume roles beyond detached observation. Moreover, we find that journalists accommodate platform logics in ways that allow civic-oriented reporting to persist, albeit in diminished form. To sustain coverage of underrepresented issues, journalists deploy a range of micro-strategies, such as simplified framing, outcome-focused storytelling, and human-interest narratives. We conceptualise these as forms of adaptive resilience enabling journalism to survive in hostile conditions. However, such strategies risk legitimising the platform dynamics that undermine journalism's civic mission. To address this tension, the study proposes a shift toward transformative resilience through regulatory reform and sustainable funding models as remedies for the progressive “dumbing down” of journalism.

## Keywords

adaptive resilience; autonomy; democratic innovations; normative commitments of journalism; platform logics; platformisation; resilience

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## 1. Introduction

Media and democratic innovations are closely interdependent as both contribute to strengthening democratic legitimacy and citizen engagement. Democratic innovations include a wide range of instruments such as participatory budgeting (PB), citizens' assemblies, referenda, and study circles (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017; Sintomer et al., 2016); they aim to mitigate public distrust by enabling more inclusive decision-making and allowing citizens to directly influence policy outcomes. Elstub and Escobar (2019) define democratic innovations as processes or institutions designed to deepen the role of citizens in governance by expanding opportunities for participation, deliberation, and influence. Yet their success depends on public visibility and monitoring, which the media is uniquely positioned to provide (Blumler & Cushion, 2014). Thus, while democratic innovations create institutional pathways for participation and collective decision-making, the media provides the communicative arena through which these practices become visible, publicly debated, and monitored. Without sustained media attention, democratic innovations risk being sidelined and overlooked, which undermines their capacity to address public disengagement and rebuild trust in governance.

In recent times, PB has emerged as one of the most significant innovations in contemporary democratic governance, offering citizens a direct say in the allocation of public funds. First introduced in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 1989, PB has been implemented in over 11,000 cases following different formats and logics (De Vries et al., 2022). PB has been widely recognised as a mechanism that enhances transparency and accountability by involving citizens in policy and fiscal decision-making processes (Sintomer et al., 2016). Its normative promise lies in its potential to counteract citizen disengagement, address declining trust in political institutions, and provide avenues for more inclusive and responsive governance. From this perspective, PB exemplifies not only democratic innovation but also a site where institutions, and in this case local authorities and the media, must demonstrate resilience in sustaining practices that support citizen participation despite political, economic, or organisational pressures.

This article examines how journalists negotiate their normative commitments within platformised news ecosystems, specifically when covering democratically vital yet low-visibility topics. Using PB as an illustrative case study through which broader challenges facing journalism can be examined, and employing resilience as a lens to connect normativity and press platformisation, we investigate why democratically valuable stories struggle for visibility although they align closely with journalism's public mission.

The article addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How do journalists perceive the democratic value and newsworthiness of PB and similar democratic innovations?

RQ2: How do platformisation, audience metrics, and economic pressures shape editorial decisions regarding the coverage of democratic innovations?

RQ3: What forms of resilience do journalists deploy when attempting to cover democratically valuable but structurally disadvantaged topics?

To address these questions, the article proceeds as follows. First, it outlines journalism's normative commitments and discusses how platformisation has transformed the conditions of news production. Second, it introduces resilience as a conceptual lens that connects normative theory and journalistic practice. The empirical section presents findings from a cross-national qualitative study with journalists in seven European countries. Finally, drawing on the concept of adaptive resilience, the study reveals how journalists employ micro-strategies to accommodate platform logics while maintaining coverage of civic topics, albeit in diminished form.

## 2. Journalism's Normative Commitments

Normative theories provide an essential starting point to understand journalism's role in democratic societies. They establish not only what journalism *is*, but also what it *ought to be*, defining the professional ideals against which practices are evaluated (Christians et al., 2009). While normative theories include libertarian, social responsibility, authoritarian, and Soviet communist models (Siebert et al., 1976), this study focuses on the social responsibility tradition. This does not suggest one model fits all democracies; rather, social responsibility emphasises journalism's civic duty to support democratic participation, public deliberation, and accountability while maintaining professional autonomy. It frames the media as a democratic institution that informs citizens, fosters public awareness, and holds power to account (Fenton, 2016; Schudson, 2007). Journalism, as Blumler and Cushion (2014, p. 261) note, is an "inescapably normative domain." That is to say, journalism plays a major role in supporting or undermining processes of citizenship and democracy. Journalism helps individuals to understand the world around them (Hess & Gutsche, 2018), and functions as a force for both social control and social change, making it central to the workings of a democracy (Thomas, 2019). However, as Hanitzsch and Vos (2017) note, we must distinguish between role *conceptions*—how journalists think they should perform—and role *performance*—what they actually do. This tension between journalism's normative ideals and practice is further illuminated by scholarship on journalistic role performance. Mellado (2020) demonstrates through cross-national research that even when journalists espouse similar normative commitments, their actual performance diverges considerably depending on structural constraints and professional cultures.

More recently, normative theories have been revisited in light of democratic challenges such as declining trust (Fink, 2019), misinformation (Waisbord, 2018), and copy-paste journalism (Saridou et al., 2017). This development goes hand in hand with what Siegelbaum and Thomas (2016) call "normative failure," referring to the fear or inability of journalists to execute normative functions of journalism as a result of growing external pressures disrupting the practices, values, and sustainability of journalism. Moreover, journalism's normative failure occurs within a wider context of growing critique and scepticism toward representative democracy (Foa et al., 2020). Declining levels of public trust are particularly pronounced toward national governments, elected representatives, and political parties (OECD, 2021). This erosion of trust is frequently associated with reduced electoral participation and the rise of populism (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). In this context, scholars argue that journalism must not only maintain independence from power but also actively contribute to civic renewal. This reflects a shift from traditional objectivist paradigms toward more engaged and democratic conceptions of the press. Historically, journalism's legitimacy has been grounded in its

autonomy from political, economic, and ideological interests (Schudson, 2007). This independence is viewed as essential to the watchdog role of the press, which ensures accountability and transparency in democratic governance. However, recent scholarship argues that detachment alone is insufficient in the face of declining public trust and growing democratic fatigue (Craft et al., 2016).

Particularly relevant in this discussion is the contested “journalist as activist” or “civic facilitator” role. Proponents argue that in contexts of democratic decline, journalism cannot remain neutral but must actively support democratic renewal (Waisbord, 2013) while critics warn that advocacy risks compromising professional legitimacy (Carlson & Lewis, 2015). This professional anxiety explains why journalists may recognise democratic innovations’ value yet resist coverage that appears promotional (Mellado et al., 2021).

Accordingly, the idea that journalism should be seen as a participatory, constructive practice that promotes civic engagement and collective deliberation rather than merely providing information and oversight is gaining ground. Deuze and Witschge (2018) contend that we should go “beyond journalism” as understood in its traditional conception and view journalism as a cultural practice embedded in communities, one that co-produces meanings and encourages public dialogue. In a similar vein, Thomas (2019) put forward the notion of “helpfulness” as journalism’s normative objective. It is argued that journalism is helpful when it expands and improves people’s opportunities. An opportunity might emerge through new knowledge (e.g., about wrongdoing in local government) or new abilities (e.g., to appreciate diverse viewpoints). Expanded opportunities could also take the form of acquired or expanded cultural capital or possibilities for political mobilisation (Thomas, 2019, p. 374).

In this regard, journalism must be reoriented around inclusivity and social justice as guiding principles (Santos & Ndlovu, 2022). Traditional commitments to objectivity and neutrality, while historically influential, often conceal inequality and reinforce dominant perspectives. This broader understanding of journalism emphasises journalism’s *civic mission*—its responsibility to sustain democratic culture, not only democratic institutions, in order to address the challenges posed by multidimensional forms of injustice in contemporary society. In this vein, journalism can support democratic innovations by informing citizens, amplifying diverse perspectives, and systematically monitoring these processes. Rather than reporting from above, journalism should interrogate power structures and the institutional contexts within which these innovations unfold. This requires rethinking the normative and professional standards that define newsworthiness. By acknowledging positionality, journalism can strengthen its commitment to transparency and accountability, while reinforcing its democratic function as a facilitator of public deliberation and a challenger of systemic injustices (Zelizer et al., 2022).

### 3. Platformisation and the Transformation of Journalism

Digital platforms have fundamentally reshaped how journalism is produced, distributed, and consumed (Bell et al., 2017). This transformation, theorised by Helmond (2015) as the “platformisation of the web,” describes how platforms extend their influence beyond their own websites by using technical features—such as APIs, social plug-ins, and data. Van Dijck et al. (2018) argue that platform logics have penetrated social institutions, including journalism. Accordingly, scholars speak of “press platformisation”—the process through which social media and other intermediaries become integral infrastructures for the production, distribution, monetisation, and visibility of journalism (Helberger et al., 2020; Nielsen & Ganter, 2022). As a

result, news organisations are much more dependent on platforms than the other way around (Bell et al., 2017; Poell et al., 2023).

Platform logics exert influence in at least three interconnected ways. First, algorithmic curation reshapes the pathways through which audiences encounter news. Rather than relying primarily on editorial judgment, news visibility is increasingly determined by opaque algorithmic systems designed to maximise engagement (Napoli, 2019). As the ownership of news distribution shifts from news media to platforms, the latter acquire a decisive role in determining which content gains prominence and which remains obscured (Smyrniotis & Rebillard, 2019). Moreover, platform logics shape not only which topics are covered but also how news is produced and framed (Walters, 2022). The uptake of social media logic has fuelled clickbait practices (Lischka & Garz, 2023), prioritised visuals over analytical depth, and elevated emotional or unusual stories (Nowak-Teter & Łódzki, 2023), often at the expense of interpretative and investigative reporting. As Peterson-Salahuddin and Diakopoulos (2020) observe, social media editors constantly negotiate between normative newsworthiness and interaction worthiness to enhance algorithmic visibility. Consequently, traditional journalistic values and conceptions of newsworthiness are reshaped while professional autonomy is increasingly constrained (Spyridou & Danezis, 2024). According to Perreault et al. (2025), this represents an epistemological shift, subordinating journalism's civic authority to platform-determined relevance. As a result, content requiring sustained attention is systematically marginalised over rapid consumption.

Second, audience metrics exert strong pressure on newsrooms to optimise content for clicks, shares, and other measurable indicators (Zamith, 2018). Dodds et al. (2023) show how "popularity-driven metrics" shift editorial power to platforms, reshaping newsworthiness, while Kristensen (2023) argues that "expected reception" now functions as a news value in digital journalism production. Although metrics have long shaped journalism, platforms intensify what Napoli (2011) calls the "rationalisation of audience understanding"—turning imagined publics into continuously measured and optimised data points. Recent research offers a more nuanced view of journalist–platform relations. While earlier studies stressed accommodation, newer work highlights resistance and tactical negotiation (Perreault et al., 2025; Walters, 2022). Ehrlén and Villi (2025) describe "opting out of analytics," though such acts are usually individual and limited in impact, "more of a gesture than a real possibility," while data-driven imperatives tend to disadvantage complex, procedural reporting vital to democratic innovations (Lischka & Garz, 2023). Metrics increasingly serve not only as optimisation tools but also as performance indicators, with direct implications for professional autonomy (Spyridou & Danezis, 2024).

Third, the growing dependency of news organisations on digital platforms has introduced new forms of economic precarity within the media ecosystem. As advertising revenue increasingly migrates toward dominant intermediaries such as Google and Meta, traditional news outlets face intensified challenges in maintaining financial sustainability (Pickard, 2020). This platform-driven redistribution of economic power has resulted in a structural imbalance where media organisations depend on platforms not only for audience reach but also for revenue generation. However, the revenue derived from these arrangements is often distributed unequally, with platforms retaining the largest share while content producers receive minimal returns (Rushidian et al., 2019).

Beyond economic asymmetries, platforms extract substantial value from user data generated through news consumption. Through advanced tracking and analytics, they gather detailed information on users'

preferences and behaviours, and monetise it via targeted advertising (Smyrnaio & Rebillard, 2019). Although news organisations produce much of the content driving this engagement, they lack comparable access to data or revenue from its monetisation (Nielsen & Ganter, 2018). This dynamic deepens what Myllylahti (2020) calls “platform capture,” whereby journalistic institutions become increasingly subordinate to the financial and algorithmic logics of infomediaries. As dependence grows, media bargaining power weakens, and journalism’s normative roles—informing citizens, holding power to account, and sustaining democratic discourse—are increasingly subordinated to market-driven imperatives.

#### 4. Resilience as a Theoretical Bridge Between Normativity and Platformisation

This study uses the concept of resilience to explain how journalists navigate these conditions. In journalism studies, resilience has gained prominence as a framework for understanding how journalism adapts, transforms, and maintains its normative role during crises. Originating in ecological and organisational theory, resilience refers to the capacity of systems or actors to absorb shocks and adapt to change while preserving core functions (Walker & Salt, 2012). In the context of journalism, resilience has recently been taken up to describe the profession’s responses and resistance to political pressures (Jeppesen, 2016), attacks and violence against journalists (Ozawa et al., 2024), technological disruption and economic uncertainty (Mathisen, 2022), and to trauma caused by covering crises and disasters (Streedharan et al., 2019). In all cases, the notion of resilience is used to refer to strategies and attitudes employed to help journalists cope with uncertainty and threat in order to be able to perform their civic tasks. From a theoretical standpoint, resilience extends beyond mere survival; it encompasses the profession’s capacity to resist, adapt, and transform in ways that restore its civic purpose and ethical grounding within an environment of technological disruption, political polarisation, and economic precarity (Eldridge & Broersma, 2018).

Applied to journalism, resilience bridges normative commitments and the realities of platformisation. While normative theory defines journalism’s civic obligations and platformisation outlines the constraints on fulfilling them, resilience explains how journalists actively navigate this tension. It highlights agency, innovation, and learning within structural limits, rather than portraying journalism as either platform-determined or fully autonomous.

Moreover, the notion of resilience suggests that crises can also serve as catalysts for renewal (Zelizer, 2015). In this sense, resilience is not simply a return to the status quo but an adaptive process through which journalism reconfigures its practices to remain aligned with democratic values. This includes developing alternative funding models (Myllylahti & Meese, 2024), engaging more directly with communities (Jeppesen, 2016), reasserting editorial independence from political and platform interference (Ozawa et al., 2024), and developing editorial counterstrategies (Barrios & Miller, 2020). Ultimately, adopting resilience as a theoretical lens shifts journalism studies beyond crisis narratives toward a transformative framework centred on normative renewal. Resilience is thus positioned as both an analytical and prescriptive concept: It helps diagnose journalism’s structural vulnerabilities while also imagining pathways for ethical and democratic regeneration (Zelizer et al., 2022). As Carlson (2022) argues, journalism’s legitimacy rests not only on its epistemic authority but also on its moral and civic obligations.

The study distinguishes between *adaptive* and *transformative* resilience. Adaptive resilience refers to micro-level tactical adjustments that enable survival within existing structural constraints, for instance,

reframing stories for platform logics. While demonstrating professional agency, such strategies operate within parameters defined by platformisation and economic precarity. Adaptive resilience enables continuity but risks normalising degraded conditions by showing that journalism can function, albeit diminished, under adverse circumstances. Transformative resilience, on the other hand, involves efforts to fundamentally alter constraining structures through collective action, institutional reform, and regulatory intervention. This includes regulatory constraints on platform power and alternative business models that reduce algorithmic dependency. This distinction provides the basis for our analytical framework, through which we examine whether journalists' strategies function as adaptive responses or as transformative interventions, and what this means for journalism's enduring civic capacity.

## 5. Background: Democratic Innovations and the Visibility Problem

Democratic innovations seek to address deficits in trust, representation, and participation in contemporary democracies (Smith, 2009). PB, in particular, has been widely recognised for its potential to increase transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement in fiscal decision-making (Sintomer et al., 2016). More specifically, PB allows citizens to directly decide how to allocate portions of municipal or public budgets through structured processes of proposal, deliberation, and voting. For example, in Paris, residents voted on projects ranging from urban gardens to bicycle infrastructure; in New York, communities allocated capital funding for neighbourhood improvements. These processes typically involve multiple stages: community meetings to generate ideas, technical feasibility review, public voting, and implementation monitoring.

However, despite aligning with democratic ideals, democratic innovations often struggle to gain sustained media attention. Although coverage of PB has increased with its global diffusion, it remains largely superficial, frequently relying on press releases and showing low substantive relevance (Mendez, 2022). More in-depth reporting is more likely to highlight challenges, as negative framing rises with higher relevance. Media visibility is therefore crucial: As a communicative infrastructure for democracy (McNair, 2009), the media makes political processes observable and open to scrutiny. Without sustained coverage, democratic innovations risk remaining peripheral or vulnerable to manipulation.

## 6. Research Design

### 6.1. Sample and Recruitment

The study draws on interviews with 90 journalism professionals across seven countries: Greece, Cyprus, Romania, Poland, the Netherlands, the UK, and Ireland (Table 1). These countries were selected to capture variation across European media systems while maintaining comparability within democratic contexts. The sample includes Southern Europe (Greece, Cyprus), Eastern Europe (Romania, Poland), and Northern/Western Europe (Netherlands, UK, Ireland). Participants include reporters ( $n = 54$ ), editors ( $n = 28$ ), and digital content managers ( $n = 8$ ) working across print, broadcast, and digital outlets. The sample includes journalists with varying levels of familiarity with PB: those who have covered or are familiar with PB initiatives ( $n = 48$ , primarily in Poland, Netherlands, Romania, UK) and those unfamiliar with the concept ( $n = 32$ , primarily in Greece, Cyprus, Ireland). Recruitment was facilitated through professional networks, academic contacts, and snowball sampling.

**Table 1.** Sample.

Country	Number of interviewees
Greece	15
Cyprus	12
Ireland	8
UK	14
Romania	11
Poland	15
The Netherlands	15

To investigate how journalists perceive and navigate the tension between journalism’s civic mission and the pressures of platformisation, this study used semi-structured interviews. Interviews are particularly well-suited to capture the lived experiences, professional judgments, and interpretive frameworks of practitioners (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Interviews were conducted between March and December 2023 either face-to-face or via videoconferencing platforms, depending on participants’ availability. Each interview lasted approximately 35 minutes. To address potential bias from cultural and linguistic differences, interviews were conducted in participants’ working languages and analysed by researchers familiar with each national context. Regular team meetings ensured consistent interpretation across cases.

## 6.2. Data Analysis

An interview guide was developed to cover three key areas: (a) journalists’ perceptions about citizen participation in PB and political processes in general, (b) parameters that would make PB and other democratic innovations more newsworthy as news items, and (c) perceptions of the role of journalism in sustaining democratic culture. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants’ consent and transcribed verbatim. To ensure confidentiality, all identifying details were anonymised and participants are referred to by pseudonyms in the analysis.

The interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coding process followed a combined inductive–deductive approach (White & Cooper, 2022). In the first phase, transcripts were coded inductively to identify recurring themes, meanings, and concerns articulated by participants. The initial open coding revealed the following key themes: journalists’ perceptions of democratic participation and PB, the newsworthiness of democratic innovations, perceptions of professional roles, and structural constraints in news production. In the second phase, deductive coding was applied using concepts derived from the theoretical framework—normative commitments, platform logics, and forms of resilience. Cross-national comparison was conducted analytically rather than through predefined media system typologies. Rather than treating national differences as variables to be controlled, the analysis focused on identifying shared perceptions and common professional responses across countries.

## 7. Findings

### 7.1. *Recognising Normative Failure: Journalists' Awareness of Democratic Deficit*

Throughout the discussions, the issue of democratic malaise emerged as a dominant concern in contemporary democratic life cutting across all seven countries. Participants referred to widespread democratic malaise characterised by declining trust, cynicism, and weakened citizen engagement. Journalists described societies oscillating between political frustration and sporadic moments of civic awakening. In Southern and Eastern Europe, malaise was frequently linked to corruption, institutional fragility, and economic precarity, while in Northern and Western Europe, to disconnection and technocratic politics. A Romanian journalist captured the prevailing sentiment: “People have stopped believing that their voice counts. They’ve seen too many promises and too few results” (Romania, #3).

Yet this recognition was accompanied by a self-critical awareness of journalism’s complicity in the problem. A Greek reporter reflected: “We have become part of the machinery that turns politics into spectacle. We talk about democracy, but our coverage often undermines it” (Greece, #2). Such reflexivity indicates that journalists acknowledge their share of responsibility and see themselves not only as observers of democratic erosion but also as its potential accomplice, an awareness that anchors a sense of professional responsibility.

Many journalists acknowledged that their own practices sometimes amplify political cynicism. The convergence of political influence, ownership concentration, and commercial priorities limits their capacity to fulfil journalism’s civic mission. A Cypriot editor noted: “You can’t talk about holding power accountable when your outlet depends on government advertising contracts” (Cyprus, #9). This recognition signals a wider sense of normative failure, the awareness that journalism no longer operates as the independent, civic institution it imagines itself to be (Siegelbaum & Thomas, 2016). At the same time, participants defended the watchdog role as essential even if it generates discomfort. A Dutch journalist explained: “If people lose trust in politicians because we reveal wrongdoing, that’s not our fault; it’s part of democracy” (The Netherlands, #12).

The contradiction here is instructive: Journalists maintain the ideal of serving democracy while operating within systems that incentivise negativity and dependence. Their reflections illustrate an ongoing struggle to balance critical scrutiny and sustainability with constructive contribution, a negotiation at the core of journalism’s normative (re)definition in the digital age (Carlson, 2017; Wu et al., 2019).

### 7.2. *Mixed Attitudes Toward PB and Professional Resilience*

Awareness of PB varied sharply among journalists. In Poland, the Netherlands, Romania, and the UK, respondents had experience with PB initiatives and generally regarded them as promising, though fragile, democratic experiments. In Greece, Cyprus, and Ireland, PB remained largely unknown, framed as a distant yet positive concept. Overall, journalists’ views were nuanced: While they endorsed PB’s democratic ideals, they remained sceptical about its practical impact, citing concerns about the capacity and credibility of the institutions tasked with implementing these initiatives. A Greek journalist summarised this ambivalence: “It’s a good idea on paper, but our institutions are not ready for it. Participation is used more as a slogan than a practice” (Greece, #8).

This scepticism toward institutional capacity coexists with a reluctance to see journalism as responsible for strengthening democratic innovations. Most interviewed journalists argued that their role is not to promote participatory tools but to observe, listen, and report. Maintaining neutrality and amplifying diverse voices—rather than acting as advocates—was viewed as central to their professional mandate. A journalist from the UK noted: “There is a trend for journalists to become activists and activists to call themselves journalists, leading to public confusion” (UK, #1). A Greek journalist articulated this position explicitly: “From the very beginning, the mission of journalism was to inform citizens. This is fully sufficient. If journalism does something different, it’s not journalism anymore” (Greece, #7).

A Dutch journalist articulated a more assertive view of journalism’s responsibility to provoke public debate through reporting and to play an active role in sustaining democratic culture:

As a journalist, you have a role in controlling politics; you have a role in informing readers; properly informing readers and making clear what choices they have. But ultimately, it is up to politicians themselves to get people to vote. That is in the end not the role of journalists. (The Netherlands, #3)

These contradictory positions reveal deeper tensions in journalistic role conceptions. The Dutch journalist’s focus on “controlling politics” reflects watchdog traditions in Northern European contexts with stronger press freedom. The Greek journalist’s stricter informational stance suggests a defensive response to greater political pressure. From a resilience perspective, these differences can be seen as context-specific adaptations: In more precarious environments, journalists maintain stricter boundaries as protection, while in more stable settings they can assume broader professional roles.

Despite differences in role conceptions, participants consistently attributed the success or failure of PB solely to institutional shortcomings. This externalisation of responsibility operates as an adaptive resilience strategy: It protects professional identity by avoiding the risks of more engaged coverage. The prevailing view confines journalism to reporting and questioning, rejecting advocacy. While this stance aligns with role conceptions prioritising neutrality and information provision (Mellado, 2020), it reveals the limits of resilience focused on survival. By adhering to strictly informational roles, journalists adapt to platform and economic pressures in ways that marginalise coverage of democratic innovations. At the same time, material constraints and weak press freedom safeguards (“Supporting freedom of expression,” 2021) limit their capacity to engage more critically with complex issues, raising doubts about whether a purely informational approach sufficiently supports democratic practice.

### ***7.3. The Limits of Adaptation: When Resilience Reinforces Constraint***

Almost all participants agreed that PB holds normative importance yet lacks news appeal. The core dilemma is structural: PB stories fail to meet the dominant criteria of newsworthiness—conflict, novelty, emotion, and simplicity—and thus struggle to gain traction within platformised media ecosystems. “PB is not sexy,” said an Irish journalist, “no scandal, no drama—so editors ignore it” (Ireland, #3). In a similar vein, a Polish journalist noted: “The democratic process is an extremely boring topic for the audience. No one would publish that. The process is too complicated” (Poland, #5).

This recognition of structural incompatibility marks the starting point of adaptive resilience: Journalists see the clash between democratic values and platform logics but adjust to the latter instead of challenging it.

Resilience thus takes the form of accommodation—professional survival achieved by accepting platform demands as unavoidable rather than open to change.

Elaborating further, the findings indicate that across all seven countries the influence of digital platforms and audience metrics has emerged as a critical factor shaping journalistic approaches to covering PB and other democratic innovations. The shift from traditional to digital media environments has fundamentally transformed editorial decision-making, often to the detriment of complex, policy-oriented reporting such as PB. In particular, the pressure to generate traffic is identified as the primary constraint:

Journalists should find a way to adjust what they want to say to what people want to read, and to present it in such a way so that people will want to read it; they must also know how the algorithm, the system, the social media, and the search engines can help them so that their content comes on top. Because if you write something and nobody reads it, your work is lost, there is no reason to do it at all. (Cyprus, #8)

The Cypriot journalist's reasoning reveals how platform metrics have displaced civic value as journalism's legitimating principle. Algorithmic visibility becomes not merely a practical consideration but an existential necessity. This algorithmic imperative fundamentally reshapes journalistic priorities, subordinating editorial judgment to platform visibility (Carlson, 2018). The click-driven paradigm directly undermines the possibility of substantive PB coverage, which requires explanation and context rather than sensationalism and visuals. Besides algorithmic visibility, participants highlighted how platforms demand "expected reception" (Kristensen, 2023), creating a destructive trade-off between speed and quality. One journalist observed: "Unfortunately, our audience wants to look through pictures, watch a short video, or read a short piece of information" (Romania, #9).

The acceptance of compressed formats and simplified narratives not only undermines the possibility of covering PB's procedural complexity, but also essentially exemplifies adaptive resilience at work: Journalists modify content to fit platform affordances, thereby maintaining relevance within algorithmic ecosystems. However, this adaptation simultaneously reinforces the very constraints that marginalise substantive civic coverage.

Beyond perceptions of low audience interest, journalists also attribute limited and superficial coverage of PB and other democratic innovations to resource constraints, especially time and funding. Newsroom downsizing (Porlezza, 2019) and increased productivity pressures have led fewer journalists to produce more content, fostering practices such as churnalism and low-cost reporting (Saridou et al., 2017). In this context, Dutch and British journalists in particular emphasised how platform-driven economic logics have been especially damaging to local journalism—precisely the level at which PB coverage would be most relevant. As one respondent noted: "I think there have been heavy cuts in local journalism, which means that what is happening there is followed less" (The Netherlands, #4). The decline of local media thus undermines reporting on democratic innovations that are inherently local in character. Moreover, the platform economy's concentration of advertising revenue in large national and international outlets systematically deprives the local journalism ecosystem of resources, even though this is where PB-related stories would most naturally find their audience.

The decline of local journalism shows the limits of adaptive resilience. When resources are significantly constrained, individual efforts cannot offset systemic shortages. This highlights the need for transformative resilience, namely collective action to reform journalism's political economy through regulation, public funding, or alternative business models. Yet such strategies are largely absent from journalists' accounts, suggesting that resilience operates primarily as a defensive mechanism rather than organised resistance to deteriorating conditions.

#### ***7.4. News Judgement, Autonomy, and the Internalisation of Constraint***

Across all countries studied, journalists consistently described their autonomy as conditional rather than absolute. A Greek reporter captured this paradox succinctly: “[Journalism] is a place where you are free to decide, as long as your story gets clicks” (Greece, #7). This formulation exposes how datafication has fundamentally reconfigured professional decision-making. What appears as editorial freedom operates within pre-established parameters defined by audience metrics, advertising revenue, and platform visibility requirements (Zamith, 2018). The shift from professional judgement to datafication represents a profound transformation in journalistic culture (Spyridou & Danezis, 2024). Where news judgment once emerged from professional expertise and normative commitments to public service, decisions increasingly derive from algorithmic feedback loops. The prevalence of platform logics—speed, metrics, appeal—pushes journalists to privilege content that circulates easily, even when it contradicts public-interest imperatives. As one Dutch journalist put it: “You can write the best civic story, but if it doesn't trend, it disappears in minutes” (The Netherlands, #3). This “algorithmic consciousness” (Bucher, 2018) reflects the voluntary incorporation of platform logics into editorial judgment. Journalists do not merely respond to metrics; they embrace them to produce content that aligns with predicted performance. The subsequent erosion of autonomy appears to be internalised as part of professional practice rather than experienced as an external imposition, with one participant observing that journalists “know how the algorithm, the system, the social media, and the search engines can help them so that their content comes on top” (Cyprus, #8). Such views reveal how adaptive resilience involves not just professional adjustment but epistemological accommodation: accepting platform logics as natural law rather than political-economic configuration subject to challenge and change.

Overall, platform logics put editorial autonomy under pressure. While many journalists reported feeling personally autonomous in story selection, they acknowledged broader structural constraints. A Greek journalist noted: “Stories with little commercial interest are considered of minor importance. Sometimes we are self-censored as we struggle to write stories that would have a commercial impact” (Greece, #2). This self-censorship, driven by internalised metrics awareness, represents adaptive resilience at its most problematic: Journalists pre-emptively exclude content deemed commercially unviable, thereby reproducing the very constraints they seek to manage. Rather than external censorship, the most insidious effect of platform logics lies in the voluntary alignment of professional judgment with commercial imperatives.

#### ***7.5. Adaptive Resilience: Micro-Strategies for Survival***

Despite these constraints, journalists do not simply accept the decline of their professional authority. They employ various strategies to keep democratic innovations visible, even when audience interest seems low. These editorial practices reflect adaptive resilience—creative efforts to preserve civic content within hostile conditions. However, they are ambivalent, as they both support survival and legitimise existing constraints.

Some participants suggested exploiting metrics strategically, using engagement data to argue for the long-term civic value of democratic innovation coverage. The vast majority of respondents argued that either a human-interest angle—stories focusing on individuals transformed by PBs—or links to tangible outcomes can make PBs newsworthy within platform logics. A Cypriot journalist explained: “If the PB builds a park or a playground, then we have a story. People connect to results, not procedures” (Cyprus, #10). These micro-strategies reflect adaptive resilience: efforts to reframe procedurally complex democratic processes as outcome-focused narratives or personalised stories, thereby making them legible within platform logics.

Adaptation is shaped not only by commercial pressures but also by changing relationships with audiences. Journalists described audiences as fragmented, distracted, and less interested in complex civic issues. As one Polish journalist noted: “People don’t hate politics, they just don’t see why it matters” (Poland, #7). This perception encourages simplification. Journalists shorten and simplify coverage to match what they believe audiences want, which in turn reinforces more superficial storytelling. A Cypriot journalist explained: “We have to speak simply, otherwise no one reads us” (Cyprus, #10). The tension between simplicity and depth reflects journalism’s struggle within attention-driven media environments. What is framed as “reader-friendliness” often aligns with engagement optimisation. Efforts to make complex issues accessible can therefore end up adapting to platform logics rather than challenging them.

However, participants also recognised that such strategies cannot compensate for structural asymmetries. Without sustainable funding models, institutional safeguards for press freedom, and regulatory frameworks that constrain platform power, resilience operates as strategic adaptation rather than resistance and transformation in the direction of restoring journalism’s civic purpose.

From a theoretical standpoint, the resilience described in this study operates primarily as adaptive rather than transformative. It constitutes neither passive endurance nor active resistance but strategic navigation within constraint. Journalists deploy creativity and agency to maintain civic coverage in diminished form, demonstrating that journalism can function, albeit degraded, within platformised ecosystems. Yet this very demonstration carries risk: By showing that journalism survives within hostile conditions, adaptive resilience may inadvertently legitimise those conditions, reducing pressure for structural transformation. The ambivalence of adaptive resilience lies precisely in this tension: While it enables professional continuity, it may do so at the cost of normalising the very conditions that erode journalism’s democratic capacity.

## 8. Discussion

This study attempts to address several gaps in existing literature. First, while scholarship has extensively documented platformisation’s effects on journalism broadly (Nielsen & Ganter, 2022; Petré, 2021), we demonstrate how these dynamics specifically disadvantage coverage of procedurally complex democratic innovations. Second, we extend resilience theory beyond crisis response (Mathisen, 2022; Ozawa et al., 2024) to everyday adaptation to structural constraints. Third, we provide cross-national evidence of how journalists across diverse European contexts navigate similar tensions, suggesting platformisation as a homogenising force and adaptive resilience as a coping mechanism to safeguard professional practice.

Our framework brings together three perspectives that are often treated separately. Normative theory defines journalism’s ideals, platformisation explains the structural constraints it faces, and resilience shows

how journalists respond through adaptation and agency. Together, they present journalism as actively negotiating constraints—rather than being fully determined by them or fully free—a negotiation with important consequences for democracy.

The findings show that editorial decisions are increasingly shaped by algorithms, audience metrics, and economic insecurity, which prioritise visibility and engagement over democratic depth (Nielsen & Ganter, 2022). This reflects a broader shift in journalism from a relatively autonomous profession to a more fluid and precarious field (Deuze & Witschge, 2018). Professional authority, once grounded in editorial judgment and civic reasoning, is now often subordinated to metrics and data (Carlson, 2018). News judgment becomes a response to algorithmic visibility rather than democratic significance (Petré, 2021), narrowing what counts as newsworthy to what performs well with audiences (Spyridou & Danezis, 2024). These developments raise pressing concerns about platform dependency and editorial autonomy (Dodds et al., 2023).

The findings show that journalism adapts to platform logics, allowing civic reporting to continue in reduced form. Journalists use micro-strategies such as simplification, outcome-focused angles, and human-interest framing, to justify coverage of underrepresented topics. This reflects adaptive resilience: Journalism survives in difficult conditions, but by internalising the very pressures that threaten its normative role. This ambivalence is crucial. By operating effectively within platform systems, journalism may legitimise the commercial and algorithmic forces limiting its autonomy. In this way, professional survival can reinforce, rather than challenge, structural dependency (Pickard, 2020).

A further dimension of this paradox lies in the persistence of journalism's informational paradigm. Even when journalists recognise the democratic potential of PB, they remain reluctant to assume roles that move beyond detached observation. This professional conservatism reflects the enduring influence of occupational norms that prioritise neutrality and objectivity (Mellado, 2020). Consequently, journalism continues to describe democratic decline without necessarily engaging in practices that could help reverse it; journalism professionals position themselves as observers rather than participants in processes of civic reconstruction, thus narrowing journalism's democratic potential (Zelizer et al., 2022).

While adaptive resilience preserves some aspects of journalism's civic purpose, the findings underscore the absence of transformative resilience, namely the capacity to alter structural conditions rather than merely endure them. Transformative resilience would entail collective rather than individual adaptation, addressing systemic constraints through regulatory reform, sustainable public funding, and institutional safeguards for editorial independence (McChesney, 2015; Pickard, 2020). Without such systemic interventions, resilience remains primarily defensive, ensuring survival while leaving the political economy of platformised media intact.

The comparative findings support this interpretation. Although the nature and intensity of constraints differ across regions—political influence and financial insecurity being more pronounced in Southern and Eastern Europe, and platform dependency and commercial pressures stronger in Northern and Western Europe—the underlying tension between journalistic ideals and structural limitations is consistent. Platformisation acts as a unifying force that overrides national differences, aligning distinct media systems under shared algorithmic and market-driven priorities (Nielsen & Ganter, 2022). Despite these pressures, journalists across countries continue to invoke core professional values such as truth, accountability, and service to the public. However, these ideals increasingly function as expressions of professional identity

rather than principles that shape everyday practice, reflecting a widening gap between what journalism stands for and what it actually does. In this respect, the findings support journalism's normative failure (Siegelbaum & Thomas, 2016) and raise questions about the future of journalism as an institution serving democracy and democratic culture. Taken together, these findings suggest that journalism's democratic function cannot be restored through micro-strategies. Journalism's civic mission has become structurally incompatible with the economic and technological systems that now define it. In this context, reclaiming journalism's normative values entails policy intervention and new business models to allow journalism to reassert its moral and epistemic autonomy.

## 9. Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations warrant acknowledgement. First, our sample, while cross-national, focuses on European democracies and may not generalise to other contexts. Second, we rely on journalists' self-reported perceptions rather than newsroom observation or content analysis. Third, our focus on PB, while revealing, represents only one type of democratic innovation. Finally, this study captures a specific moment (2023) in rapidly evolving platform dynamics. Future research should examine coverage of other democratic innovations, and explore whether alternative funding models (membership, philanthropy, public subsidy) enable more substantive coverage of complex civic topics.

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The author declares no conflict of interests.

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