

Article

Teaching Journalism Literacy in Schools: The Role of Media Companies as Media Educators in Germany

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Abstract

German journalism is facing major challenges including declining circulation, funding, trust, and political allegations of spreading disinformation. Increased media literacy in the population is one way to counter these issues and their implications. This especially applies to the sub-concept of journalism literacy, focusing on the ability to consume news critically and reflectively, thus enabling democratic participation. For media companies, promoting journalism literacy seems logical for economic and altruistic reasons. However, research on German initiatives is scarce. This article presents an explorative qualitative survey of experts from seven media companies offering journalistic media education projects in German schools, focusing on the initiatives' content, structure, and motivation. Results show that initiatives primarily aim at students and teachers, offering mostly education on journalism (e.g., teaching material) and via journalism (e.g., journalistic co-production with students). While these projects mainly provide information on the respective medium and journalistic practices, dealing with disinformation is also a central goal. Most initiatives are motivated both extrinsically (e.g., reaching new audiences) and intrinsically (e.g., democratic responsibility). Despite sometimes insufficient resources and reluctant teachers, media companies see many opportunities in their initiatives: Gaining trust and creating resilience against disinformation are just two examples within the larger goal of enabling young people to be informed and opinionated members of a democratic society.

Keywords

disinformation; journalism literacy; journalistic media education; media literacy; news media literacy

Issue

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1. Introduction

Digitalization brought fundamental changes to financing, producing, and distributing media products. In journalism as a whole and daily newspapers in particular, revenues have been declining for more than 20 years. The industry is reacting through consolidation and economization. Despite mitigating economic problems in the short term, these measures mostly rely on reducing staff and cutting costs. While supported by loyal, older target groups still buying print editions, newspapers still do not seem to have found a sustainable digital revenue model, espe-

cially for younger audiences. Without a permanent solution, journalism faces a difficult future (Lobigs, 2016; Newman et al., 2022). Decreasing sales in high-quality journalism is a threat to society as a whole since media is understood as the fourth pillar of democracy. Indeed, journalists cover a broad spectrum of important functions. This includes, e.g., providing citizens with the necessary information to participate in the democratic system and make well-informed decisions (Malik et al., 2013), serving as a watchdog to observe and control the governing institutions, or giving socially disadvantaged groups a voice, to name a few (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018).

In addition to the economic insecurities described above, parts of society are deeply and consistently mistrusting traditional media (Jakobs et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2022). Despite the general belief in conspiracy theories being low, those who rely on alternative news sources and disinformation are significantly more susceptible to them (Sengl & Holzer, 2020). Furthermore, low trust in journalism seems to correlate with low media literacy (Ziegele et al., 2018). The latter and its sub-concept journalism literacy (Jaakkola, 2020) offer a promising opportunity for civic resilience (Beiler et al., 2020; Meßmer & Sänglerlaub, 2020).

Despite not reaching all citizens, school offers one of the broadest and most convenient opportunities to spread journalism literacy. Unfortunately, structural deficits regarding organization, personnel, and teaching development have hindered media education in German schools for years. Inadequate and non-functioning (technical) equipment as well as rigid school structures, large classes, full curricula, and a lack of teaching materials are one side of the problem (Durner, 2009; Lilienthal, 2022; Spanhel, 2005). While political goals regarding media literacy are ambitious, media literacy is theoretically part of most school curricula, and researchers have long recommended multi-faceted media literacy education concepts (Tulodziecki, 2010), journalism literacy or journalism as a democratic institution only play a minor role (Hagen et al., 2017a), even in countries like Australia that embrace media literacy education in their school system (Notley & Dezuanni, 2019). Media production projects mostly take place in out-of-school settings and are often only offered for a small number of students in teachers' free time (e.g., video club, student newspaper). The other side of the problem is that teachers often lack the necessary skills and knowledge (Durner, 2009; Spanhel, 2005). In university curricula for future teachers, journalism literacy takes a minor spot, with university students striving to become teachers showing low levels of journalism literacy despite them regarding the subject as very important (Hagen et al., 2017a). These results support findings of a representative survey of German teachers supposed to teach journalism literacy. Despite their responsibility, misunderstandings about media's tasks and misconceptions about rules applying to journalists and reporting are evident among them (Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, 2020). This skill gap among teachers has led to journalists and media companies filling in the role of journalism literacy educators (Beiler et al., 2020; Lilienthal, 2022). The following study provides an initial insight into what media companies in Germany contribute to teaching journalism literacy and why they do so.

2. From Media Literacy to Journalism Literacy

Media literacy is a central concept in media education. With the growing importance of the internet and multimedia, the term has been increasingly discussed since

the beginning of the 1990s (Koltay, 2011). In Germany, Dieter Baacke is considered a pioneer of media literacy research. Like other studies in the field (e.g., Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993; Livingstone, 2004; Potter, 2013) he differentiates the four sub-areas media criticism, media knowledge, media use, and media design in his definition of media literacy. Media criticism refers to the ability to analyze social changes triggered by media change and to reflect on them in terms of oneself and one's social responsibility. Media knowledge refers to knowledge of one's own media system as well as the ability to use new devices. Media use encompasses both passive and active use of media while media design describes the competence to produce innovative and aesthetically creative content (Baacke, 1996). For the school context, Tulodziecki (2010) specifies five central aspects: (a) selection and use of media content, (b) creation and distribution of one's own content, (c) comprehension and evaluation of media content, (d) recognition and processing of media influences, and (e) understanding and evaluation of the conditions of media production and distribution. These definitions are still reflected in the current competency framework of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs in Germany (Kultusministerkonferenz). This framework comprises six areas of competence: "searching, processing, and storing," "communicating and cooperating," "producing and presenting," "protecting and acting safely," "problem solving and acting," and "analyzing and reflecting" (Kultusministerkonferenz, 2016, p. 16–19). While this is meant to be reflected in media literacy in teachers' education, teaching plans for schools, technical equipment in schools, cooperation programs, regular evaluations, etc. (Kultusministerkonferenz, 2016), these goals have very little impact on schools in practice. Most teacher-led projects targeting media literacy focus on how to use the internet or social media while neglecting essential dimensions of media literacy such as media knowledge or media criticism (Beiler et al., 2020; Knaus, 2016; Notley & Dezuanni, 2019).

Recently, the term "media literacy" has been criticized for lacking specificity (Beiler et al., 2020) as it allows for a very broad debate and includes aspects like the ability to read and write that are not at the core of the challenges of journalism and society. Therefore, several scholars have been referring to more specific concepts like digital news and information literacy, news media literacy, or journalism literacy. These various definitions are often based on broader concepts of media literacy like Baacke's (1996). Some approaches like the concept of news literacy by Hagen et al. (2017b) build on Baacke's (1996) basic structure, further differentiating the dimension of media use. These authors understand news media literacy as the ability to use, understand and critically evaluate news media and journalistic content purposefully, as well as to participate in news production, breaking down Baacke's (1996) approach to media literacy on news media. Others like Meßmer and

Sängerlaub (2020) approach digital news and information literacy by including all types of information, regardless of them being from a journalistic institution or not if they address politically or societally relevant content.

Malik et al. (2013) also derive their concept of news literacy from information literacy and media literacy, categorizing news as a type of information delivered through the media. The difference from other information or media is derived from the civic engagement aspect and the formal aspect of news as a journalistic product. While the authors do not strive to define news literacy, they identify five dimensions that should be included in the concept: First, news-literate citizens should understand the role of news in society. Second, they should be intrinsically motivated to actively seek out news. Third, they need to be able to find and recognize news as such by, fourth, being able to critically evaluate them. Fifth, the ability to create news as the best way to understand them is included in the concept. In summary, the authors define news literate recipients as “empowered citizens” (Malik et al., 2013, p. 8) who can participate in democratic processes.

Beiler et al. (2020) as well as Jaakkola (2020) argue that while many of these conceptualizations do aim at journalism, its special role in democratic societies, and recipients’ critical, civic, and democratic skills, their naming and focus lack a clear reference to journalism, which can lead to a blurring with other sub-forms of media literacy, e.g., by policymakers. Therefore, Beiler et al. (2020) and Jaakkola (2020) recommend using the term journalism literacy.

The distinction between other types of literacy, especially media literacy, and journalism literacy often comes down to civic engagement. While media literacy as a register of skills for using mass media content is a very broad concept, journalism literacy as a specific subset refers to the ability to use journalistic content critically and reflectively, and thus to participate in democratic processes (Ashley et al., 2013; Maksl et al., 2015; Meßmer & Sängerlaub, 2020; Tully & Vraga, 2018). Therefore, while journalism literacy is often named as a central approach for combatting disinformation, studies show that it can also impact other factors. According to Craft et al. (2017), there is a connection between news media literacy and skepticism in media use (Maksl et al., 2015), trust in the media (Ashley et al., 2010), and judgments of credibility (Carr et al., 2014). In addition, higher levels of news media literacy positively affect the motivation to consume high-quality news (Maksl et al., 2015, 2017). Moreover, media literacy positively affects the willingness to pay for journalistic content (Wellbrock & Buschow, 2020), addressing journalism’s economic troubles and in turn helping secure its services for democracy in the long term. These findings suggest a high relevance of journalism literacy for the industry, which currently faces several challenges at once. In this tense situation, a look at media companies’ initiatives to teach journalism literacy seems promising.

In this study, we build upon the criteria of news literacy by Malik et al. (2013) but follow Jaakkola (2020) in her terminology of journalism literacy and journalistic media education.

3. Journalism Literacy Education by Media Companies

Based on these theoretical concepts, there are many practical approaches to teaching journalism literacy at school. Jaakkola (2020) identifies three types of journalistic media education: *on*, *in*, and *via* journalism. Media education *on* journalism refers to journalists acting as mediators that convey knowledge about journalism to their audience. This typically means media companies producing educational material for schools or encountering audiences in live events, e.g., by journalists visiting schools, talking about general topics like journalistic genres or journalism ethics. Media education *in* journalism integrates information on journalistic work within journalistic content in a didactically appropriate way, making media education part of the day-to-day work of journalists. By explaining the backgrounds of journalistic stories, publishing media criticism, or in-house fact-checking, audiences can learn about journalistic values and production processes. Media education *via* journalism refers to audience engagement, integrating them into journalistic processes as (co-)producers. This is typically achieved either by supporting newsroom simulations in schools or publishing content produced by students. Jaakkola (2020) concludes that, while being time- and resource-intensive, a combination of different approaches—introducing students to journalistic practices, offering them insight into an authentic journalistic environment, and then supporting the setup of a training newsroom—promises the most didactic value. She identifies three different goals of media companies: promoting journalism literacy to restore the legitimacy and credibility of journalism, as a way of self-promotion to attract new audiences, and finally as an altruistic promotion of civic skills for citizens in a democracy.

The state of research on the teaching of journalism literacy by media companies is scarce, both internationally (Notley & Dezuanni, 2019) and in Germany: When conducting the study, we could not find any study addressing this topic for the German-speaking region. Meanwhile, this has changed with Lilienthal (2022) investigating journalistic school visits in Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein. An online survey among journalists, students, and teachers, supplementary qualitative in-depth interviews with selected journalists as well as a content analysis of documented school visits concluded, among other things, that most students assess their knowledge of media and journalism as expanded, whereas only just under half of the journalists agreed. However, more than two-thirds of the teachers felt that the visit’s goal had been achieved despite the limited time of 90 minutes being criticized by students and journalists alike. The author criticizes a discrepancy between students’ interests (e.g., social media)

and journalists' input (e.g., journalistic practices, disinformation). Lilienthal (2022) sees school visits as one enriching component of media literacy education among others as journalists could not fulfill the educational goal of media literacy on their own due to irregular visits and lacking pedagogical skills.

In her 2009 dissertation, Alexandra Durner also addressed journalistic media education in her conceptualization of a project for political media education in which she defines the basics of journalistic work as basic competencies to be taught in school. Thereby she extends beyond journalism as a didactic media tool and considers the critical and analytical examination of journalistic material as central to political education (Durner, 2009).

Two further studies, albeit master's and bachelor's theses, explore journalistic media education. Kakkola (2009) investigated the relation between media education and the professional identity of journalists in a qualitative survey of nine Finnish newspaper journalists who had participated in media education projects. Despite it being part of their work, the interviewees did not identify as educators, but as journalists supplying media education in addition to their actual work. While intrinsically motivated to promote journalism literacy, they did not want to be responsible for teaching students but rather support actual teachers in doing so. Interviewing four Finnish journalists, Huovinen (2019) found similar results: While journalists' feelings towards pedagogical aspects of journalistic media education were more positive than in Kakkola's (2009) study and they stressed its importance, they still regarded it as an addition rather than an integral part of their job. Apart from this work, journalistic media education projects are hardly mentioned in academic work (Lilienthal, 2022), making it even more important to provide an initial overview of such projects in Germany and thus lay the foundation for further research.

4. Research Questions and Methodology

The scarce state of empirical research did not allow for a quantitative, hypothesis-testing approach at the time, as a scientific basis for hypotheses had to be established first (Mayring, 2014). Based on our preliminary theoretical considerations, we formulated qualitative research questions to gain a first overview of journalism literacy projects by German news media companies:

RQ1: How are journalism literacy projects by German media companies designed?

RQ2: To what extent do German media companies feel responsible for promoting journalism literacy?

RQ3: What is the motivation behind journalism literacy projects?

Guideline-based expert interviews promised the greatest success in finding detailed and in-depth answers (as seen in Huovinen, 2019; Kakkola, 2009; or Lilienthal, 2022). We structured them in three parts: (a) the respective interviewees' literacy definition (e.g., journalism/media/news literacy), (b) their sense of responsibility regarding journalistic media education (including, e.g., opportunities and limitations, motivation, potential, and importance of the projects), and (c) the structure of the specific projects (including, e.g., target groups, goals, development, successes and failures, and competitors). We asked mainly open-ended questions with more specific follow-ups as needed. This basic guide was tailored to the respective interviewees to confirm information about the project found online or complete aspects still missing. The three-part structure was always retained.

To explain the selection of interviewees, we first summarize Germany's media system very briefly: The German media market consists of private media companies and public-service broadcasters with the latter only providing radio, television, and limited online content. The biggest and most impactful sector of private media is newspapers and their digital platforms (Beck, 2018). Traditionally, the private newspaper sector has been very diverse, regional, and consisted of plenty of small newspapers. While nowadays this diversity is shrinking due to economic pressure and the following consolidation processes, regional newspapers still play an important role in Germany's media system. In addition to the regional press, national newspapers are the second large block of the daily newspaper market (Beck, 2018). To cover as much of the German media market as possible, the selection of interviewees was based on two criteria. First, although the small, qualitative sample of seven projects cannot provide a representative overview of Germany's media landscape, we paid attention to integrate public service broadcasters, local daily newspapers, and national daily newspapers (NDNs) that offer journalism literacy projects. Second, our interviewees had to be part of the journalism literacy project team, which did not necessarily consist only of journalists.

Seven projects were selected based on online research in combination with recommendations of particularly committed projects by Thorsten Merkle, managing director of the Young Readers Initiative, a network and knowledge database on children's and youth engagement in newspapers. The sample ultimately consisted of two public service broadcasters, two national newspapers, and three regional newspapers (see Table 1). All interviews were conducted by telephone between October 2019 and January 2020 and lasted some 35 minutes on average. The interviews were transcribed into standard German and sentence structure and grammatical errors were corrected. As the content was central to the analysis, dialectal colorations or para-linguistic expressions were irrelevant. Before the content-structuring qualitative content

Table 1. Overview of the sample.

Type of medium	Medium	Project	Target group	Interview partners
National Daily Newspaper (NDN)	<i>Süddeutsche Zeitung</i> (SZ) alias NDN 1	Schule & Zeitung, SZ-Werkstattgespräche (School & Newspaper, SZ Workshop Talks)	Middle and high school students	Mario Lauer, head of marketing at SZ: interviewee (IV) 1.1 Wilhelm Maassen, CEO of the media education institute Promedia Maassen: IV 1.2 Klaus Ott, journalist at SZ and co-organizer of the workshop talks: IV 1.3
	<i>Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung</i> (FAZ) alias NDN 2	Meine Zeitung (My Newspaper)	Students in grades 6 to 10	Werner D'Inka, co-publisher and project co-organizer at FAZ: IV 2.1 Oliver Beddies, head of education at the Stiftung Polytechnische Gesellschaft Frankfurt am Main (project co-organizer): IV 2.2
Public Service Broadcaster (PSB)	<i>Bayerischer Rundfunk</i> (BR) alias PSB 1	Multiple offers for students, teachers	All school types and age groups	Isabella Schmid, head of the media literacy department at BR: IV 3
	<i>Südwestrundfunk</i> (SWR) alias PSB 2		All school types and age groups	Christine Poulet, media literacy officer at SWR: IV 4
Local Daily Newspaper (LDN)	<i>Mindener Tageblatt</i> (MT) alias LDN 1	MT clever	Children in kindergarten and elementary schools	Nicola Waltemathe, project lead MT clever and deputy head of marketing at MT: IV 5.1 Lisa Meier, project team MT clever: IV 5.2 Frank Sommer, head of marketing at MT: IV 5.3
	<i>Mittelbayerische Zeitung</i> (MZ) alias LDN 2	Klasse informiert (Informed Class)	All school types and age groups	Dagmar Unrecht, journalist responsible for the project in Ratisbon at MZ: IV 6
	<i>Main-Post</i> (MP) alias LDN 3	KLASSE! (CLASS!)	All school types and age groups	Peter Krones, project lead at MP: IV 7.1 Anke Faust, journalist working on the project at MP: IV 7.2

analysis (Kuckartz, 2018; Mayring, 2014), the transcripts were authorized by the interviewees. We then processed the transcripts initiatively, marked important passages, and wrote initial summaries. Based on main categories deduced from the interview guide (e.g., definition, motivation, target groups, goals, etc.) the material was first coded. From the resulting structuring categories, subcategories (e.g., intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, or students/teachers/seniors as target groups) were inductively formed, acting as a template for the second coding process, also selecting prototypical quotes which were translated into English for this article. Thus, a case overview in an Excel spreadsheet was created for each

interview, and for each topic a matrix was used as a template for comparing the individual cases for evaluation. Due to the strong orientation towards the structure of the guide in the coding process, there was little susceptibility to different category systems and coding by different researchers. Nevertheless, we checked this by using consensual coding (Hopf & Schmidt, 1993; see also inter-coder agreement following Mayring, 2014). Since the discrepancy between the two codings was very small, the procedure was continued with a consensual category system by a single person. In summary, our study meets the quality criteria according to Mayring (2016) up to the point of triangulation.

5. Definition of Media and Journalism Literacy

In contrast to the very similar target groups of the different projects summarized in Table 1, the various understandings of media literacy differ more widely from one another. Here, media literacy is the correct term as definitions cover a broad spectrum from relatively loose to explicitly mentioning Baacke (1996). National Daily Newspaper (NDN) 1 and Public Service Broadcaster (PSB) 2 referred to the latter, each emphasizing one skill in particular: “Developing one’s own writing talent” (interviewee [IV] 1.1, NDN 1) as an aspect of media creation and ethical competence, which IV 4 (PSB 2) considers “not sufficiently represented in [Baacke’s] model.” Along with IV 3 (PSB 1), she is the only one who, in addition to media literacy, also specifically talks about news media literacy, which “is becoming more and more central.” Definitions of media literacy by PSB 1, NDN 2, and Local Daily Newspaper (LDN) 2 also closely resemble Baacke’s (1996) model. However, the experts from these media organizations mainly mention the skills of media criticism, media knowledge, and media use in their definitions. But despite not being explicitly mentioned in the interviews, media creation plays an important role in their projects. Nevertheless, IV 3 (PSB 1) emphasizes that “the focus is on content, not technology.” IV 6 (LDN 2) further stresses: “Students should develop a feeling for sources and learn to distinguish serious, independent information from subjective assessments.” How to evaluate information and sources is also very important to LDN 1. Thus, they focus primarily on media criticism, media knowledge, and media use. Media design plays a subordinate role, which is related to the project’s target group of children in kindergarten and elementary school. In LDN 3’s definition of media competence as well as in their project, the ability to design media does not play a key role either.

6. Project Implementation

The journalism literacy projects can be analyzed on a conceptual and a content level. Conceptually, most of the projects’ modules can be attributed to journalistic media education on journalism. All media companies offer teaching material as well as free access to their news content. Typically, editors visit schools as part of the projects. At LDN 2, the PSBs, and NDN 2, classes can also visit editorial offices. The NDNs as well as LDN 3 offer advanced training options for teachers. PSB 1, in addition to frequent teacher trainings, offers a special two-year training to become a media expert that is recognized by the Ministry of Education. These “teach the teacher” modules can also be categorized as journalistic media education on journalism.

Regarding education via journalism, producing one’s own content is also an integral part of the projects by both NDNs, both PSBs, and LDN 2, where students can create Instagram stories with a social media expert dur-

ing newsroom visits. While NDN 2 and LDN 2 are particularly positive about students producing their own content, IV 7.1 (LDN 3) criticizes that writing one’s own article is not necessary to properly understand how to use media. In his opinion, “the obligation to write articles does not lead to good content, but rather stresses teachers and editors.”

While at NDN 1, the newspaper serves “as a day-to-day textbook” (IV 1.2), “which is supporting the formation of opinions and interest in democracy, society, and politics” (IV 1.1), there is no special pedagogical content. No expert mentions fact checks in newspapers or media journalism as didactical elements of the literacy projects.

In summary, the project approaches can therefore be assigned to journalistic media education on and via, but not in journalism according to the model by Jaakkola (2020).

In terms of content, the projects are very similar, showing a clear canon of what media companies want to convey to students and teachers. Here, five topics stand out. First, all media companies try to explain the role and structure of their own medium. Second, all projects focus on journalistic genres. According to IV 6 (LDN 2), “it is nowadays very important for children and adolescents to learn to distinguish informative and commentary formats.” In the project *Schule & Zeitung* (School & Newspaper, NDN 1), students also deal with the formation and shaping of opinions. In terms of content, except for LDN 1, experts of all other projects talk about journalists’ work and strive to make it more comprehensible. For IV 2 (NDN 2), “more knowledge about the journalistic profession is needed for a realistic assessment of what journalism can achieve in society and where its limits might be.” IV 1.3 (NDN 1) stresses that journalists “need to build trust by explaining how they work, how they research and edit, how they check facts and how they decide what to publish and how.” According to IV 3 (PSB 1), this often leads to an “aha-moment,” both for students and teachers, which illustrates the need for such projects and confirms the results of the study on German teachers’ journalism literacy (Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, 2020). The fifth central topic is the question of what so-called fake news is and how it can be recognized or prevented. Except LDN 1, whose project is aimed at kindergarten and elementary school children, each of the six media companies addresses this topic. LDN 2, for example, teaches what reputable and independent sources are. NDN 2 and LDN 3 want to instill a healthy skepticism in the students’ minds towards dubious sources, as IV 2.1 says: “Use your own head, don’t believe everything. Nevertheless, try to use sources that have proven to be trustworthy over a longer period and trust them more than others.” To be able to distinguish reputable and untrustworthy ones, practical exercises are part of the teaching material of LDN 3.

In addition to these main topics, projects are also devoted to other current issues. PSB 1 and NDN 1 offer information on extremism and hate speech, while

all three LDNs compare different media with each other. These topics, however, are overall rather marginal. Nevertheless, IV 5.3 (LDN 1) emphasizes that “it is important to keep the projects up-to-date and to develop them further to remain in the target group’s focus” and thus guarantee a high level of participation.

While our study as well as media companies’ offers clearly focus on school projects, both PSBs, NDN 1, LDN 2, and 3 also offer limited modules for other target groups like seniors, e.g., in cooperation with adult education centers.

7. Sense of Responsibility

Two types of feeling responsible can be identified: role responsibility as a journalistic entity, and task responsibility of media as the fourth power in a democracy. The latter is especially important for both PSBs, as they feel obliged by law to fulfill the educational mandate laid down in the Interstate Broadcasting Treaty (Rundfunkstaatsvertrag). PSB 1 adds that this is also demanded by the audience, citing the ARD acceptance study from 2018 which found that it is important for around three-quarters of Germany’s population that ARD teaches media literacy (ARD, 2019).

PSB 1 and NDN 1 also address the sense of responsibility arising from the media’s social task of promoting participation in political discourse. The latter (IV 1.2) stresses its responsibility “in times of influencers, disinformation, and conspiracy theorists to help set the course for the future of democracy as only those who know how and where to obtain serious and well-founded information can have their say.”

However, for the NDNs three areas of responsibility emerge that apply primarily to private-sector media companies not bound by the Interstate Broadcasting Treaty. First, the responsibility of individual journalists as experts in their field is to inform, explain, and pass on their knowledge. Second, media companies “should create transparency about their work and thus promote media literacy much more than ever before,” as IV 2.1 (NDN 2) notes. Third, responsibility arises from the self-perception of the respective media companies. Thus, LDN 1 and 2 refer to their role as a trustworthy medium that must contribute to journalism literacy, NDN 1 from its role as a leading and high-quality medium, and LDN 3 and 1 from their role as regional daily newspapers. The latter explains this primarily with the high reach in their respective regions as well as the proximity to their users.

8. Motivation for the Projects

According to IV 5.2 (LDN 1), “the project serves an educational purpose first and foremost, not only a promotional one.” IV 6 (LDN 2) admits, however, “We are a commercial enterprise. Of course, we hope that this project will introduce young people to our range of products

and services.” These two statements show that journalistic media education projects are neither solely motivated extrinsically nor intrinsically. Both NDNs, LDN 2, and both PSBs teach media literacy because they want to explain quality journalism and thus also create transparency. Except for PSB 2, the interviewees also specifically talk about enabling citizens to participate in political and social discourse. A third intrinsic motive is mentioned by NDN 1 and LDN 3 wanting to train teachers as mediators of knowledge in the field of media literacy to reach many and not just a few classes.

However, these intrinsic motives are often linked to extrinsic ones. This means attracting new readers, which all three LDNs cite as a motive. While IV 6 (LDN 2) is optimistic, even though not every student would become a future subscriber, IV 2.1 (NDN 2) is more pessimistic and therefore speaks of “a more general economic interest in keeping young people aware that newspapers still exist.” Both NDNs and LDN 1 and 2 aim to present and position their brand. Another relevant extrinsic motive is to maintain, establish or regain trust, which was mentioned by PSB 2, NDN 2, and LDN 3. After all, “less trust automatically means fewer readers,” says IV 2.1 (NDN 2). A final extrinsic motive according to both NDNs, and LDN 1 is the promotion of reading skills and pleasure. Of course, one could also argue that this motive is an intrinsic reason for the media companies, just as promoting civic literacy is one. However, reading is obviously a prerequisite for consuming daily newspapers, so there could be several motives at work here. For completeness’ sake, the above-mentioned legally prescribed educational mandate that both PSBs must fulfill is also an extrinsic motivation through negative reinforcement.

Despite the opportunities that arise with the projects they also create various mainly organizational challenges, e.g., time constraints due to the curriculum and sometimes a lack of motivation of the teachers making cooperation difficult (LDN 2). But “teachers are indispensable as mediators,” says IV 7.1 (LDN 3), because “journalists only have limited time for the projects,” as mentioned by IV 3 (PSB 1). IV 2.1 (NDN 2) adds, that “parents sometimes suspect a promotional event behind the projects.”

Nevertheless, media companies are sticking to their projects. Their motivation clearly goes beyond extrinsic motivations. None of the respondents regards journalism literacy projects of their direct and indirect competitors in the media market as competition. They are rather seen as a joint response to challenges for the entire industry: “We are all in the same boat,” emphasized IV 6 (LDN 2). According to PSB 1, there is after all a very high demand for such initiatives. It is therefore also helpful to share ideas with other projects, since “everyone can learn something from another” (IV 5.1, LDN 1) and “we will achieve more together...than if everyone works alone” (IV 1.3, NDN 1). The latter is therefore calling for more cooperation that goes beyond exchange, e.g., collaborations with federal media institutions, public organizations, or tandems with universities

and communication scientists. The latter could talk about journalism on their own, but also provide scientific background and evaluate and possibly improve journalism literacy projects. This is a clear appeal to researchers in Germany to participate in such projects and to become active in journalism literacy education not only in academic contexts, as Morris and Yeoman (2021) have already called for in the UK. Or as IV 2.1 (NDN 2) says: “The more participate, the better.”

9. Conclusions

In summary, the research questions can be answered as follows: Journalism literacy projects in Germany are primarily aimed at students and their teachers. The services offered mostly focus on journalistic media education on journalism, ranging from educational resources, free news content, and visits by editors to further training for teachers and visits to editorial departments. Some of the media companies further use education via journalism by students producing their own content while others explicitly oppose this approach. Journalistic media education in journalism does not play a role within our sample.

In terms of content, the projects mainly provide information on the respective medium as well as on journalistic work practices, journalistic genres, and disinformation. This finding is in line with Lilienthal’s (2022) research, although he adds that students are more interested in learning about social media, criticizing the lack of focus on how journalism can be an integral part of young people’s lives.

Media companies’ sense of responsibility results primarily from their role in the media industry, a task responsibility as the fourth power in a democracy, or the social task of promoting participation in political discourse. The motives behind the initiatives are neither exclusively extrinsic, e.g., to attract new audiences, nor solely intrinsic, as in teaching civic skills. Rather, there is an interplay between the two motives. These findings support Jaakkola’s (2020) assumption that journalistic actors have three goals: promoting the legitimacy and authority of journalism, attracting new audiences, and enabling democratic participation.

The projects’ organizational implementation is sometimes difficult, mainly due to insufficient resources and teachers’ lack of motivation to register their classes for such projects, showing that some problems described in the mid to late 2000s (Durner, 2009; Spanhel, 2005) are still existing today. Among the teachers that did register their classes for cooperation with media companies, Lilienthal (2022) found them and their students to be pleased with the projects and overall feeling that their knowledge had increased while journalists were more skeptical regarding the projects’ success. In contrast, our interviewees praised the opportunities of journalistic media education in our study: Gaining trust and countering disinformation are just two examples. Finally,

the fact that none of the experts sees the other projects as competition but rather as enriching for students and society shows the projects’ perceived importance and suggests that industry-led journalism literacy education seems to be boundary work in journalism. In encouraging and agreeing with each other, media companies redefine what journalism is, including supporting educators in promoting journalism literacy.

This refers to the metajournalistic discourse on what journalism is and what it is not as conceptualized by Carlson (2016). He identifies three types of interpretative processes, including a shared language of definitions for different actors, practices, or products, boundaries that come into play when actors debate appropriate and inappropriate journalistic topics, actors, practices, norms, etc., and lastly journalistic legitimacy, discussing why news deserves attention and therefore concerning the authoritative base of journalism. Journalistic media education concerns two of these areas. First, Jaakkola (2020) argues that it is a type of inclusive boundary work, lifting barriers between what journalism is and what it is not by providing non-journalists (in this case students) access to journalistic resources, including, e.g., journalists’ time, knowledge, experience and more. Second, stressing the boundaries between (one’s own) high-quality journalism and low-quality- or non-journalism is an important distinction for media companies regarding debates about their authority and legitimacy in times of disinformation and so-called alternative news sources (Carlson & Lewis, 2019; Nygaard, 2020).

Nevertheless, in line with Lilienthal (2022), Jaakkola (2020), and Kakkola (2009), this study shows that media companies cannot and do not want to be the only ones responsible for teaching journalism literacy due to the various challenges mentioned above, including a misfit with journalists’ professional identity, the irregular nature of the visits, and the lack of journalists’ pedagogic expertise. To date, “teach the teacher” programs are the most popular approach for media companies supporting, but not becoming educators. As our experts did not necessarily have to be journalists but rather experts for the projects, we could not assess journalists’ role identity regarding the role of educators.

While media companies already offer a broad spectrum of education on journalism and some also educate via journalism, journalistic media education in journalism still seems to play a minor role. Pedagogically valuable journalistic content like background explanations of journalistic stories, media criticism, or in-house fact-checking offers the potential to broaden journalism literacy education, especially as this approach reaches audiences beyond students.

Our goal in this study was to analyze journalism literacy projects by news media companies. Nonetheless, most of the experts referred to their projects as focusing on media literacy. While both public service broadcasters explicitly referred to Baacke’s (1996) definition of media literacy, they were also the only ones differentiating

news media literacy from media literacy. The other interviewees used the general term media literacy despite their projects clearly targeting journalism literacy. This discrepancy in terminology further underlines Jaakkola's (2020) point of consistently referring to journalism literacy when talking about the subdimension of media literacy focusing on news content.

Although these results offer an exciting insight into an under-researched topic (Lilienthal, 2022), they can only be an initial snapshot. One limitation of the study is its explorative and qualitative character, which does not allow for conclusions to be drawn about all journalism literacy projects conducted by German media companies. In addition, the study's results are based solely on information provided by experts with social desirability effects being possibly present, particularly regarding topics like feelings of responsibility and motivations. Therefore, follow-up studies are strongly recommended. For example, quantitative content analyses of project websites and teaching materials as well as quantitative surveys of those responsible for the projects would be useful to obtain an overview of these kinds of projects throughout Germany. This also includes following up on the discussion on the boundaries of journalism by investigating the relationship between journalists' role conceptions and their educatory tasks. It would also be interesting to learn how media companies fund such projects and, above all, how successful they ultimately are in teaching journalism literacy.

Despite these limitations, the study offers a first interesting glimpse into the German media's commitment to promoting journalism literacy among students in Germany, striving to strengthen resilience against disinformation and enable democratic participation.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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