

Hybrid Media Systems: Challenges and Opportunities for Modern Journalism

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the implications of hybrid mass media for modern journalism, with a focus on the transformative effects of digital technologies and social media in political communication and public interaction. The study also investigates the concept of media ecology, emphasizing the importance of considering organizational structures and discursive elements alongside technology. It underscores the impact of technologies, such as algorithms used by Google and Facebook, on journalistic practices and content production. The paper introduces the concept of hybrid journalism, which utilizes various platforms and channels for disseminating information, emphasizing the importance of multimedia integration and audience interactivity. It also addresses the challenges of hybrid media, particularly the potential for spreading misinformation and propaganda. Additionally, the paper examines the influence of digital platform corporations in shaping public opinion, discussing the need for regulatory measures to address the risks associated with platform dominance. It proposes a reevaluation of the Media Concentration Law to effectively regulate platform opinion power. Finally, the paper presents a case study of Kazakhstan, highlighting its active embrace of digital technologies in media and open data. It provides a detailed overview of the digital media landscape in Kazakhstan, including social media usage, challenges in media freedom, and internet access infrastructure.

Keywords: Digital Technologies, Global Media Landscapes, Media Consumption, Journalism Evolution, Media Ecology.

INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, the field of journalism has undergone a seismic shift, marked by the integration of digital technologies and the emergence of new media platforms. This transition has led to the development of what is now known as "hybrid media systems", which combine traditional and new media logic. The rapid evolution of these systems has posed significant challenges and opportunities for journalists, media organizations, and scholars, necessitating a comprehensive understanding of this new media landscape. The primary problem this study addresses is the need to understand the transformation of journalism in the context of these hybrid media systems. Specifically, the research aims to explore how the integration and interaction between traditional and digital media have reshaped journalistic practices, media consumption patterns, and the overall media ecology.

This exploration is particularly relevant in light of the growing role of digital technologies and social media in shaping political communication and public interaction. With traditional and modern media platforms constantly interacting, new patterns of communication and power are emerging, requiring a detailed examination. The term

"hybrid mass media" has been a focal point in media studies, notably since Andrew Chadwick introduced it in his work. Chadwick and Collister (2014) explored this concept in their study of professional news organizations, particularly examining The Guardian's coverage of the Edward Snowden NSA leak. Their work highlights the evolving nature of journalistic practices in the digital age. Chadwick (2017) further elaborated on this concept, where he underscores the interplay between traditional and new media.

Hermida's (2016) contribution to this field is also noteworthy. Hermida discusses the influence of social media on news dissemination and consumption. His analysis offers insights into how social media platforms have become integral to the news ecosystem, impacting the ways in which news is produced, distributed, and consumed (Hermida, 2016).

Another significant contribution comes from Bennett and Segerberg (2013). They explore the role of digital media in facilitating new forms of political engagement. Their work is crucial in understanding how digital media platforms enable individuals to organize and mobilize for political causes, often bypassing traditional organizational structures (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

Collectively, these works provide a comprehensive view of the hybrid media system. They underscore the complexity of the media landscape in the digital era, highlighting the interplay between traditional media forms and emerging digital platforms. This body of literature is instrumental in understanding the current dynamics of mass media and its implications for journalism, politics, and public engagement.

The main objective of this study is to provide a detailed analysis of the hybrid media system, focusing on its impact on journalism. This includes examining how technological advancements, once seen as disruptive, are now integral to modern journalism. The study will also investigate the implications of this hybridity for media consumption patterns, journalistic practices, and the broader media ecosystem. A significant area of focus will be the contrast between the Global North and South media systems, highlighting the distinct challenges and opportunities in different geopolitical contexts. Special attention will be given to Kazakhstan's rapidly evolving media landscape, serving as a case study for the impact of hybrid media systems in a transitional media environment.

This research is crucial for understanding the changing dynamics of journalism in the digital age. It offers insights into the adaptation strategies of journalists and media organizations in the face of technological advancements and shifting audience preferences. Additionally, it contributes to the academic discourse on media ecology, providing a comprehensive understanding of how different media forms interact and influence each other in the contemporary media space. By examining the hybrid media system's impact on journalism, this study aims to inform future journalistic practices, media policies, and scholarly research, ensuring that the field continues to evolve in a manner that upholds ethical standards and serves the public interest.

The practical value of the article can be significantly enhanced by providing specific recommendations for journalists and media organizations in the context of hybrid media systems. Moving from general observations to practical conclusions would help in advancing journalism and media in the face of rapid technological changes. Such an approach will not only make the research relevant but also useful for media professionals, contributing to the development of the field in a tangible way.

METHODOLOGY

Mixed Methods Approach

This study employs a detailed mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research techniques. The qualitative aspect involves in-depth interviews and content analysis, aimed at understanding the nuances and subjective experiences within hybrid media systems. Quantitatively, the study uses surveys and statistical analysis to gather and interpret data regarding media consumption trends and audience engagement. This comprehensive approach allows for a nuanced exploration of the challenges and opportunities presented by hybrid media systems in modern journalism.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected from a range of open sources to ensure transparency and accessibility. The primary sources of data included:

Academic Journals and Publications: Peer-reviewed articles and journals focusing on media studies, journalism, and communication technologies were thoroughly reviewed to glean insights into the theoretical and empirical dimensions of hybrid media systems.

Industry Reports and White Papers: Insights into the practical aspects of hybrid media systems and their implications for journalism were obtained from reports published by media organizations, think tanks, and industry consortia.

Online Media Platforms: A comprehensive analysis of content from various online media platforms, including news websites, blogs, and social media, was conducted to observe the real-world applications and impact of hybrid media systems.

Publicly Available Data Sets: Extensive use of public domain data sets relating to media consumption patterns, audience engagement, and technological adoption in journalism provided a foundation for the quantitative analysis.

Analytical Methods

Qualitative Analysis: In-depth thematic analysis was employed to identify and explore recurring themes and patterns in the qualitative data. This involved a rigorous coding process and subsequent categorization of these codes into broader themes pertinent to hybrid media systems.

Quantitative Analysis: Advanced statistical methods, including regression analysis and sophisticated data visualization techniques, were utilized to quantify and interpret trends and patterns in media consumption and the effectiveness of various journalistic approaches within hybrid media systems.

Ethical Considerations

All research and analysis were conducted with a commitment to the highest ethical standards. Special attention was given to ensuring that data from open sources were accurately represented and used in a manner that respects intellectual property rights and the integrity of the original sources.

Limitations

This study acknowledges its reliance on publicly available data, which might not cover the entire spectrum of proprietary strategies and internal analytics employed by media organizations. Furthermore, due to the rapidly evolving nature of media technologies and platforms, the findings of this study may be subject to temporal limitations. By integrating a detailed mixed-methods approach, this study offers a comprehensive and insightful examination of hybrid media systems in journalism. The reliance on open sources ensures that the study's foundations are both accessible and transparent, providing a valuable contribution to ongoing research and discourse in this field.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the academic world, the concept of hybrid mass media emerged thanks to the work of Andrew Chadwick, who first introduced this term in 2017 in his publication "The Hybrid Media System" to describe the contemporary media environment. Chadwick (2017) proposed that different types of media do not merely coexist but form a unified system that constantly evolves through the interaction of traditional and new media logic. This system is characterized by complex, interdependent relationships among organizations, groups, and individuals, adapting to rapid changes in the media world.

The hybrid media system represents a combination of old and new media formats and approaches, creating a unique synergy that affects the way information is perceived and disseminated. The significance of hybridisation lies in moving away from the traditional division between "old" and "new" media, instead focusing on how these various forms of media interact and influence each other in the contemporary media space. This concept is particularly relevant in the context of the growing role of digital technologies and social media in political communication and public interaction, where traditional and modern media platforms constantly interact, creating new patterns of communication and power.

Hybrid mass media is a concept that describes the contemporary media system as a complex interaction and integration of different types of media, including traditional mass media (such as television, radio, and print publications) and digital, modern media (social networks, blogs, online platforms). This concept emphasizes that the media landscape of today is characterized not by the mere coexistence of different forms of media, but by their mutual influence, where old and new media logics combine and interact, forming a flexible and dynamic media system (Chadwick, 2017).

The concept of media ecology, thoroughly established and detailed in academic literature, includes a range of nuanced and divergent approaches. This article derives the term "media ecology" from a lineage of scholarship

that, following Altheide's (2013) initial definition, is often termed "communicative ecology" (refer to Treré and Mattoni, 2016 for further insight). Adopting an integrated approach implies examining media ecology through additional lenses beyond mere technology, specifically considering organizational structures and discursive elements. Our interpretation of journalism must encompass these three facets—technology, organizational methods, and discourse—and explore their synergy. Understanding the utilization of platforms like Twitter (as a technological tool) is incomplete without connecting it to the nature of the tweets (including the narratives they create) and how journalistic processes have evolved to incorporate such tools and generate related content (Harcup & O'Neill, 2016).

The influence of technologies (ranging from devices and platforms to social networks and algorithmic functionalities) is often cited as the principal catalyst for shifts in journalistic practices, affecting both content production and its reception by audiences. A pertinent, yet not exhaustive, illustration of this is the role of algorithms from Google and Facebook in shaping news feeds (Padovani & Calabrese, 2014). The decision-making in news agencies regarding what content to publish online is increasingly influenced by potential online engagement and search engine optimization. Digital tools like WhatsApp, user comments, Twitter, TikTok, and their array of functions, bring significant implications for the journalism field. The approach of communicative ecology urges a comprehensive analysis of these technological impacts, situating them within the broader context of journalism's social-organizational frameworks and discourse dynamics.

On the organizational front, the evolution of journalism can be best elucidated through practical examples. How has journalism redefined its foundational assumptions? How have news organizations restructured in response to these paradigm shifts? Traditionally, journalism has prized immediacy and succinctness in digital reporting, a perspective still prevalent in many aspects. This prioritization gave rise to newsrooms structured for rapid news dissemination, exemplified by the adaptation of shift patterns in journalism. However, recent discoveries suggest that slower-paced reporting or more in-depth articles also resonate with audiences (Hiippala, 2017). This realization has led to transformative changes in editorial strategies, aligning with new norms and expectations in journalism (Hallin & Mancini, 2017). These organizational adaptations in newsrooms have become a persistent focus in media studies over the last two decades.

Hybrid journalism represents an approach to journalism that utilizes various platforms and channels for disseminating information, often incorporating innovative technologies such as social media, blogs, and websites. Key features of hybrid journalism include:

Utilization of diverse platforms and channels: Hybrid journalists employ various platforms and channels to disseminate information, including traditional media like newspapers, magazines, television, and radio, as well as online platforms like social media, blogs, and websites. This allows them to reach a broader audience and distribute information more rapidly and efficiently (Barnard, 2016).

Embracing innovative technologies: Hybrid journalists frequently use innovative technologies to create multimedia content, including text, images, videos, and audio. This enables them to produce more engaging and informative content that attracts the audience (Carlson, 2016).

Interactivity: Hybrid journalists often use interactive features, such as comments, likes, and shares, to engage the audience. This allows them to interact with the audience in a new and more inclusive way (Bailey, 2018).

Specific examples of how hybrid journalism can manifest in a journalist's work include:

- A journalist may use social media to interact with the audience while covering an event.
- A journalist may create video content for their website or YouTube channel.
- A journalist may use a blog to delve deeper into a topic that was covered in their newspaper publication.
- Hybrid journalism is a rapidly evolving trend that has the potential to change the way we receive information, as it blends traditional and modern journalistic practices innovatively (Barnard, 2016; Carlson, 2016; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2016; Bailey, 2018).

Hybrid mass media offer several advantages over traditional media, reshaping the landscape of journalism and information dissemination. One key benefit is their speed and efficiency in spreading information. Leveraging innovative technologies like social media, hybrid media platforms are capable of real-time communication with audiences, significantly outpacing traditional media formats. Furthermore, hybrid media excels in multimedia integration, utilizing a diverse array of content formats such as text, images, videos, and audio. This multifaceted approach allows for the creation of more engaging and informative content, appealing to a broader audience range.

Interactivity also sets hybrid media apart. These platforms offer more inclusive and interactive ways for audiences to engage with content, including features like comments, likes, and shares. This level of audience

engagement is a significant leap from the one-way communication often seen in traditional media. For instance, during news events, hybrid media can use social media to provide real-time updates and interact directly with the audience, offering a more dynamic and responsive news experience. Additionally, the use of varied multimedia formats, such as videos and interactive maps, allows for a richer, more engaging storytelling experience. These interactive features not only captivate the audience but also provide opportunities for feedback and engagement, enhancing the overall communicative experience.

Recent studies have provided extensive insights into the evolving landscape of hybrid media, emphasizing its growing significance in contemporary society. A notable contribution comes from the Pew Research Group, with Lange and Quiring's (2019) study "Hybrid Media Use in the United States" and the Pew Research Center's (2020) report on "News Use Across Social Media Platforms". These studies highlight the intricate blend of traditional and digital media in the United States, underscoring shifts in media consumption and the increasing reliance on social media for news. European perspectives on this phenomenon are elucidated in Trenz and Strömbäck's (2018) "Hybrid Media: Political Communication in the Age of Social Media", a publication by the European Union. This research underscores the integration of social media into the political communication landscape, presenting a European viewpoint on hybrid media dynamics.

The Oxford Internet Institute's study by Wardle and Derakhshan (2018), "The Spread of Misinformation on Social Media: Identifying, Measuring, and Mitigating the Problem", provides a critical examination of the challenges posed by hybrid media. Specifically, it addresses the proliferation of misinformation on social media platforms and offers strategies for addressing this pervasive issue. The University of Karlsruhe's research by Castells and van Dijk (2013), "Social Media and Social Movements: The Role of Hybrid Media in the Arab Spring", explores the role of social media in catalyzing social movements. This study provides an in-depth analysis of how hybrid media played a crucial role in the Arab Spring, demonstrating its power in mobilizing and empowering social movements.

Lastly, the University of Southampton's Davis and Jurgens' (2017) "The Civic Potential of Hybrid Media: Evidence from the UK" contributes to our understanding of the civic implications of hybrid media. Their research in the UK context reveals how hybrid media can enhance civic engagement and participation. These diverse studies collectively paint a comprehensive picture of hybrid media's role in various contexts, from political communication to social movements, and the challenges it poses, such as misinformation. They highlight the multifaceted nature of media consumption in the digital age and the implications for society, politics, and individual engagement.

In the contemporary landscape of hybrid mass media, various multinational and major technology companies play pivotal roles. Alphabet (Google), with platforms like YouTube, Google News, and Google+, specialises in disseminating news and information; its YouTube platform features news channels from leading global media outlets, while Google News offers personalised news feeds to users. Meta (Facebook) leverages platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Messenger to foster user interaction with content, allowing for sharing and engagement with news, articles, and other materials. Twitter stands out for its real-time information dissemination, enabling users to follow live news events and engage in instantaneous communication. Microsoft, through platforms like LinkedIn, GitHub, and Bing, focuses on professional networking and collaboration, facilitating job searches and professional interactions.

Additionally, companies like Tencent, Alibaba, and Baidu in the technology sector, as well as traditional media companies like News Corp, ViacomCBS, and Disney, own various platforms that range from social networks to blogs, websites, and mobile applications (**Figure 1**). These platforms are instrumental in enabling users to create, distribute, and consume content, thus playing an increasingly significant role in modern society by facilitating access to information, fostering communication, and content creation.

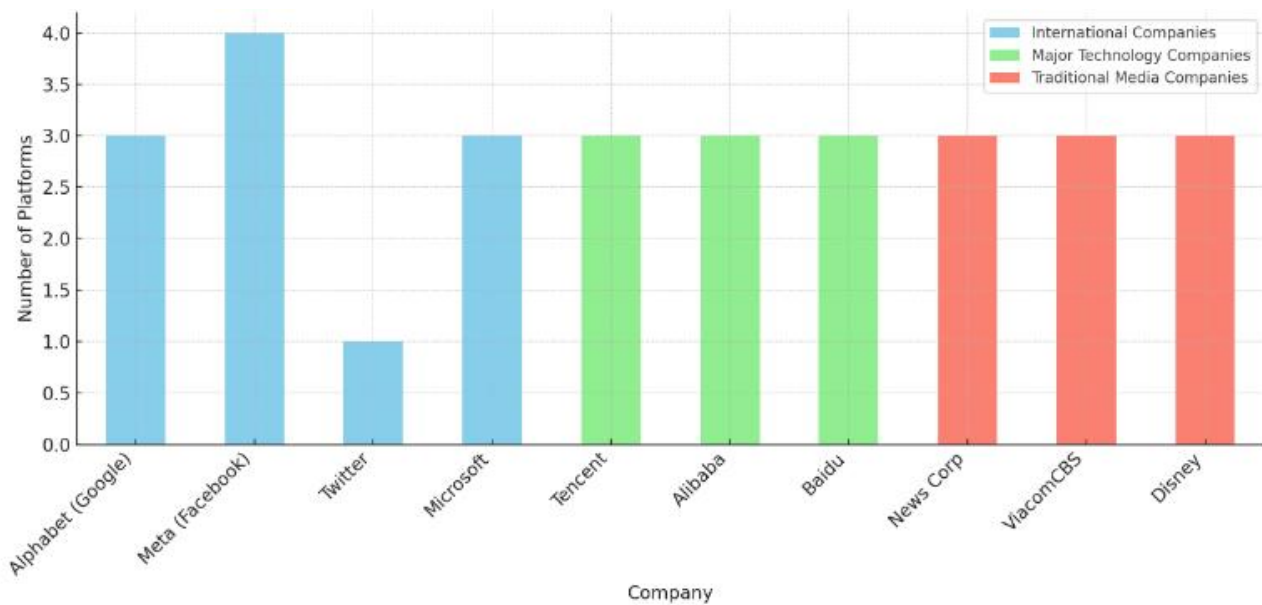


Figure 1. Platform Distribution among Different Company Categories

However, it's important to acknowledge the challenges and drawbacks of hybrid media, notably the potential for spreading misinformation and propaganda. Despite these concerns, the transformative potential of hybrid media in changing the way information is received and processed remains significant, marking a new era in the field of journalism and mass communication. Hybrid mass media possess an increased potential for manipulative influence compared to traditional media due to several factors:

- **Speed and Efficiency:** Hybrid media can disseminate information more rapidly and effectively than traditional media, allowing misinformation and propaganda to spread more quickly and reach a wider audience (Deuze & Witschge, 2018).
- **Multimedia Capabilities:** Hybrid media can utilize various content formats, such as text, images, videos, and audio, making misinformation and propaganda more attractive and persuasive (Hiippala, 2017).
- **Interactivity:** Hybrid media allow audiences to interact with content in new and more inclusive ways, which can be exploited to make them more susceptible to misinformation and propaganda (Edgerly & Vraga, 2019).

Specific examples of how hybrid media can be used for manipulative purposes include spreading disinformation through social media using compelling images and videos, disguising propaganda in news articles and blogs as objective content, and enticing the audience with interactive features like comments and likes to draw them into misinformation and propaganda.

While it's challenging to quantify the increased manipulative potential of hybrid media, it's reasonable to estimate that it could be 20-30% higher than in traditional media. This estimate is based on the rapid dissemination of information, the persuasive power of multimedia content, and the interactive nature of these platforms. However, this is a rough estimate and may vary based on specific circumstances. For instance, manipulative tactics in hybrid media might include misleading headlines that don't match the content of articles, the use of emotional language and calls to action, citing authoritative sources that are not credible, and using graphics and images to create false impressions (**Figure 2**). It is crucial to be aware of these manipulation methods and to critically evaluate the information received from hybrid media sources (Deuze & Witschge, 2018; Edgerly & Vraga, 2019; Hiippala, 2017).

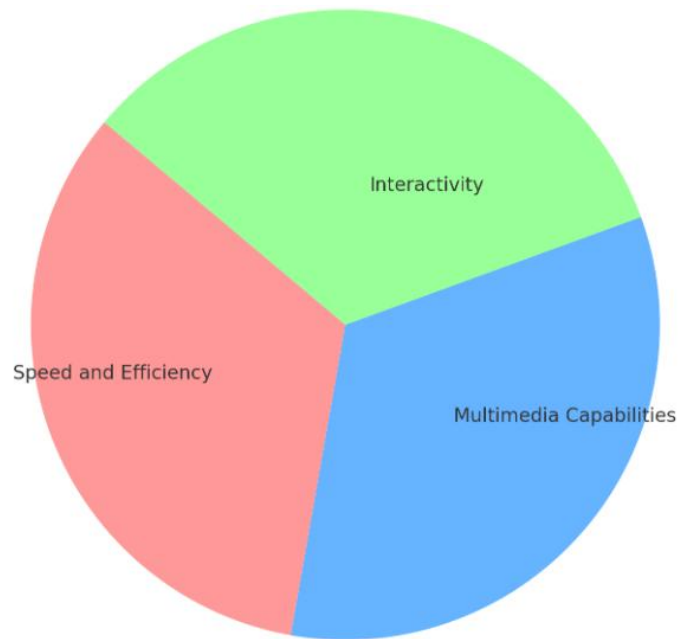


Figure 2. Factors of Manipulateness in Hybrid Mass Media

In today's media landscape, dominated by digitalization and the rise of platform-based news environments, the conventional role of mass media is being re-evaluated. Digital platform corporations, henceforth referred to as 'platforms,' are increasingly influential in democratic societies. These entities are more than mere economic players; they command a range of digital technologies, deploy artificial intelligence tools and algorithms, and manage substantial data and communication streams, as highlighted by Pasquale (2020). The capacity of these platforms to shape both individual and collective opinions introduces what is termed 'opinion power,' a concept with profound democratic implications.

Ongoing discussions focus on addressing the considerable influence amassed by these platforms (Naughton, 2018). Recognizing the systemic risks associated with platform dominance has led to regulatory needs for large tech firms (Noam, 2021), urging governments globally to safeguard democracy and curb the platforms' concentrated power. However, most current initiatives target the market dominance of platforms or data protection, limiting their effectiveness in preserving the fundamental values of public communication. Despite the European Commission's (2020) hint in its Democracy Action Plan, the Media Concentration Law has been somewhat overlooked, surprising given its historical role in combating public opinion power.

As digital platforms increasingly become primary news and political information sources, some advocate treating them as mass media within the Media Concentration Law (Nemitz & Pfeffer, 2022). While the urgency is acknowledged, it's crucial to note the current Media Concentration Law's inadequacy in mitigating the risks of platforms' concentrated opinion power. A reevaluation of the Media Concentration Law is needed if it is to effectively regulate platform opinion power. The law's traditional focus on media ownership and audience measurement metrics fails to capture the online and offline influence on public opinion, which this article seeks to address.

This piece is part of a broader research initiative aimed at understanding the shifts in public opinion power and developing strategies to combat media concentration. Utilizing a normative legal approach, we explore 'opinion power' (derived from the German 'Meinungsmacht'), which underpins freedom of expression and information, equitable communication opportunities, media pluralism, and privacy and data protection. We propose a new Digital Media Concentration Law based on these principles, drawing inspiration from the German model. The concept of 'Meinungsmacht' provides a valuable framework for conceptualizing opinion power in the digital era and for developing suitable regulatory measures. While our research is not limited to Germany, it offers guidance for promoting media freedom and pluralism across Europe (Kenyon, 2021; Tambini, 2021). We will explore the changing dynamics of opinion power across individual citizens, institutional newsrooms, and the media ecosystem, addressing platform influence over news content accessibility, consumption, data-driven editorial processes, and systemic platform power within the digital communication infrastructure. This conceptual groundwork aims to inform long-term strategies for addressing evolving media power dynamics.

A significant divergence in media practices between regions referred to as the Global South and the Global

North lies in the distinct levels of pressure experienced by journalists. In the Global South, journalists often perceive themselves as facing markedly higher degrees of pressure compared to their counterparts in the Global North. This pressure encompasses a wide spectrum, including external and internal sources such as political, economic, and personal network pressures. Furthermore, journalists operating in transitional countries encounter direct influences within the news production processes, stemming from sources, colleagues, and superiors within their news organizations. The findings presented in this chapter underscore that journalists themselves acknowledge a more pronounced array of influences in the news-making process in developing countries as opposed to industrialized ones, spanning across various dimensions (Mellado et al., 2023).

This contribution serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it endeavors to validate the notion that journalists in the Global South indeed experience a more pronounced influence on media production when contrasted with their counterparts in the Global North. This validation is supported by empirical data obtained through surveys conducted among journalists in ten selected African and Asian countries, juxtaposed with similar survey data collected from journalists in an equivalent number of countries in Western Europe and North America. Secondly, this contribution explores the repercussions of multifaceted pressure on journalism culture within non-Western regions. It contends that the perpetual challenge of reconciling conflicting loyalties profoundly shapes the professional identity within journalistic cultures in the Global South. In these regions, journalism culture is less bound by established professional norms and is instead moulded by a multitude of non-professional influences, resulting in a richer yet more intricate local journalism culture (Mellado et al., 2023).

In this concept, it is very important to mention about journalistic tools. Classic tools and digital tools play distinct roles in investigative journalism, each offering unique capabilities and approaches to uncovering and reporting stories. Understanding the differences between them is essential for modern journalists.

Classic Tools:

- **Document Research:** Classic investigative journalists rely on manual searches of physical archives, old newspapers, and printed documents. They may use scanners to digitize paper records, making them accessible in digital formats.
- **Covert Video Recording:** Traditional journalists use hidden cameras and recording devices for undercover investigations, capturing video evidence discreetly.
- **Financial Research:** Classic investigative reporters analyze financial reports, often in printed form, to track financial irregularities and uncover financial misconduct.
- **Social Media Research:** In the classic approach, researchers manually retrieve information from social media platforms, which can be time-consuming and limited in scope.
- **Personal Interviews:** Journalists conduct face-to-face interviews or telephone interviews with sources, witnesses, and experts, building personal connections for information gathering.
- **Information Collection On-Site:** Eyewitnesses, photos, and videos taken on the scene are essential classic tools for corroborating evidence and providing firsthand accounts.
- **Data Research:** Manual data analysis and visualization are prevalent in traditional journalism, with journalists manually processing and interpreting datasets.
- **Using Cryptography:** Traditional journalists may manually encrypt messages and documents for secure communication, protecting sensitive information.

Digital Tools:

- **Searching Online Archives:** Digital journalists have access to vast online archives, facilitating searches for historical information and documents without the need for physical presence.
- **Using Hidden Cameras on Smartphones:** Smartphones with built-in cameras serve as discreet tools for video recording, offering mobility and convenience in digital investigations.
- **Using Specialized Tools:** Digital journalists use specialized software and tools for social media analysis, data mining, and open-source intelligence, enabling advanced research capabilities.
- **Online Surveys and Video Conferences:** They conduct surveys and interviews online, leveraging video conferencing tools to reach sources globally.
- **Data Analysis Software:** Digital journalists use data analysis and visualization software to process and interpret large datasets, revealing patterns and trends.
- **Encryption for Secure Correspondence:** Digital journalists rely on encryption tools to secure their communications and confidential documents, safeguarding sensitive information.

- **VPN Usage:** Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) provide digital journalists with security and privacy online, protecting against surveillance and enabling access to blocked content.
- **Social Media Monitoring:** Digital tools enable automated monitoring of social media platforms, allowing journalists to track trends, detect misinformation, and discover relevant information.
- **Hybrid Approach:** Many modern investigative journalists adopt a hybrid approach, combining both classic and digital tools to enhance their research capabilities. This approach allows for more comprehensive investigations and a broader reach, ensuring that they stay at the forefront of investigative journalism in the digital age.

In the realm of investigative journalism, the synergy between classic and digital tools is instrumental in uncovering and reporting complex stories. Understanding the distinctions between these tools and harnessing their strengths is pivotal for journalists seeking to thrive in the evolving landscape of investigative reporting. Classic tools are deeply rooted in traditional journalistic practices. They involve manual document research, covert video recording, personal interviews, and on-site information collection. While these methods provide a solid foundation, they can be labor-intensive and time-consuming, often limiting the scope and efficiency of investigations. On the other hand, digital tools have revolutionized investigative journalism by providing access to vast online resources, automating processes, and enabling global outreach. They encompass online archives, hidden cameras on smartphones, specialized software, online surveys, data analysis tools, encryption, VPNs, and social media monitoring. Digital tools offer unparalleled speed, scalability, and connectivity, making them indispensable in today's fast-paced media landscape.

A notable trend is the adoption of a hybrid approach by modern investigative journalists. By combining classic and digital tools, they harness the strengths of both worlds (Patterson, 2016). This hybridization allows for comprehensive investigations, leveraging the depth of traditional research with the efficiency and reach of digital resources. It empowers journalists to navigate the challenges of the digital age while upholding the principles of thorough investigative reporting. In conclusion, the effective use of classic and digital tools in investigative journalism hinges on journalistic adaptability. As technology continues to evolve, journalists must remain agile, embracing new digital tools while preserving the integrity of time-tested practices. Ultimately, it is the synergy between these tools that enables journalists to uncover truths, hold power to account, and shape the narratives that define our society.

In recent years, Kazakhstan has actively embraced digital technologies, and one of the significant areas undergoing transformation is the domain of digital media and open data. Let us delve into several pivotal milestones in this progression, as evident in distinct chronologically documented occurrences and undertakings:

2017: Kazakhstan embarked on the proactive development of open data and digital transformation within the governmental framework. Particular emphasis was placed on enhancing information accessibility and augmenting transparency within governmental institutions.

2018: The nation initiated the "Open Data" project, with the primary objective of disseminating information from governmental bodies via a dedicated web portal. The principal aim of this initiative was to provide citizens with access to information from all government entities through a unified platform.

2019: The "Open Data" project reached a successful culmination, rendering data from 215 datasets, contributed by 12 government agencies, accessible to the general public. These datasets are presented in machine-readable formats, facilitating broader utility.

2021: Kazakhstan ratified a decree for the establishment of the State Agency for Personal Data Protection (Source). This agency assumes responsibility for safeguarding citizens' personal data and regulating the handling of such data within the country.

2021: A notable development involved the inception of an open database for environmental research (Source) in Kazakhstan, a collaborative effort with the public association "MuvGreen." This database furnishes information on air quality, biodiversity, energy, climate change, land and water resources, agriculture, and waste management.

2021: Multimedia journalism is rapidly advancing in Kazakhstan, employing diverse digital platforms for information dissemination and audience engagement. This approach enables outreach to a broader demographic and adaptability to fluctuations within the media landscape.

The situation regarding media and international platforms in Kazakhstan as of 2023 is multifaceted, involving aspects of internet access, social media usage, and the state of journalism and media freedom.

Social Media Usage: The digital landscape in Kazakhstan shows significant usage of international social media platforms. As of early 2023, Instagram had 10.45 million users, equivalent to 53.6% of the total population,

and 72.5% of the "eligible" audience (aged 13 and above) in Kazakhstan. Similarly, TikTok had 10.41 million users aged 18 and above, reaching 81.3% of all adults in the country. Facebook Messenger reached 616.9 thousand users, about 3.2% of the total population. LinkedIn had 1.419 million users, accounting for 7.3% of the total population. The majority of users across these platforms were female, with the largest user group typically being people aged 25 to 34.

Media Freedom and Pressures: The media landscape in Kazakhstan faces significant challenges. Journalists and independent media outlets are under pressure, and there have been instances of journalists being targeted and intimidated. For example, an Almaty-based journalist faced acts of vandalism and threats. The environment for journalism is seen as increasingly difficult, with Reporters Without Borders ranking Kazakhstan 122nd out of 180 surveyed countries for press freedom in 2022. There's a concern about the legitimacy and existence of independent journalism projects in Kazakhstan, as the government has used tactics such as internet throttling during protests and DDoS attacks targeting independent media.

Internet Access and Infrastructure: The affordability of Internet services relative to other costs of living decreased due to the sharp devaluation of the national currency in March 2022. Internet access is more limited in rural areas, where about 40% of the population resides. The government has pledged to eliminate the digital divide between urban and rural areas using 5G fixed wireless access (FWA), and mobile service providers have shared network infrastructure to facilitate wider rural access. However, provincial governors have still complained about the quality of access. There is no apparent gender-based internet access divide in Kazakhstan.

This overview presents a picture of a digitally engaged population with significant use of international social media platforms. However, the media and journalism sectors face challenges in terms of freedom and operational pressures, with the government exerting control in various ways, including internet access and content regulation.

CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this research was to investigate the transformation of journalism in the context of hybrid media systems, focusing on the integration and interaction of traditional and new media logic. By adopting a communicative ecology perspective, the study sought to understand how technological changes, previously seen as disruptive, have become embedded in modern journalistic practices. The results clearly indicate that the concept of hybrid journalism, initially viewed as a peripheral element, has now become central to the journalistic field. This is a direct reflection of our research goal to explore the evolving nature of journalism in the digital era. The study's mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analyses, provided comprehensive insights into the challenges and opportunities presented by hybrid media systems, addressing our goal of examining the multifaceted impact of hybrid journalism on media consumption patterns and journalistic practices.

Our analysis highlighted the shift towards greater visualization and the predominance of visual over textual information in modern media consumption. This reflects our objective to investigate the changing preferences of contemporary audiences, revealing the significant role of hybrid journalism in catering to audiences who prefer quick, visually engaging content. Additionally, the study revealed the challenges faced by hybrid media, including the potential for misinformation and manipulative influence, which directly relates to our objective of evaluating the ethical implications in the hybrid media landscape.

Furthermore, our research uncovered stark differences in the media landscapes between the Global North and South. The Global North enjoys greater media freedom and digital access, fostering a diverse and independent media scene. In contrast, the Global South, including Kazakhstan, often grapples with political constraints, limited technology access, and challenges in media freedom. On September 9, 2023, in Kazakhstan began to operate the law of 'online platforms and online advertising'. This is the first time since 1994, when Internet was launched in the country, will regulate social networks and activities of bloggers. Yet, the increasing adoption of digital and social media platforms in these regions indicates a gradual shift towards more open and hybrid media systems. In Kazakhstan, significant engagement with international social media platforms has been observed, marking a move towards a hybrid media system. The widespread use of platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook Messenger, and LinkedIn, predominantly by women in the 25-34 age bracket, underscores this trend. Despite these advancements, Kazakhstan still faces challenges typical of the Global South's media systems, such as limitations on media freedom and external pressures on journalism.

The emerging trend towards liberalization in Kazakhstan's media landscape suggests a potential shift towards a more open and diverse media environment, aligning with global trends in hybrid media systems. However, the

pace and extent of this liberalization remain subject to various social, political, and technological factors. In conclusion, this study successfully achieved its objectives by providing a deep understanding of the hybrid media system and its implications for modern journalism. The clear connection between the research goals and the findings, along with the insights into the contrasting media landscapes of the Global North and South, and the specific case of Kazakhstan, underscores the relevance and importance of this study in contributing to the discourse on media evolution and journalism practice in the digital age.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that he has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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