

# Innovation Through Crisis



Journalism and News Media in Transition

EDITED BY:

**MONA KRISTIN SOLVOLL**

**RAGNHILD KRISTINE OLSEN**

# **INNOVATION THROUGH CRISIS**

JOURNALISM AND NEWS MEDIA IN TRANSITION

Innovation Through Crisis:  
*Journalism and News Media in Transition*  
Mona K. Solvoll & Ragnhild Kr. Olsen (Eds.)

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## Preface

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Oslo, 17 November 2023

*Mona K. Solvoll & Ragnhild Kr. Olsen*



# The innovation response to the Covid-19 crisis

MONA K. SOLVOLL<sup>I</sup> & RAGNHILD KR. OLSEN<sup>II</sup>

<sup>I</sup> DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE, BI NORWEGIAN BUSINESS SCHOOL, NORWAY

<sup>II</sup> DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM AND MEDIA STUDIES, OSLO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY, NORWAY

## Learning from a crisis

The pandemic has given you a master's degree in navigating crises, so break out the old drawing board and start executing for the next 12–18 months of disruption and opportunity.

This quote from an *Editor & Publisher* magazine commentary published during the late stage of the Covid-19 crisis in August 2022 encapsulates key characteristics of the current news media landscape: News media are in a constant state of flux where disruptions and crises go hand in hand with opportunities for innovation. Confronted with such uncertainty, there is considerable learning potential in the Covid-19 pandemic for academics as well as the media industry. This global health crisis has provided unique opportunities to explore and understand news media's ability to respond to external shocks and create new and improved value for audiences, society, and their own business operations.

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In this edited volume, we delve into crisis-driven journalism innovation and value creation, providing new knowledge on how news media change and adjust during times of unprecedented uncertainty. We revisit the tumultuous years of the Covid-19 pandemic to enhance our understanding of news media's adaptability and resilience amid the crisis. Such research is important in order to gain a deeper understanding of crises as both threats and opportunities for journalism. Although there has been considerable growth in research concerning journalism and news media during the Covid-19 crisis, there remains a dearth of contributions offering a comprehensive overview of how this crisis affected the news media's capacity to innovate and create new value. Examining the multifaceted experiences and responses of news media within a specific national context, where the industry was notably well-positioned to handle the crisis, holds the potential to provide a more nuanced depiction of how news media generate novel ideas and address emerging issues in challenging times.

Based on empirical research among legacy news media in Norway, this book poses the following overarching research question: How did Norwegian news media respond to the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of innovation and value creation?

Our empirical research originates from the "Media Innovation Through the Corona Crisis" project at the BI Norwegian Business School. This project, conducted from 2020 to 2022, explored the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Norwegian news media and what possibilities there are for legacy news publishers to develop and grow during times of crisis.

The Norwegian context provides distinctive opportunities to glean insights from digitally advanced news media operating in a well-functioning media system. Consequently, this book offers a different perspective than the dominating Anglo-American research tradition where commercial news media have faced a more profound economic crisis and the pandemic had more severe implications. As we describe in more detail later in this Introduction, Norwegian news media have managed the ongoing digital transition of the media landscape well compared with many other countries. The many news outlets scattered throughout the country have remained remarkably stable over time, not least because of substantial state subsidies channelled to the country's most economically vulnerable news publishers. Thus, Norway serves as an exemplary case of a media welfare state system (Syvertsen et al., 2014), which allows us to explore how news media under comparably favourable social, political, and economic conditions cope with a crisis of unprecedented magnitude. During the Covid-19 pandemic, additional state support was offered to assist commercial news operations through the crisis. Such state support recognises news media's essential role as key knowledge-producing institutions and democratic infrastructure in society.

Our perspective on innovation is inextricably linked to this normative understanding of journalism's value for people and society, while simultaneously recognising how journalism is a business that creates economic value for the news organisation. Value creation – be it by means of new journalistic services, new journalistic working processes, new revenue streams, or any other way that news media improve the way they operate – lies at the heart of our understanding of innovation in this book. Innovation, from our perspective, is not solely about adopting new technology or introducing flashy new things (Posetti, 2018). Instead, it revolves around materialising novel ideas that generate value for the key stakeholders of news media. It entails crafting solutions to problems in innovative ways, thereby creating value. This was particularly relevant for news media amid the Covid-19 pandemic, when the crisis created huge problems by disrupting people's everyday lives, threatening their livelihoods, and spreading fear and insecurity in communities around the globe. The crisis presented opportunities for the news media, akin to numerous other organisations, to foster creativity and devise novel solutions capable of alleviating some of the problems induced by the pandemic. The surge in news consumption, particularly during the early phase of the crisis, demonstrates how news media had an important role to play. News media provided news and information that could contribute directly to citizens' potential for self-protection and safety. Simultaneously, the Covid-19 crisis disrupted journalistic practices and processes and exacerbated the revenue crisis among commercial news media. It significantly diminished advertising investments, adding another blow to commercial news media's fractured business model. In this sense, it compounded an already complex crisis context for the news media.

## **Exploring responses to opportunities and threats**

We take this Janus-faced aspect of the Covid-19 crisis as our point of departure in this book, recognising how the pandemic represented both opportunities to solve new problems and create new value with innovative solutions, as well as threats to the practice and business of journalism. In essence, our goal is to explore Norwegian news media's ability to seize the opportunities and navigate the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Seizing opportunities through innovations is one of several strategic responses to a crisis. Other options may involve discontinuing a company's business activities, implementing retrenchment through cost-cutting measures that might reduce the company's scope, or maintaining the status quo of the company's operations (Wenzel et al., 2020).

Discontinuation and cost-cutting have emerged as common crisis responses within the newspaper industry, which has been deeply affected by the virtual collapse of advertising revenues in the twenty-first century. Previous research

has shown that in certain countries, like the US, the newspaper industry's revenue crisis has resulted in the closure of numerous news outlets, particularly at the local level (Abernathy, 2018). In other media systems, like Norway and other Nordic countries, the newspaper industry has responded with a combination of relentless cost-cutting (Ohlsson et al., 2021) and a strategic shift from an advertising-centric revenue model to one reliant on reader revenue (Olsen et al., 2021). The latter approach indicates a status quo-oriented response, as newspapers have reproduced their traditional print-subscription model online by implementing paywalls (Olsen & Solvoll, 2018). Nonetheless, substantial innovation has also been involved in this strategy, as newspapers have shifted from traditional print operations to becoming multiplatform service providers building new customer services around advanced technology and developing digital value propositions for their audiences (Bakke & Barland, 2022).

These observations, suggesting the relative success of Norwegian news media in navigating threats and seizing opportunities, provide relevant context for our empirical investigation in this book. The Covid-19 crisis might have acted as a catalyst in the digital transformation of news media by prompting innovative responses to emerging or latent audience needs. Conversely, it could have slowed down ongoing innovation processes, even terminating experimentation and the development of new digital services due to retrenchment strategies or the preservation of the status quo in times of heightened insecurity. The latter two approaches are often seen as beneficial for an organisation in the short- and mid-term, while innovation during crisis is considered a more effective long-term strategy (Wenzel et al., 2020).

## **Taking a normative view on innovation and value creation**

Analysing media innovation could take several directions depending on which aspect of news media's multifaceted value creation we choose as our research object. In this book, we are interested in journalism innovation that creates value for audiences and society as well as for news organisations. This is an explicitly normative position, which perceives journalism innovation as beneficial for news media and their key stakeholders. Moreover, we perceive innovation that creates value for key stakeholders as a prerequisite for the sustainability of the news business in the future. Taking this position may need some explication, considering the different strategic crisis responses outlined in the previous section. While we appreciate that innovation is not the sole or even the preferred route for a news organisation in times of crisis, we do believe that innovation that creates new and improved value for key stakeholders, like audiences and the broader community, could play an essential role in sustaining news organisations as businesses as well as social institutions serving public interests.

Nevertheless, we acknowledge that such value creation can be intricate and ambiguous. The pursuit of innovation to meet the economic interests of news media may inadvertently de-prioritise the news media's civic responsibilities. For instance, utilising technology to cut costs might not always result in elevated journalistic quality (Trappel, 2015). The prevailing emphasis on innovation often prioritises a market-oriented vision for the future of journalism, sidelining normative concerns about the democratic role of journalism (Creech & Nadler, 2018; Trappel, 2015). While we acknowledge this conflict of interest, we argue that the pandemic yielded opportunities to bridge this divide with initiatives that provided new and improved information value to the public while simultaneously generating economic value for news organisations (Olsen & Furseth, 2023).

Another instance of a potential conflict of interest arises when innovation, which is perceived to create new value for the public, may not be equally advantageous for news workers. Studies in journalism have shown that innovations, particularly the growing reliance on new digital tools, have led to mental and physical burnout among journalists working within online and digital platforms (e.g., Bossio & Nelson, 2021). During times of crisis, these conflicts of interest can be especially challenging as news professionals work under immense pressure to fulfil the public's constant need for news and information.

When investigating innovation within Norwegian news media during the pandemic, our objective is to sensibly address the challenges posed by divergent stakeholder interests and value perceptions. We perceive innovation as a concept that yields varied value for different stakeholders within a crisis context. News media consistently grapple with challenges in balancing stakeholder interests and reconciling conflicts in value creation (Olsen, 2021; Picard, 2010). With that in mind, we echo the sentiments of scholars who advocate for guiding innovations in news media by fundamental journalism values, including truth, accuracy, social responsibility, and high ethical standards (Pavlik, 2013). By adopting this normative stance, our focus is on crisis-driven journalism innovations intended to enhance editorial processes and products, ultimately aiming to extend the reach and impact of journalism in the public interest. The best way to innovate would then depart from the notion that media innovations should contribute to the quality of news as well as the lives and development of citizens and society (Pavlik, 2013). It is within this context that our research emphasises crisis-driven innovation, aiming to create value for both audiences and wider society. Simultaneously, we remain attentive to the professional interests of news workers and the economic interests of news media.

## Research objects and terminology

When examining journalism innovation and value creation during the Covid-19 crisis, our particular interest lies in the digital transformation occurring as physical news products are replaced by digital services, with increasing consideration given to audiences' evolving needs and preferences. Termed as an audience turn in journalism (Costera Meijer, 2020), this transformation aligns with the ongoing service shift of the newspaper sector transforming news organisations into digital service providers rather than manufacturers of physical goods (Cestino & Berndt, 2017). Our research primarily focuses on legacy newspaper organisations navigating this transformative phase.

The emphasis on the newspaper sector is primarily motivated by newspapers' important role in providing journalism that is generally regarded as a necessity for a well-functioning democracy (Nielsen, 2015). Consequently, these media's ability to adapt and innovate during times of crisis is ultimately about securing an important democratic infrastructure in society. Serving audience needs and generating subscription revenues has become the backbone of the newspaper industry's business model (Olsen et al., 2021). While advertising revenue continues to hold a central role in the newspaper economy, there is a noticeable trend toward audiences becoming the primary funders of journalistic production. This shift is particularly evident in the increasing reliance on audience payment for digital services. In a competitive news and information landscape, newspapers are required to attract audiences with digital services that meet evolving customer needs. The adaptation to digital service provision is pivotal for newspapers to maintain their relevance and, therefore, their sustainability as commercial entities (Villi & Picard, 2019). The creation of engaging digital services, valued and supported by audiences, is essential for newspapers to sustain their crucial civic function as knowledge-producing institutions in society. Given this context, the research presented in this book delves into the influence of the Covid-19 crisis on the transformation of Norwegian newspapers into digital service providers.

Our empirical investigation integrates theoretical perspectives from multiple research fields, including journalism studies, media innovation research, management, organisational research, and innovation theory. This interdisciplinary approach encourages a flexible terminology framework. For example, when writing about audiences as stakeholders in innovation, we use this term interchangeably with media users as well as citizens and customers. Although there is an extensive scholarly debate regarding the different meanings of these concepts (see, e.g., Picone, 2017; Syvertsen, 2004), for our purposes, these are labels with one key characteristic in common – they all refer to people that media aim to reach and engage. Whether these people feature as customers in the innovation literature or as citizens of the democratic order in journalism research, they are ultimately individuals who utilise news media to navigate and engage with the public world.

Internal stakeholders are individuals or groups within an organisation. Regarding internal stakeholders, our scope includes various individuals such as journalists, developers, newsroom managers, and senior news executives. In our research, the term news workers is commonly used to refer to the broader group involved in news production.

Our terminology for newspapers varies. News operations, newspaper businesses, newspapers, or news organisations, as well as broader concepts like news media, the media sector, or the media industry, all refer to institutions which provide journalism in society.

## **The Norwegian case**

As mentioned earlier, we consider Norway to be an especially compelling and relevant case for researching innovation and value creation during the Covid-19 crisis. This assessment is based on both the characteristics of the Norwegian media system and the country's resilience in weathering the most adverse effects of the crisis.

### **Norway and the Covid-19 pandemic**

Several characteristics of Norway, such as its robust economy reliant on oil and gas, a well-established welfare state, a strong public sector, and high levels of trust in the government within a transparent political system, shed light on the country's success in managing the crisis (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2020). In addition, Norway is among the top-ten healthiest countries in the world (Ursin et al., 2020) and the population density is low (14 people per square kilometre of land area). The country boasts a robust publicly financed national healthcare system that offers universal coverage for all residents, primarily funded through general taxation. Notably, the country experienced lower Covid-19 cases and death rates compared with most European Union countries (EU, 2021).

On 12 March 2020, Norway implemented its most far-reaching measures ever experienced in peacetime to curb the spread of Covid-19. These measures aimed to limit and delay the outbreak, accompanied by policies addressing the pandemic's economic impact, such as offering loan guarantees to the private sector and implementing a work furlough scheme. These policies were adjusted (scaled back or revised) depending on the development of the pandemic. The governmental recommendations involved significant restrictions on social contact and movement, encompassing measures such as emphasising hand hygiene and cough etiquette, advising on social distancing by limiting gatherings to a maximum of five people, discouraging the use of public transport, promoting remote work where feasible, restricting leisure travel within Norway, avoiding visits to health institutions with vulnerable groups, and closing Norwegian borders to foreign nationals. By law and

with enforceable sanctions, various establishments – including educational institutions, restaurants, bars, fitness centres, cultural venues, and personal care services – were mandated to close. Organised sports, competitions, and cultural events were uniformly cancelled or rescheduled. Furthermore, individuals returning from abroad were mandated to undergo a 14-day quarantine period, while those experiencing respiratory tract infection symptoms were required to stay at home. Confirmed Covid-19 cases were instructed to self-isolate at home. Many restrictions remained in place throughout 2020 and 2021. This was in response to recurring waves of infections and the emergence of new versions of the virus. However, in February 2022, the Norwegian government removed all regulation-based measures against Covid-19, including the requirement for face masks, one-meter distancing, and the obligation to isolate when sick. In November 2023, the Ministry of Health and Care Services decided on an amendment to the regulation concerning contagious diseases, removing Covid-19 from this list of diseases.

### **The Norwegian media system and newspapers**

In Norway, as in other Nordic countries, newspapers and news media have been instrumental in establishing and upholding the welfare system. The intertwining of media and welfare state interests has been conceptualised as a media welfare state model characterising the media systems in the Nordic region (Syvertsen et al., 2014). Within this framework, the press operates based on egalitarian ideals, resulting in content and readership that show fewer elite versus mass distinctions and reduced class and gender differences. Central to this model is the principle of equal access to public broadcasting. Additionally, key features of the media welfare state include freedom from editorial interference by politicians, a cultural policy that extends to the media, and collaborative efforts among major stakeholders such as media representatives and politicians. This type of media system is also characterised by the high level of direct and indirect public subsidies to commercial newspapers (Kammer, 2016). According to MediaNorway (2022), the public service broadcaster NRK and the biggest online news site VG (owned by Schibsted) were the most frequently used news sources during the Covid-19 crisis. These were also the most used news sources prior to the pandemic.

Norwegian newspapers are characterised by diversity and advanced digitalisation. The sector responded to digital innovation challenges early on and offers an extraordinary opportunity for gaining insights from pioneers and early adopters of digital innovation (Sraml Gonzales & Gulbrandsen, 2021). The Norwegian population is among the most digitally literate in the world, with high access to both broadband and digital services (Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, 2021). Norwegians are also among the world's most avid newspaper readers, although the country's newspaper circulation plummeted from the turn of the century onwards. The

circulation downturn has been less steep for small local newspapers than for the big national and regional titles (Harrie, 2018). Since the newspaper industry started rolling out digital paywalls and introducing online news subscriptions in 2011, the country's newspaper industry has become world-leading in charging for news. By 2019, nine out of ten newspapers had some form of reader payment in place (Høst, 2019), and Norway has consistently ranked at the top of lists showing people's willingness to pay around the world (Newman et al., 2023). Most Norwegian newspapers are small (circulation 2,000–5,000), published less than six days a week, and serve one or a few local communities (Østbye, 2019). The newspaper industry is dominated by three media groups – Schibsted, Amedia, and Polaris – but there are still a considerable number of newspapers with local ownership.

## **The structure of the book**

Chapter 1 and the Conclusion of this book closely interrelate, acting as bookends and presenting a cohesive synthesis of its entirety. In Chapter 1, “Theoretical perspectives on crisis, resilience, and innovation”, we introduce the theoretical framework for our research, delving into the concept of innovation by emphasising its value creation aspect alongside improvements and novelty. In the chapter, we introduce a framework of six pivotal factors that influence journalism innovation, identified as building blocks of journalism innovation: resources, technology, organisation, management, culture, and business model. These building blocks manifest in diverse ways and constellations across the subsequent empirical chapters, which unfold as follows:

Chapter 2, “Innovations in resilience strategies during the Covid-19 pandemic”, is based on a mapping survey among 24 managers in Norwegian news organisations. By combining the innovation framework of Francis and Bessant (2005) and three ways of conceptualising resilience, Mona K. Solvoll provides an analysis of how news media coped and recovered from the crisis through different innovations and initiatives. Three strategies for coping and recovering from a crisis are identified: bouncing back, bouncing forward, and bouncing beyond.

Chapter 3, “Positive renewal in newsrooms through crisis in crisis”, presents an ethnographic study based on interviews with 15 managers and journalists from three news organisations. In this chapter, Gudrun Rudnigen focuses on key themes of crisis-as-event and crisis-as-process, resilience, and sensemaking as she sets out to capture narratives of the experience of “a crisis in crisis”. She identifies three practices of resilience in a crisis: flexible working conditions; creativity and collaboration; and increased trust, autonomy, and solidarity that derived from restricted working conditions during the pandemic.



Chapter 4, “The digital shift in the news media’s revenue streams during the Covid-19 pandemic”, focuses on the economic resilience of the Norwegian media businesses, focusing on revenue development among newspapers, in particular. Starting with the newspapers’ two-sided business model as a foundation, Jens Barland and Ragnhild Kr. Olsen explore the pandemic’s influence on both advertising and reader revenues. Utilising revenue data from the Norwegian Media Authority, alongside industry reports and expert interviews, they identify winners and losers in the context of the pandemic’s impact on newspapers’ financial dynamics.

Chapter 5, “Crisis-driven newsroom innovation”, delves into the intersection of technology, professional cultures, and organisation, aiming to uncover the pivotal factors that foster newsroom innovation during a crisis. Drawing insights from 13 qualitative interviews conducted across leading Norwegian news organisations, Junai Mtchedlidze employs the “social shaping of technology” approach, and she identifies rapid pace as a central aspect of crisis-driven innovations. Specifically, the chapter highlights four key facilitators of swift newsroom innovations during crises: the audience’s demand for information, employee-driven initiative, technological expertise, and collaboration between data journalists and developers.

Chapter 6, “Exploring telework innovation’s value for news workers”, focuses on how telework was perceived to generate value for news workers during the pandemic and introduces a structured framework for analysing the innovation’s perceived benefits and challenges. Through an examination of telework literature and in-depth interviews with journalists, programmers, and managers, Ragnhild Kr. Olsen, Cecilie Asker, and Maria Konow-Lund unravel the nuanced aspects of working remotely solely via digital technology. They discuss insights derived from telework experiences, providing guidance for news organisations in effectively organising physical, digital, and hybrid newsrooms in the future.

Chapter 7, “The effects of an external crisis on the prioritisation of innovations”, investigates the shifting innovation priorities among news media executives following the Covid-19 crisis. Arne H. Krumsvik and David L. Francis introduce a novel research typology – the 8 × 2 model – to offer detailed insights into decision-making dynamics regarding media innovations. Drawing on survey data, their findings suggest that in times of crisis, leaders and managers are inclined to reassess and optimise existing resources rather than immediately pursue radical innovation initiatives. The study identifies three distinct clusters of media executives, each exhibiting varying priorities for future innovation endeavours.

Finally, in the Conclusion, the insights gained from these empirical studies are synthesised and the overarching theoretical perspectives established in Chapter 1 are engaged with. The Conclusion thus serves as a summary as well as a discussion of the six building blocks of innovation. Specifically, three

overarching themes are identified that encapsulate the impact of the crisis on news media's ability to innovate and generate new or enhanced value during times of exceptional uncertainty: the crisis as a catalyst for innovation, an amplifier of value creation, and a critical test of resilience.

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# Theoretical perspectives on crisis, resilience, and innovation

RAGNHILD KR. OLSEN<sup>I</sup> & MONA K. SOLVOLL<sup>II</sup>

<sup>I</sup> DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM AND MEDIA STUDIES, OSLO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY, NORWAY

<sup>II</sup> DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE, BI NORWEGIAN BUSINESS SCHOOL, NORWAY

## ABSTRACT

This chapter describes how the concepts of crisis, resilience, and innovation are well-suited for capturing how Norwegian news media dealt with the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic posed threats to public health, leading to increased urgency for accurate information dissemination. As such, the crisis served as a catalyst, accelerating changes in news production, distribution, consumption, and business models. Persistence reflects resilience as the ability to regain stability and get back to “business as usual”, adaptability as resilience refers to large adjustments in professional practices in response, while transformability brings radical long-lasting renewal of the whole organisation. Presenting a normative view of innovation in journalism, this chapter focuses on value creation, improvement, and novelty. Innovation involves adjusting existing products or services and introducing new ideas perceived as novel by audiences. This coincides with the transformation of journalism from physical news products to digitalised services. Summarising insights from different strands of innovation literature, we identify a set of internal factors, or building blocks, of journalism innovation: resources, technology, organisation, management, culture, and business model.

**KEYWORDS:** crisis, innovation, resilience, journalism, news media

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## Introduction

The underlying premise of this book is the conventional business advice that a crisis is not only a threat but also an opportunity for change and learning (e.g., Jacobides & Reeves, 2020; Sutton, 2007). In other words, a crisis could destroy an organisation, like a news publisher, but it could also stimulate innovation and encourage adaptation to new realities. We apply the concept of resilience to analyse and understand the organisational sensitivity of reaction to an external shock – in the case of this book, the Covid-19 pandemic – and the ability to respond and recover, sometimes by renewing growth (Faggian et al., 2018).

We take the normative view that to be resilient, news media organisations must rely on innovation. Furthermore, we perceive resilience as a prerequisite for news media sustainability over time. As such, there is a link between innovation and the preservation of news media as key knowledge-producing institutions in society, as noted in the Introduction of this book. This chapter elaborates on this position inspired by the understanding of journalism as a service to stakeholders while also connecting the changes that journalism is undergoing – as a profession, institution, practice, product, process, and business – to a broader service orientation observed across many socioeconomic sectors. In other words, we regard the ongoing changes in journalism and news media organisations as part of a general service transformation in society, whereby the news industry like many other industries is turning into digital service providers rather than manufacturers of physical goods (Cestino & Berndt, 2017; Sullivan, 2006).

Furthermore, we consider value creation to be central to journalism innovation. Innovation in our view is about providing new journalistic services that create value for key stakeholders, such as audiences, society, and the news organisation itself. In other words, value – be it social, economic, or any other kind – is the overall objective of journalism innovation. By taking this normative position, we focus on journalism innovation as something more than the introduction of new technology. Information and communication technology is important for service innovation, as a technological tool, a transformative market development, and an essential resource (Barrett et al., 2015), but it is not an end in and of itself. Value creation is.

In the next sections, we unpack the concepts of crisis, resilience, and innovation in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. These concepts are central to our empirical investigation of how news media in Norway responded to the Covid-19 crisis, which is presented in the following chapters of this book.

## **Crisis: Perception and responses from news media**

The organisational theorist Karl E. Weick (1993) defined a crisis as a cosmology episode that occurs when people suddenly feel that the universe is no longer a rational, orderly system. A cosmology episode feels like *vu jàdé*, (i.e., the opposite of *déjà vu*): “I’ve never been here before, I have no idea where I am, and I have no idea who can help me” (Weick, 1993: 633–634). This description succinctly captures the sense of bewilderment, shock, and fear that spread across the globe in March 2020 when the World Health Organization declared the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus a pandemic (WHO, 2023). Such an event-centred perspective views crises as sudden, unexpected, and unpredictable episodes. A crisis is generally understood as a concrete time- and space-specific event with a clear beginning and a clear end (Frandsen & Johansen, 2016). However, crises are often overlapping, with blurred boundaries, and encompassing several aspects, and it could be difficult to discern where one crisis begins and another ends. Some researchers are therefore critical of the event-centred approach to crises and suggest that crises should be studied as ongoing processes that span from before and after a triggering event (Roux-Dufort, 2007). This process-oriented understanding of crises is well-fitted to capture how the Covid-19 crisis interlaced with the ongoing media crisis in many countries around the world. The media crisis represents a multifaceted process which is economic, political, social, and technological in nature, and it concerns news media’s business model and profitability as well as their relationship with key stakeholders and their legitimacy as knowledge-producing institutions in democratic societies (Curran, 2019). As observed by De Mateo, Bergés, and Garnatxe (2010), the media crisis is a business crisis, initiated by redistribution of advertising expenditure and audience; a crisis of journalism, where products and services are optimised to achieve maximum profits in both advertising and audience markets; and finally, a crisis concerning the role of journalism in democratic societies, putting news media and their journalistic work under considerable pressure long before the outbreak of Covid-19. The pandemic was woven into this complex crisis process, serving as an amplification of uncertainty in the news media.

The Covid-19 crisis could thus be studied both as an event in and of itself and as part of a larger crisis process that has been going on in the news media for several years. Crises represent threat, urgency, and uncertainty (Bakken & Brinkmann, 2022), catalysing a need for problem-solving, important decision-making, and change. These characteristics are central when analysing the Covid-19 crisis and news media’s responses in terms of resilience strategies and innovation, as exemplified in the following sections.

## **Crisis as threat**

In terms of threat, the Covid-19 pandemic was primarily a health and humanitarian threat, but as previously noted, the pandemic had a massive impact on businesses as well. According to a report by the European University Institute (Carlini & Bleyer-Simon, 2021), the pandemic was particularly harmful to business models predominantly based on advertising revenues, like commercial radio, television, and newspapers. For print newspapers, the reduction in sales of print products added to the negative effect of the advertising decline (Olsen et al., 2020)

The pandemic also represented a major threat to the general information ecosystem. Around the world, false information regarding the origin of Covid-19 and how to cure the disease spread on social media accounts and websites, making it difficult for people to understand and implement scientifically grounded preventive measures to keep themselves and their communities safe (Posetti & Bontcheva, 2021). Adding insult to injury, far-right extremist groups spread fear and conspiracy theories on social media with the aim of destabilising the social order. For example, Boberg and colleagues (2020) found that alternative news media in Germany used Covid-19–related information to foster their long-term anti-establishment narratives, critical of public institutions and political actions of the administration.

## **Crisis as urgency**

News media has a vital role to play as an information source in times of crisis, and news consumption sky-rocketed during the Covid-19 crisis, even among groups that normally would not turn to legacy media for news (e.g., Casero-Ripolles, 2020). However, meeting the public's urgent information needs and responding to the new social realities put newsrooms under severe pressure (Finneman & Thomas, 2022). Both crisis journalism and health journalism represent narrow fields within most news organisations, and journalists had to develop skills and knowledge to provide accurate reports as the crisis escalated. As demonstrated in Konow-Lund and Olsson's (2016) study of newsrooms' responses to a terror crisis, news desks' ability to cope with "disaster marathon modes" of reporting relies on everyday organisational structures and previous experiences, which represent a certain type of resilience. Still, routines and stabilising mechanisms alone are not enough for journalists to cope and perform during a crisis (Konow-Lund & Olsson, 2016). A crisis provides a sudden and real sense of urgency to respond, an example of which is the quick shift to remote working practices in news organisations during the Covid-19 pandemic. In Norway, the implementation of remote work was done at an extreme pace – almost overnight – following the strict social distancing measures and full lockdowns

in March 2020. The sense of urgency and need for quick decisions amid the crisis could enable news media to reprioritise activities and focus on key challenges while reallocating and mobilising resources towards the most pressing issues facing the organisations.

### **Crisis as a catalyst for change**

A crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic can also serve as an acceleration of innovations (McKinsey, 2020). Quandt and Wahl-Jorgensen (2021) noted that for the news media sector, the Covid-19 crisis created a sudden disruption in behaviour, which amplified or accelerated processes that had started well before the pandemic, such as staff reduction, increased focus on online subscribers, or planned launches of new products or services. In a similar vein, Olsen, Pickard, and Westlund (2020) argued that Covid-19 and its economic effects accelerated changes in news production, distribution, consumption, and business models. Studies from all over the world have suggested that the Covid-19 pandemic changed the way newsrooms function, such as the composition of teams (Appelgren, 2021), as they set up trans-organisational networks that allowed employees to exchange ideas and learn from each other during the pandemic (Túñez-López et al., 2020). Some of these accelerating processes included a turn towards process innovation and servitisation, as journalists tested and developed new formulas for co-creating content and establishing direct and effective conversations with audiences (Olsen & Furseth, 2023). Moreover, the news media diversified their content on more platforms than before the pandemic to reach as many people as possible with information about the virus (Túñez-López et al., 2020).

### **Resilience: Coping with and recovering from the Covid-19 crisis**

In economic theories, the term resilience refers to a system's capacity to respond to, handle, and recover from exogenous shocks (e.g., the Covid-19 pandemic) that disturb its economy, structure, and activities (Martin, 2012; Mayor & Ramos, 2020). The Latin root, *resilire*, means “to leap back” or “to rebound”, which suggests that a system has a certain elasticity and adaptive capacity that enables it to rearrange itself and adapt following a disturbance or disruption. Keck and Sakdapolrak (2013) suggested that the underlying principles that constitute the resilience concept are persistence, adaptability, and transformability, which involve different types of innovation.



## **Resilience as persistence – business as usual**

This type of resilience is mostly concerned with incremental innovations along prevailing paths, which often lead to the continuity of an organisation's operations. The capacity to persist may be found deeply embedded in organisational culture and history. This can be observed as a type of organisational inertia (Gilbert, 2005). While such inertia could serve as an obstacle to change, it could also enable an organisation to withstand an external shock which would otherwise threaten to destroy the organisation (Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Giddens, 1984). Relying on learned routine responses is an example of persistence, and this notion of routines is central in research on journalism practice. Olsson (2009: 448) has suggested that an organisation's pre-crisis structure and experience will determine how they respond to a crisis. When journalists are accustomed to periods of crisis (Konow-Lund & Olsson, 2016), their responses may often follow the approach of "business as usual" (García-Avilés, 2021). Along with norms, routines may help journalists negotiate uncertainty, maximise resources, and avoid conflict (Bunce, 2019). For example, García-Avilés (2021) observed how managers in Spanish digital-only media outlets built on well-rooted practices rather than developing an entirely different approach to work in virtual newsrooms when responding to the Covid-19 crisis.

## **Resilience as adaptability – a turning point**

Adaptability describes resilience as a way of moving forward for an organisation, and not returning to the pre-shock state. Within this type of resilience, adapting to evolving technology and user needs and preferences are the focus of media innovation. At the same time, structures ensure stability, preventing the organisation from collapsing (Giddens, 1984; Hess & Waller, 2021).

This type of resilience can take place if an organisation is deeply affected by a crisis and the disturbance is pushing the organisation beyond its "elasticity threshold" (Martin, 2012). A crisis can be a turning point or a defined breaking point, "where some processes and developments come to a halt, and some essential aspects, issues, practices, actors and interactions become observable, including ones that may have been previously overlooked" (Quandt & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2021: 1201). As such, a crisis can trigger adaptability and the capacity to adjust (Finneman & Thomas, 2022).

A breakdown of newsroom procedures, organisational structure, and hierarchy can create a vacuum which leaves room for improvisation and creativity. Although adapting to a new reality may include re-establishing normal routines and roles within a new working mode to create stability (García-Avilés, 2021; Konow-Lund & Olsson, 2016), these activities represent a turning point in digitalising professional practices and virtual workflows.

## **Resilience as transformability – radical renewal**

Lastly, transformability means a complete restructuring of an entire system, which, in the context of news media, could be understood as a massive disruption in news practices (Alexander, 2015; García-Avilés, 2021) as well as the introduction of entirely new offerings to customers. As such, transformability includes reorientation and an innovative mindset focusing on renewal in the long run (Francis & Bessant, 2005).

We can observe this in the way the pandemic accelerated digitalisation strategies, which, according to Sarkar and Clegg (2021), were an essential survival strategy across industries and businesses during the pandemic. Day-to-day adaptation does not require major organisational restructuring (Nadler & Tushman, 1989); however, when organisations experience substantial changes within a noticeably brief period (such as the pandemic outbreak), the transformation also includes a potential for radical renewal and improvement. Whether changes such as the introduction of remote working (Applegren, 2021) and virtual management and collaborations (García-Avilés, 2021), as well as new types of services based on data journalism (Heravi et al., 2022) that took place during the pandemic, are substantial enough to be counted as transformative innovations is open for empirical investigation.

## **Innovation: Value creation, improvements, and novelty**

While innovation plays a role in transformability, adaptability, and even persistence in an organisation amid a crisis, the type and extent of the newness of the innovation involved can vary greatly. This calls for a closer examination of the meaning of innovation. As noted by several media scholars, there is a persistent need for a deeper theoretical framework that captures how innovation is becoming a crucial asset to the survival of the media industry as well as the actors, dynamics, and factors involved in the innovation processes (Doyle, 2013; Küng, 2013).

Considering newsroom innovation as “an organizational process characterized by different dynamics, mechanisms, and negotiations” (Paulussen, 2016: 194), the research presented in this book explores how journalism innovation plays out at various organisational levels, particularly in relation to changing business models and the development of digital strategies among news media, as well as new journalistic services and practices. By focusing specifically on key components of the news production process, we address the value-creation logic of news media and how this is realised through innovation.

Although news media operate in dual, or sometimes multiple, markets of advertisers and audiences, the market for digital subscriptions has been

growing since before the pandemic, while the Internet advertising market is shrinking (Kalim, 2022). This development suggests that for news media, maximising the journalistic value for the audience is a more sustainable strategy than depending on advertising alone (Bakke & Barland, 2022; Groves & Brown, 2020; Sullivan, 2006). As such, improving journalistic services through innovation represents essential value-creation potential for news media. This potential is based on a value-creation logic whereby creating value for audiences by offering engaging news and information is seen to create value for society by making people better informed and connected to the public. This in turn creates economic value for the news organisation (Olsen, 2021). Developing new and improved audience experiences, providing new offerings that are aligned with audiences' needs and expectations, and engaging in deeper relationships with audiences in new ways are essential elements of news media's value creation in an advanced consumer society.

This understanding of value creation and innovation motivates our investigation of how news media responded to the Covid-19 crisis and encourages us to explore factors that stimulate or impede innovation among news media in this specific context. Before outlining such enabling and constraining forces, we need to expand on our understanding of the concept of innovation in terms of value creation, improvements, and novelty. Moreover, we outline different types of innovation that are helpful in the categorisation of innovations amid the Covid-19 crisis.

### **Innovation as value creation**

Treating news media as any other commercial manufacturing industry, and news and information as any other kind of commodity, would ignore journalism as a knowledge-producing institution committed to journalistic ethics and to serving the interests of society. According to such ideals, news media provide services of a worth that exceeds their exchange value (i.e., the price that customers are willing to pay in the marketplace). On the societal level, journalism ideally contributes to an informed and educated public, to social interaction, engagement, and participation in public life, as well as the correction of errors and the resolution of conflicts in society. On the individual level of media users, journalism's value creation concerns functional benefits, such as information and helping to understand the world and events; emotional benefits, such as stimulating feelings of involvement, belonging, and community; and self-expressive benefits, such as providing opportunities for participation through various forms of interactivity (Picard, 2010). Taking this normative view, we argue that innovation in journalism is essentially about enhancing the value of news and information

services to audiences and to society at large so that the new service better meets audiences' needs and expectations as well as the broader needs of a well-functioning democracy.

On the other hand, news media operating in a commercial environment also need to generate revenue. Indeed, a sound financial basis for news operations plays a key role in securing high-quality journalism (e.g., Sjøvaag, 2022). Therefore, economic value creation cannot be ignored when analysing journalism through an innovation lens that emphasises value creation, nor can the competitive environment in which news media operate. As described by García-Avilés and colleagues (2018), journalism innovation is the introduction of something new that *adds value* to customers while simultaneously allowing the media organisation to capture a share of the value generated. Therefore, an essential aspect of media innovation lies in its transformative value, which modifies and improves the organisation's performance (García-Avilés et al., 2018).

Building a more robust and competitive business of journalism is an important reason why news media are encouraged to move from a product-centric to a service-centric operation. By developing a value proposition which differentiates news organisations from other information businesses, by becoming more focused on understanding audiences' problems, addressing their needs directly, and thus increasing trust and credibility, news media are likely to generate more revenue (Picard, 2010; Sullivan, 2006).

When audiences pay for content, it generates exchange value for the news organisations. As such, the commercialisation of the service is a central part of value creation. This view aligns with a substantial body of media innovation research which emphasises how sustainable innovation in journalism is also about business model innovation, and that finding new ways to generate revenue is a key challenge for news media (see, e.g., García-Avilés et al., 2019; Paulussen, 2016; Posetti, 2018). This duality in news media's value creation is captured in the definition of journalism innovation as

the ability of media professionals to creatively solve the needs of their audiences, conditioned by the professionals' talent and predisposition and by the available resources to test and create new journalistic processes, products, and services, thus providing value to their news organization and its audience. (Zaragoza Fuster & García Avilés, 2022: 2)

In the Covid-19 context, this definition captures how news media used available resources to provide new service offerings that created value for audiences while simultaneously generating revenue for their own organisations.

## **Innovation as improvements**

Innovation is closely related to change, but in our view, the two should still be treated as distinct concepts. Change is temporal and concerns the difference in the state of something from one time to another (Westlund et al., 2021); it does not necessarily have a purpose and is often incidental. Furthermore, change is not related to an invention or something that is necessarily characterised by novelty or value creation. The purpose-driven nature of innovation – to achieve certain goals or to solve problems, which in turn creates value – helps distinguish innovations from the more general notion of change.

Innovation is not understood as shifts at various times but as the advent of novel, different, or modified ideas, processes, products, or services. As noted by Luecke (2003), innovation is the embodiment, combination, or synthesis of knowledge in original, relevant, and valued new products, processes, or services. Similarly, Huberman (1973) emphasised innovation as a creative process of selecting, organising, and utilising resources in new or unique ways that will result in the higher achievement of predetermined goals and objectives. In other words, innovation concerns improvement. It has a direction and purpose. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, journalism innovations typically encompassed new solutions to emerging problems created by the crisis.

Innovation encompasses both small adjustments and major shifts in offerings and operations, including entirely new ideas which could have disruptive effects on established players in an industry. This kind of disruptive innovation (see Christensen, 1997, for an elaboration of the concept) typically takes place when incumbents focusing on improving product performance and serving the high end of a mature market are overturned by new entrants offering cheaper, simpler, and often more convenient products that are “good enough” for a large share of the market. Disruptive innovation thus creates new markets that incumbents have overlooked (Christensen, 1997). This would be the case if the Covid-19 crisis opened opportunities for new service providers to create cheaper news and information services than those of news media and these new services were perceived by audiences as sufficient to meet their information needs. Sustaining innovation, on the other hand, are typically improvements of an existing product or service, informed by customer needs (Christensen, 1997). Similarly, incremental innovation is defined as gradual alternations which make an existing product or service slightly better or different. Most innovations taking place in news media are described as incremental, gradual, and continuous improvements of existing concepts, products, or services in existing markets (Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013). Such incremental innovation, which “requires existing capabilities to be expanded or adapted” (Küng, 2013: 10), may not create new markets or use radically new technologies, but if the adjustments fulfil customers’ needs,

they can attract customers who are willing to pay more. In times of crisis, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, sustaining and incremental innovations would typically include new services that build on and enhance already existing services which yielded new opportunities to generate revenue.

### **Innovation as novelty**

Whereas some scholars have reserved the term innovation for describing the *outcome* of an innovation process, others maintain that the *process* of developing new services and products cannot be separated from the implementation and value creation of a new service (Witell et al., 2016). The latter view of innovation covers both the emergence of a new idea and the implementation of the idea in an existing social system, as well as the further elaboration of the idea. Moreover, the process perspective includes an organisational ongoing, evolving, and cumulative change (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002), sometimes referred to as organisational innovation (García-Avilés, 2021: 1254). News media, like any organisation, are continuously modified, altered, and extended, and even presumably static organisational structures, such as routines, are modified on an ongoing basis (Hernes, 2007; Langley et al., 2013).

Generally, novelty is perceived as a common characteristic of innovation – either in the form of new ideas or a new combination of old ideas that are experienced as new in a certain context. As described by Rogers (1995), innovation is an idea, practice, or object that is considered new by an individual or group of individuals, meaning that “innovation must involve something more than the repetitive cycle of everyday news production” (García-Avilés et al., 2019).

The experiences of both the audiences outside the media organisation, and of news workers inside – such as reporters, editors, programmers, and others involved in delivering the news – determine the novelty of innovation as well as its value. As such, newness refers to something that has not previously been understood, accepted, or implemented by the recipient of the innovation. Radical innovation often refers to innovations that are new to the world, and incremental innovation to those that are new to the market (Sundbo, 1997). In our view, it makes sense to interpret the “new to market” factor liberally in the context of innovation, so that a new service introduced, for example, in a local market by a local news provider could represent an innovation even though a similar service has already been introduced by another media organisation operating in another market. What matters in this respect is that the service is experienced as new to relevant customers, that is, to audiences that the media organisation aims to serve in new ways.

This interpretation of innovation as small and incremental changes in existing products and practices, as well as radically new operation modes and services offered, is supported by the fact that over time, small adjustments may represent a major long-term transformation of news media in general.

As described by Paulussen (2016: 192), “while news organizations seem to adapt slowly on the short term, their incremental evolution over several years is significant and fundamental”, and the changes in the news industry are radical and disruptive when assessed in retrospect. When exploring innovation among news media during the pandemic, it is important to bear in mind that small adjustments to operations and news services that took place during the crisis could represent significant steps in a broader transformation that may only become apparent over time.

## **Types of innovation**

Though the basic understanding of innovation guiding our research in this book is that innovation is something new that creates value for stakeholders, the conceptual characteristics that enable us as researchers to capture and assess innovation among news media in the context of Covid-19 need some further clarification. In the next sections, we approach this by distinguishing different types of innovation as areas where innovation takes place. García-Avilés and colleagues (2018) have suggested a structured indexation of media innovation, measuring the area, degree, and technological base of innovation. Furthermore, García-Avilés and colleagues (2019) provided a model for diffusing innovation in media organisations that integrates the different areas and types of innovation and its players, obstacles, and boosters, as well as its outcomes. In this book, we rely mostly on Krumsvik, Milan, Bhroin, and Storsul’s (2019) categorisation, which builds on the work of Francis and Bessant (2005). Here, media innovations are distinguished as product, process, position, paradigm, genre, and social innovations (see also Krumsvik & Francis, Chapter 7). Both product and genre innovation refer to innovations of what news media offer, while process innovation concerns how these products are created and delivered. Position innovation captures how media organisations redefine their products in the market, whereas paradigm innovation concerns change in the mindset, values, and business model of news media. Social innovation involves the use of news media to meet social needs and improve people’s lives.

While both journalistic products and production are part of a process of innovation in our interpretation, journalistic products and production could undergo distinct and separate innovation processes. An example is when newsrooms had to move their entire news production online due to Covid-19 restrictions, as it was a process of innovating the journalistic production which did not automatically change the journalism offered to audiences. Indeed, in this situation, innovating production processes was necessary to maintain the status quo of journalistic production and secure the provision of news and information, rather than changing the nature of the journalistic output (García-Avilés, 2021; Olsen & Furseth, 2023).

On the other hand, the Covid-19 pandemic also encouraged media organisations to experiment with new ways of communicating, collaborating, and interacting with audiences, as newsrooms were replaced by home offices and physical meetings were moved to digital platforms (Appelgren, 2021; Olsen & Furseth, 2023). In this case, the journalistic product and process innovation were symbiotic. The main purpose of process innovation is to improve the organisation's performance, that is, its ability to create value "through variations in strategy and workflow" (García-Avilés, 2021: 1254) and to maintain "a commitment to quality and high ethical standards" (Pavlik, 2013: 183).

## **Building blocks of journalism innovation**

A key objective for innovation research, in news media and elsewhere, is to understand dynamics and factors that drive or impede innovation. This is also key to our investigation of innovation in journalism amid the Covid-19 crisis. Previous research has explored many factors that impact innovation in news media, for instance, technology, market opportunities and user behaviour, the behaviour of competitors, regulation, industry norms, company strategy, leadership and vision, organisational structure, capacity and resources, and culture and creativity (Krumsvik et al., 2019). In our research, we are primarily interested in internal dynamics in news organisations that either stimulated or slowed down innovation in response to one key external factor – the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the field of media innovation, a growing body of research has identified internal factors shaping innovation processes in the newsroom, both on the structural and individual levels (Paulussen, 2016; Steensen, 2009). A variety of structural conditions – ranging from organisational hierarchy and lines of command in the newsroom to resource reallocation, technological infrastructure, recruitment, and training – have been identified as crucial to newsroom innovation (García-Avilés et al., 2019, Hendrickx & Picone, 2020). Another innovation model, presented by Posetti (2018) and the Journalism Innovation Project at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, suggests presenting sustainable innovation in journalism as a wheel with different spokes, where each spoke captures an innovation area: storytelling & reporting; audience engagement; technology & products; distribution; business; leadership & management; organisation & structure; and people & culture. Innovation – radical, disruptive, and transformative – could manifest in each of these areas or spokes of the innovation wheel. Others, like Dogruel (2015), have introduced a multi-level innovation model to account for the processual nature of innovations, from development to implementation and economic and societal impact, as well as the parameters shaping media innovations at the micro-level



of the individual news worker, the meso-level of the media organisation, and the macro-level of the wider media and innovation system where a media organisation operates.

An implicit premise in much of this research is that innovations can succeed if structural constraints are properly addressed, which in turn suggests that innovation is controlled, determined, and imposed by management in a top-down manner (Hendrickx & Picone, 2020). However, there is also substantial research describing how factors like established culture, norms, habits, and role perceptions in legacy news organisations could stand in the way of innovation (Belair-Gagnon & Steinke, 2020; Goyanes & Rodríguez-Castro, 2019; Paulussen, 2016; Porcu, 2020). These structural forces play a stabilising function within journalistic practice and are inherently difficult to change. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, there was arguably a crisis-driven push to alter, adjust, and modify operations and service offerings among news media, combined with a natural drive towards stabilisation and normalisation. This makes the crisis a particularly interesting case for investigations of factors that stimulate or hinder innovation. Summarising insights from different strands of innovation literature (Dogruel, 2015; Furseth & Cuthbertson, 2016; García-Avilés et al., 2018; 2019; Hendrickx & Picone, 2020; Krumsvik et al., 2019; Paulussen, 2016; Posetti, 2018; Steensen, 2009), we identify a set of internal factors that have been found to influence innovation, particularly relevant for investigations of news media's ability to innovate amid the pandemic. These factors have been constructed to bridge structural and individual perspectives of processes of innovation within a multi-level perspective of an organisation. As such, they serve as a framework which guides our empirical investigation in the following chapters of this book. Our framework includes six such factors, or building blocks, of journalism innovation: resources, technology, organisation, management, culture, and business model.

## Resources

In a media company, resources include both tangible and intangible assets in addition to financial assets. Intangible assets refer to a wide variety of resources including cultural property rights (e.g., the right to stream a sporting event), as well as brand value and reputation.

Tangible assets typically include the physical newsroom and other production facilities. Research on media innovation has been concerned with the impact that the physical newsroom has on innovation, specifically the integration of print and online operations in newsrooms and how this could stimulate creativity as well as synergies in news production. The role of the physical newsroom gained renewed attention during the Covid-19 pandemic, as it became unavailable to news workers and was replaced by remote working practices due to social distancing regulations (García-Avilés, 2021). The

report *Changing Newsrooms 2020* (Cherubini et al., 2020) predicts that hybrid newsrooms will soon be the norm for most news organisations.

Financial assets include all forms of cash or credit that can be invested in innovation. Spending on research and development is often presumed to be connected to increased innovation and sustained financial performance (Furseth & Cuthbertson, 2016). Several media innovation studies have identified lack of resources as a major constraint to the adoption of innovations in the newsroom (Paulussen, 2016), and the news industry's comparatively low investments in people, competency, and technology are considered restrictive to innovation among news media (Nielsen, 2021). However, the relationship between financial assets and innovation is not straightforward, as observed in organisations that are both big and resourceful but still lagging in the digital transformation of their industry (Furseth & Cuthbertson, 2016).

## Technology

Technology includes a variety of platforms and tools for news production, news presentation and distribution, customer management, and more. Technology has been described both as a broad type of innovation in and of itself as well as a “transversal element, which influences all the areas where innovation is implemented” (García-Avilés et al., 2019: 5).

García-Avilés's (2021) review of media innovation research sums up a wide variety of technologies that have facilitated the implementation of innovative news media offerings and production processes, from computational journalism – which automates parts of the content creation, production, and personalisation of journalistic processes and seeks to derive value from algorithms, Big Data, and online analytics – to the emergence of drone journalism and immersive 360-degree video – which creates new genres of visual journalism and human–computer interaction, enabling the audience to interact with news content through spoken commands.

There has been an increasing interest in how technology makes it possible to connect with others to create value in a network type of innovation, as described in studies on user-generated content, audience participation, social media, multimedia, and interactive actors (Belair-Gagnon & Steinke, 2020). Others have demonstrated how technological advances, such as data and computational journalism, mobile journalism, and web analytics and metrics, represent innovations in how news media create and distribute content (Boyle & Zuegner, 2017; Karlsen & Stavelin, 2014; Posetti, 2018; Willemsen et al., 2021).

## Organisation

Organisation is a broad category that includes a media organisation's employees as well as organisational structures, routines, competency, and communication practices: It relates to how the media company is organised (Krumsvik et al., 2019). From the seminal work on newsroom innovation by Boczkowski (2005) to more recent research in the field (e.g., García-Avilés et al., 2019; Hendrickx & Picone, 2020), it has been emphasised that innovation requires the integration of both people and resources in processes of change. A key point here is that innovation arises from practice within flexible organisational structures, as described by García-Avilés and colleagues (2019). Research also emphasises the importance of digital competency and training to ensure the diffusion of various technological innovations is successful (Belair-Gagnon & Steinke, 2020). However, the priority given to building such competency differs between news organisations (Krumsvik, 2015).

The organisational aspect is also central to how people communicate and cooperate within the organisation. For example, there is considerable research interest in the coordination and collaboration between various departments within the media organisation, such as the newsrooms and the information technology department, and how this dynamic affects innovation (Westlund et al., 2021). According to García-Avilés and colleagues (2019), the most innovative media outlets foster interaction between various departments and sections in the media organisation, harness the power of change agents inside and outside the newsroom, and nurture flexible workflows that encourage the spread of innovative culture and a more risk-tolerant mindset. Organisational structure, workflows, routines, and lines of command can be seen as resources that form part of the innovation process. Some news media have implemented innovation departments or labs for experimenting and developing innovative ideas and projects regarding technologies, content, audiences, and editorial formats. According to a study by Zaragoza Fuster and García Avilés (2022), the level of innovation in such projects depends on the talent and creativity of the members as well as the collaborative culture, while internal bureaucracy can slow down innovation.

## Management

The upper echelons of news organisations need to establish structures and processes that harness creativity and stimulate innovation, including internal communication, coordination among organisational units, and balancing tensions, according to García-Avilés (2021). In Norway, these responsibilities could belong to a dual management model of an editor-in-chief and a managing director who plan, organise, and lead the organisation. With both reporting to a board of directors, as joint chief executives, the editor-in-chief

is then responsible for the editorial department and the managing director for sales and marketing. In many newspapers, the same person fills both roles, functioning as publisher, according to this media system.

Previous research on management in journalism has found that routines and norms can make it difficult for management to introduce new priorities (Appelgren, 2021), and that newly appointed journalists tend to support changes by management while veterans struggle to adjust (Bunce, 2019). Media managers have been found to be risk-averse and reluctant to change in their organisations (e.g., García-Avilés et al., 2019; Lowrey, 2012; Paulussen, 2016), and they are often “inclined to let others be the first to test the digital waters” (Pavlik, 2013: 184). According to Groves and Brown (2020), reflective leaders balance strategic thinking with the risk of innovation by allowing news organisations to develop new routines that fit in the context of the existing culture. Changes in journalistic practice will be less likely to become established if the news workers do not appreciate the connections between their efforts and the management’s strategies for change (Boyle & Zuegner, 2017) or if the leadership style fails to motivate journalists to keep up with change (Appelgren, 2021). The lack of strong leadership, particularly communication deficits, could create substantial tension and resistance toward newsroom innovation among the editorial staff (Hendrickx & Picone, 2020; Steensen, 2009). Similarly, the absence of a clear strategy that promotes specific goals has been described as a key obstacle faced by journalists when it comes to innovating (García-Avilés et al., 2019; Groves & Brown, 2020).

## **Culture**

Culture encompasses norms, values, and traditions that could either stimulate or hinder innovation (Hendrickx & Picone, 2020). Porcu (2020) described a certain social climate that stimulates outside-the-box thinking among news workers. She conceptualised this as an innovative learning culture that stimulates people to work and learn together, to grow individually and as a group, to experiment, and to be creative. This is facilitated by leadership that provides people with the autonomy needed to be flexible through open communication, mutual trust, a supporting culture, shared goals, and appreciation of individual achievement, training, and development.

However, the media innovation literature has shown that there is also substantial scepticism towards change among media managers, as well as journalists. As claimed by Paulussen (2016), established journalistic work cultures tend to have a braking effect on innovation processes. Several studies have confirmed that newsrooms are slow to innovate and adopt new technology (e.g., Hendrickx & Picone, 2020; Lehtisaari et al., 2018), largely due to a professional culture that resists change (Paulussen, 2016; Sacco &

Bossio, 2017). When “well-rooted practices and preferred work patterns dominate” (Villi & Picard, 2019: 128), there is a clear obstacle to innovation in news media (Karlsen & Stavelin, 2014; Cestino & Berndt, 2017).

Several studies have described how new norms of journalism challenge the boundaries and professional identity of journalism, ultimately resulting in resistance to change (Belair-Gagnon & Steinke, 2020; Goyanes & Rodríguez-Castro, 2019). Journalists have been found to resist innovations on moral grounds, as they may threaten journalistic and ethical principles (García-Avilés, 2021). For example, Usher (2014) described how journalists are confronted with moral and ethical dilemmas, as values such as immediacy, interactivity, and participation are promoted as new ideals of journalism.

## **Business model**

The concept of a business model is not clearly defined in the research literature on media and journalism. In economic research literature, a business model represents “the money-earning logic of a firm” (Osterwalder, 2004: 47). For commercial news organisations, this means integrating resources into a marketable service that generates revenue from audiences and advertisers, while simultaneously minimising costs. A business model is thus essentially about value creation. It captures how a commercial news provider makes money from a product and service offerings by meeting new or emerging customer needs, improving customer experiences, and engaging in deeper relationships with customers. For audience customers, this encompasses qualities such as trustworthiness, exclusivity, context, and depth of reporting, as well as ease of use and speed, to mention a few. Innovation could be an improvement in such customer experiences as well as the introduction of new ones that may improve audience engagement with the news and help news publishers nurture deeper relationships with their audiences.

As described by Evens, Raats, and von Rimscha (2017), the research on media business model innovation has covered a range of different business model innovations, from the introduction of online paywalls and monetisation of audience data to crowdfunding models for journalism. Although this research shows some promising new revenue streams, the persistent issue of funding remains, and innovation alone is unlikely to remedy it (García-Avilés, 2021; Olsen, 2021).

The persistent crisis discourse surrounding news media largely revolves around this underfinancing of journalism as a service to individuals and society at large. Developing a sustainable business model that can simultaneously provide value to individuals and society, while also creating economic value for news operations, is one of the key challenges facing the news media today.

## Summing up crisis, resilience, and innovation

What we have aimed to establish in this chapter is an understanding of journalism innovation that does not treat technology and the introduction of “bright, shiny things” (Posetti, 2018) as its key objective. Nor do we promote a view which reduces innovation to a matter of profits and market shares for the news business. Instead, we have aimed to describe how innovation in journalism is essentially about value creation for audiences and broader society, as well as for the media organisation itself. This approach presents a broad view of innovation by combining public service ideals of journalism, the needs and wants of audiences, and the interests of news operations, including news workers. The latter group – journalists, editors, developers, programmers, and others who are involved in creating new and improved service offerings – are, as previously noted, internal stakeholders in the innovation process, while audiences and society at large are external stakeholders. The innovation perspective we have outlined relates to multiple internal factors that either drive or impede value creation. In our perspective, value creation is the explicit purpose and direction of innovation.

However, innovation does not take place in a vacuum. Rather, it unfolds in relation to broader contextual trends, and there is a need for expanding the theorising of innovation to new fields related to change and transformation (Malmelin et al., 2021). This is especially true while operating in highly institutionalised environments encapsulating the norms, standards, and expectations of relevant stakeholders, as in the case of journalism. We explore innovation in the context of a sudden, dramatic event under high uncertainty and threats: the Covid-19 pandemic. We have outlined how a crisis such as the pandemic could act as a catalyst for change and introduced the concept of resilience as the ability to respond to an external shock, by means of innovation, either in radical shifts, incremental changes, or improvements. We have organised resilience along three dimensions: persistence refers to the ability to regain stability or get back to normal; adaptability refers to an organisation’s ability to adjust in response to the shock and change some parts of the organisation, while others remain stable; and lastly, transformability refers to a long-lasting radical renewal of the whole organisation.

In this chapter, we suggest that innovation depends on the complex interplay between factors related to structure, agency, and technology (e.g., Dogruel, 2015; Paulussen, 2016; Steensen, 2009), the internal dynamics at play in news organisations (Kueng, 2017), and external factors, such as a crisis influencing innovation to build resilience. The next empirical chapter explores various aspects of this interplay.

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# Innovations in resilience strategies during the Covid-19 pandemic

MONA K. SOLVOLL

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE, BI NORWEGIAN BUSINESS SCHOOL, NORWAY

## ABSTRACT

This chapter addresses innovation initiatives in Norwegian news media in response to the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020. Based on a mapping survey among 24 top and middle Norwegian news media managers, the analysis reveals three strategies for coping and recovering from a crisis: bouncing back, bouncing forward, and bouncing beyond. Several news media bounced back from Covid-19 in a swift recovery from the crisis while maintaining and improving existing activities through incremental innovations. Other news media bounced forward by absorbing the crisis and exploring innovation possibilities in new service offerings, distribution channels, and markets. A few news media bounced beyond, suggesting that news media adapted to the crisis by digitalising the newsroom and reorganising towards more service-based mindsets, community engagement, and value co-creation.

**KEYWORDS:** resilience, news media, innovation, crisis, media managers

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## Introduction

Crises can be turning points for news media organisations (Quandt & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2021). To survive a crisis, media organisations often need to change by coping with adversity, risk, and uncertainty (Bakken & Brinkmann, 2022). In this chapter, I discuss how Norwegian news media responded to the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020. Combining the two concepts of resilience and innovation, the chapter provides an understanding of how innovative initiatives during a crisis can help news media “build back better” (Williams et al., 2017) and emerge stronger and even more resourceful than before a crisis. The chapter is based on a mapping survey among 24 top and middle Norwegian media managers from 24 news media organisations. The sample represents the broad and diverse field of news media in Norway, including the two public service broadcasters, ten national news media, six regional news media, and seven local news media.

A crisis often represents a serious threat to an organisation’s survival. For some organisations, crisis management is about maintaining stability by restoring equilibrium and bringing the organisation back to the pre-crisis stage (Wildavsky, 1988), that is, bouncing back. On the other hand, a crisis may offer learning opportunities and allow an organisation to grow by adapting to changing markets and technologies (Euchner, 2019), as in bouncing forward. Lastly, an organisation may use the crisis as an opportunity to strengthen and develop parts of its core business and dismiss others. In the last scenario, the crisis represents an even bigger opportunity to grow, change direction, and even thrive amid adversity. This is bouncing beyond. The nature of an organisation’s response to a crisis in any of these three ways “critically depends on the capacity to enhance improvisation, coordination, flexibility, and endurance – qualities that we typically associate with resilience” (Boin et al., 2010: 11). Thus, resilience is an organisation’s capacity to absorb disruptive surprises and recover from disturbances (see also Rudningen, Chapter 3; Krumsvik & Francis, Chapter 7).

Resilience is embodied in the existence of resources, people, finance, technology, ideologies, routines, and structures. These capabilities also serve as the basis for innovation ability (Furseth & Cuthbertson, 2016). As both resilience and innovation ability are based on the same types of capacity, they are inextricably intertwined (Euchner, 2019). Resilience could be a source of innovation or act as an organisational form supporting innovative processes. Resilient behaviour from persons or teams can, for instance, improve the chances for successful innovation. On the other hand, innovation could also be essential for resilience in terms of how an organisation responds to a crisis and grows stronger through challenges. Recovery in terms of “built back better” often suggests that the organisation has the potential to emerge stronger and more resourceful than before (Williams et al., 2017). Innovation plays a key role in this process.

Addressing the overarching topic of the book, news media's ability to respond to external shocks and create new and improved value for their stakeholders, I ask how Norwegian newsrooms initially recovered from the pandemic and what characterised the recovery process in terms of resilience. Doing so sheds light on news media's innovation ability in the face of crises. To analyse innovation in resilience strategies taking place during the Covid-19 pandemic, various types of innovation initiatives are identified and the relationship between these innovations and the resilience of news media strategies, activities, and mindsets is explored.

## Theories of innovation and resilience

### Innovative practices in the news media business

Existing literature on media innovation usually distinguishes between product innovation, process innovation, innovation in market position, and paradigmatic innovation, or the 4 Ps (Francis & Bessant, 2005). While Krumsvik and Francis (Chapter 7) explore and extend this framework, in this chapter, I employ the original "4 Ps of innovation" framework.

Product innovation refers to changes in the products a news media organisation offers its customers. Moreover, there is concrete production of service offerings, as news media start adding more and more advanced services to their original products. As outlined earlier in this book (see Chapter 1), the concept of servitisation is well-known in marketing and business management studies, but the perspective of *media as service* has been rare in media management studies (Viljakainen & Toivonen, 2014). Nevertheless, the intangible benefits of news (information, knowledge, and entertainment, for example) have always been at the heart of news media's offerings as "experience goods" (Viljakainen & Toivonen, 2014).

Servitisation also reflects a movement of the organisation from being product-centric to service-centric, as well as the adoption of a value-oriented mindset, highlighting customer value and customer collaboration. This is sometimes referred to as process innovation and changes how products and services are created and delivered (Francis & Bessant, 2005). This may include newsroom practices that rely more on audience metrics or interaction between journalists and users. Process innovation also includes digital workflow in the newsroom and the use of technology when communicating and collaborating.

In addition to product and process innovation, the media innovation literature includes position innovation, which refers to (products' and services' position in markets (Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013). This requires attention to brands, target customers, and competitors. Some researchers view servitisation as a new competitive strategy for media companies with regard to market position (Viljakainen & Toivonen, 2014); for example,

news media can obtain a competitive advantage and profitable growth by offering users new value beyond the conventional context. The value offerings arise from understanding and responding to users' problems, needs, and wants.

The fourth kind of innovation, paradigmatic innovation, can be defined as the field of innovation that includes changes in mindset, values, and business models (Santos-Silva, 2021). The process of servitisation also includes changes in an organisation's value proposition (Viljakainen & Toivonen, 2014) and movement toward a viable new business model for the industry (Chen et al., 2021). It includes a renewal of how the news media view their audiences and how they are transforming the traditional two-sided business model by involving both technological and organisational changes (Dogruel, 2014). The distinction between the four types of innovations may not always be clear, as they are often intertwined and take place at the same time. Moreover, one type of innovation may come across as incremental changes over a long period of time, while another innovation may take place as a sudden, new, and radical change. To better understand the four types of innovation, particularly how a crisis may reduce or increase an organisation's ability to create value, I turn to resilience theory.

### **Resilience to crisis: Bouncing back, forward, or beyond**

Applied in several fields, the concept of resilience has become increasingly important to understanding how people and organisations cope with and recover from crises (Bakken & Brinkmann, 2022; Wildavsky, 1988). The basic assumption of resilience is that systems need to change to survive a crisis, first by recognising the complexity and uncertainty of a crisis, and second, by handling the situation (Bakken & Brinkmann, 2022). For instance, according to a Reuters Institute report in November 2020, remote working practices have made media organisations more efficient, although respondents also worry about the Covid-19 impact on creativity and on building and maintaining team relationships (Cherubini et al., 2020). A resilient organisation may be considered immune, flexible, or productive in the face of disturbances and disruptions.

The concept of adaptation features several process-oriented definitions of resilience (see also Olsen & Solvoll, Chapters 1; Rudningen, Chapter 3). Adaption suggests that organisations can master the disruption and use uncertainty as a positive resource. The latter plays an important role in studies of resilience, as attributes of uncertainty are the ability to thrive, nurture optimism, and capitalise on opportunities to improve. Hence, resilience may also be conceptualised as the ability to emerge from adversity as a strengthened and more resourceful organisation (Degbey & Einola, 2020). The resilience literature has identified three main types of resilience: bouncing

back, bouncing forward, and bouncing beyond (Martin, 2012). These are three “ideal” response strategies organisations may use during a crisis. Some organisations may use a mix of these strategies, different strategies for different levels of their organisations, or even different strategies at different times during a crisis.

Resilience as bouncing back focuses on the resistance of a system to disturbance and the speed of return to its pre-shock state, that is, to maintain continuity. In this context, resilience may work as a “shield” that is both flexible and hard to break, allowing threats to bounce off. The shield allows the organisation to carry on with its usual activities and plans and protects the organisation from interventions and setbacks produced by the crisis. The resilience dynamic is like a punching bag, which can absorb impacts and withstand heavy punches, rather than a bouncing ball in chaotic motion. The organisation may experience some minor setbacks but can recover and bounce back quickly to continue its normal activities. This type of resilience includes immunity, robustness, and flexibility to uphold strategic plans regardless of external disturbance. In the context of innovation, bouncing back is mostly concerned with incremental product and process innovation along prevailing paths, which often lead to continuity (Isaksen & Trippel, 2016).

Resilience as bouncing forward refers to positive adaptability and a focus on an organisation’s ability to move forward following a shock while maintaining some of its structural stability (preventing the organisation from collapsing) – in other words, adapting to a new normal. This resilience strategy can also be thought of as elastic storage, “measured by the magnitude of disturbance or shock that can be absorbed” (Martin, 2012: 7) before the structure of the organisation changes (Holling, 1996). Like shock absorbers on a car or shock-absorbing shoe insoles, the bounce-forward strategy absorbs energy and controls unwanted and excess motion. In this situation, an organisation’s flexible structures allow for culture, routines, and workflows to adjust to the crisis, but simultaneously offers stability, preventing the whole system from collapsing. How much disturbance and the degree of shocks an organisation can absorb depend on the stabilising structures of an organisation. Some organisations can endure big crises and many disturbances, while others are more fragile and easier to knock over. Bouncing forward implies a certain degree of organisational change and innovation to both absorb the crisis and stabilise the organisation. An organisation that has experienced a crisis before may, for instance, be more adaptable when a new crisis occurs and would have the ability to handle radical innovation processes during the crisis. Other organisations may struggle to absorb the crisis and spend all their resources implementing small, incremental changes.

Lastly, resilience as bouncing beyond is also centred on the notion of positive adaptability, but with directionality focusing on reorientation of mindset and a long-term restructuring and renewal of the entire organisa-



tion (Martin, 2012). Bouncing beyond has a different scope and duration than bouncing forward: it is about responding with significant changes and adapting with new systems (Boin et al., 2010), suggesting that there is no turning back for the organisation. Viewing resilience as a deliberate process suggests that robust systems are also enabled to change without perishing. A suitable metaphor to illustrate this strategy is modelling clay, which can completely change its form when exposed to external influence, while remaining modelling clay.

In this empirical study, I draw on the theoretically informed concepts from the literature on resilience and innovation types, as presented above. Having theoretical concepts available helps adopt a more narrow and deductive approach to coding by creating a matrix that identifies different types of innovation and resilience strategies. The first part of the matrix consists of the four types of innovation: product, process, position, and paradigm (Francis & Bessant, 2005). The second part of the matrix applies the three resilience strategies: bouncing back, bouncing forward, and bouncing beyond. When using a structured matrix of analysis, we can systematise, analyse, and understand the relationship between innovation initiatives and resilience strategies during the Covid-19 crisis. In the following, the matrix of resilience strategies and innovation initiatives is used to analyse how Norwegian news media responded and coped with the Covid-19 crisis, applying the data and methods described below.

## Methods and data

To identify resilience strategies, I examined innovation initiatives in 24 Norwegian news organisations. Data was collected in qualitative interviews focusing on innovation initiatives during the early phase of the Covid-19 pandemic in Norway. The sample of respondents represents the broad and diverse field of news media in Norway, including the two public service broadcasters (NRK and TV 2), nine national news media (*E24*, *Aftenposten*, *Dagens Næringsliv*, *Dagbladet*, *Klassekampen*, *Dagsavisen*, *Vårt Land*, *Nationen*, and *Nettavisen*), six regional news media (*Nordlys*, *Romerikes Blad*, *Fædrelandsvennen*, *Stavanger Aftenblad*, *Adresseavisen*, and *Bergens Tidende*), and seven local news media (*Jærbladet*, *iFinnmark*, *Avisa Nordland*, *Telemarksavisa*, *Fredriksstad Blad*, *Bergensavisen*, *Drammens Tidende*). Managers with both editorial and business functions were contacted. In smaller newspapers, eleven editors-in-chief answered our questions; in bigger organisations, we talked to either news editors (5), development editors (3), the chief innovation officer, the managing director, the digital editor, the digital news executive, or the vice president for production, news, and sports. The

interviews were carried out in January 2021, either by telephone or e-mail. Nine news media had net circulation below 25,000, six had between 25,000 and 40,000, five had between 50,000 and 110,000, and four had above 250,000 (MediaNorway, 2021; Høst, 2021). Net circulation refers to both digital and print publications and includes subscriptions, digital newspapers, single sales, and combinations of these.

Informants were asked one question about the kind of innovations their news media initiated during the Covid-19 pandemic. This broad and open question allowed the informants to freely talk about activities, products and services, processes, mindsets, and working practices. If necessary, a few follow-up questions were asked for clarification or elaboration. The telephone interviews lasted for about half an hour. Notes were taken during the interviews and transcribed immediately to facilitate a detailed mapping of innovation initiatives. Quotations (translated to English) are not attributed to specific informants because several informants asked for anonymity.

### **Analytical design**

The theoretical framework of resilience strategies and innovation types has been converted into a coding framework. The number of codes is limited, as is common in the deductive coding approach, but still flexible and open for adjustment if something new and interesting emerges that existing codes don't capture (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Inspired by the approach adopted by Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2013), the data was coded in three cycles. The first-order informant-centric analysis included descriptive codes about statements related to activities, actions, opinions, and processes, as well as repeated phenomena, surprising data, or things stressed as important by the informant. In the second more analytical cycle, the data was sieved and coded according to Francis and Bessant's (2005) understanding of the four types of innovation (see Table 2.1). Combining descriptive first-cycle codes and theoretically informed categories allows for analysing the connections between similarities and regularities in patterns.

**TABLE 2.1** Analysis according to innovation type

<b>Innovation type</b>	<b>Activities, actions, opinions, and processes</b>
Product	Product developments (apps, podcasts, newsletter, content, etc.) Service developments as (advanced) add-ons (live tracker, streaming of events, webinars, press conferences)
Process	Utilisation of audience data Remote working practices Digital meetings Resources development and coordination Cross-functional interactions Restructuring of newsroom roles, communication, and activities Digital competence development External collaboration
Position	Audience-centred strategies Redefining customers' needs, problems, and demands Cross-selling and bundling of products Social media strategies Explore new customer segments (children and young adults) Develop content for niche audience groups From print products to digital products Establishment of new online news websites
Paradigm	New mindsets Development of business models Multimedia offerings Value co-creation with customers and partner networks Stronger integration of activities and departments

Next, data were brought together by creating categories on a more abstract level according to the three resilience strategies. This completed the matrix and allowed exploration of patterns across codes, as presented in Table 2.2.

**TABLE 2.2** Matrix of resilience strategies and innovation types

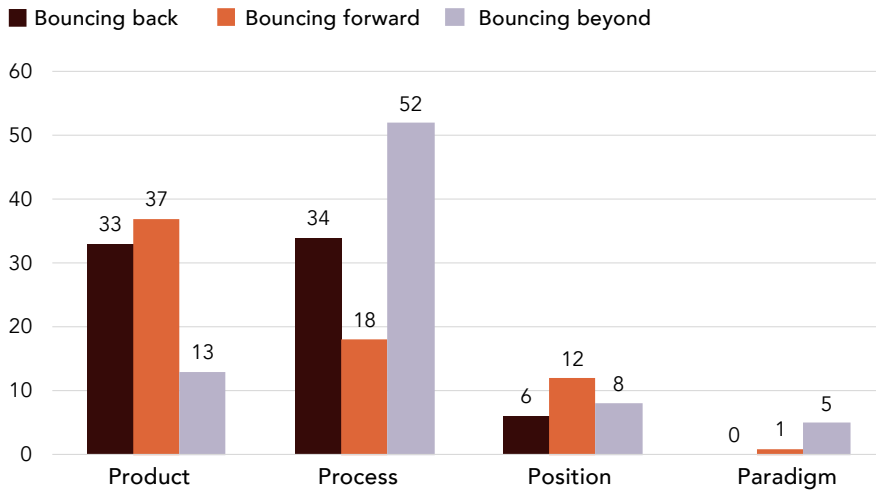
Innovation type	Resilience strategies		
	Bouncing back	Bouncing forward	Bouncing beyond
Product	Improvement of existing products and services	Development of new digital products and services	Value co-creation Servitisation
Process	Securing existing activities Resource flexibility Digitalisation to simplify and streamline activities Digital competence development Adapting newsroom practice and structure	Service-oriented thinking Audience-first strategy Co-existence of existing and new activities Application of lessons learned Challenging professional standards and norms More interdepartmental collaboration	Remote work Digital workflow Virtual management Computational newsroom Stronger integration of departments
Position	Maintenance of existing distribution channels and markets	Development of new networks, distribution channels, and markets	Introducing new offerings Community engagement
Paradigm	Maintaining stability Incremental changes	Process development Radical changes	Development of sustainable business models Complete restructuring of an entire system

## Results of the analysis

The mapping of innovation initiatives in the 24 Norwegian news media reveal a high level of innovation activity across the three resilience strategies, ranging from product and service development and organisational changes to repositioning in markets and overall industrial developments. After the mapping, these initiatives were manually counted and summarised. An estimate suggests that the bounce-back strategy is mostly used within product and process innovations, bounce-forward dominates in product

innovations, while the bounce-beyond strategy is extensively used within process innovation. There are only a few initiatives categorised as position and paradigm innovations (see Figure 2.1).

**FIGURE 2.1** Innovation initiatives across innovation types and resilience strategies



Comments: n = 219

The mapping of the activities as bouncing back, bouncing forward, or bouncing beyond depend largely on the informants' own reflections of whether a certain activity was part of an existing activity or a new activity and whether they regarded it as an incremental change (small improvements) or a radical change, which also included collaboration with external actors. Most news media were, for instance, already producing their own podcasts, so new podcasts launched during the pandemic were simply viewed as small improvements of an already existing product, and therefore mapped as bouncing back. Other news media used podcasts to target new market groups or niches, which were viewed as a radical reorientation, and subsequently mapped as bouncing beyond.

### Bouncing back by maintaining continuity

The focus of a bounce-back resilience strategy is to uphold existing activities in existing markets to achieve stability. In terms of innovation, this is exemplified by small improvements to news platforms (*E24, Klassekampen, Stavanger Aftenblad, Aftenposten*), introducing new sections of content (*Dagbladet, Aftenposten, NRK, TV 2, Nordlys*), information pieces (*Romerikes Blad, Fredriksstad Blad*), debate pages (*Adresseavisen, Nettavisen*), podcasts

(*Stavanger Aftenblad*, *Bergens Tidende*, *Adresseavisen*, *Aftenposten*, *Dagens Næringsliv*, *Vårt Land*), and app development (*E24*, *Dagens Næringsliv*). Most of these product developments were incremental changes aimed at the news media's core users in existing markets. The most extreme version of bouncing back is for a well-positioned organisation to remain unaffected by the impacts of Covid-19. For example, the newspaper *Nationen* started to implement an innovation project for boosting their digitalisation process in September 2021 and continued throughout the pandemic, reaching more digital users and subscribers, and developing digital content and differentiated services for specific target groups. This also included working with new teams of journalists, developers, and interactive designers. Podcasts and apps are examples of product developments that were not driven by the pandemic. For the last four years, both commercial and independent podcasts have flourished, and today, most news media offer podcasts within their field of interest. A couple of podcasts introduced, though, were directly linked to the pandemic. For instance, the regional newspaper *Stavanger Aftenblad* launched "Smellen" to shed light on how Covid-19 affected young people in the region of Stavanger. The newspaper *Aftenposten* expanded its news for children (*Aftenposten Junior*) by adding two podcasts for children, both addressing issues related to the pandemic.

Overall, incremental product developments included a tremendous acceleration of already ongoing digitalisation processes in newsrooms (*Telemarksavisa*, *Avisa Nordland*, *Bergensavisen*), streamlining of work processes (*Nettavisen*, *Stavanger Aftenblad*), creation of more aligned organisations and better use of resources (*Bergens Tidende*, *Klassekampen*, NRK), and changing prioritisation (*Romerikes Blad*, *Nordlys*, *Stavanger Aftenblad*, *Klassekampen*, *Adresseavisen*). In 2020, the pandemic was the biggest news story across all media types, which led to increased prioritisation of breaking news about Covid-19, including statistics, background information, fact-checking, and live coverage of press conferences. Although these elements do not represent something new within journalism, they affected the organisation of journalists and their work routines, especially journalists who used to cover sports and cultural events, who had to find new areas to cover due to the uncertainty of access to their usual beats.

The product developments taking place in 2020 also included incremental digital competence development, often taking the form of "learning by doing" (*Nettavisen*, *E24*, *Fredriksstad Blad*, *Adresseavisen*, *Avisa Nordland*, *Jærbladet*, *Vårt Land*). In some of the news media, the use of digital courses increased during the pandemic, such as *Romerikes Blad*, *Aftenposten*, *Avisa Nordland*, and *E24*, to boost competence in different fields. In relation to online news videos, journalists executed the whole process, from the script, through recording and editing, to publishing. As some journalists (like sports journalists) had to cover different events than what they were used to before

the crisis, they developed their competencies, became more flexible, and learned to master digital tools. In *Bergens Tidende*, as one of the previous “live event journalists” suddenly had no events to cover, he used the free capacity to produce a new product, “Koronapodden”, a podcast with Covid-19 news, Q&As, and daily updates on information regarding the virus. Journalists in *Stavanger Aftenblad*, *Fredriksstad Blad*, and *Telemarksavisa* improved their skills in data journalism while working with data scraping and Covid-19 statistics. As emphasised by several respondents (*Vårt Land*, *Stavanger Aftenblad*, *Dagens Næringsliv*, *TV 2*, *Adresseavisen*, *Nettavisen*), journalists increased their multimedia competencies and used their smartphones to produce podcasts, videos, and publish photos. In particular, the television company TV 2 strengthened their ability to produce television programmes remotely. According to one informant:

Old dogs don't have a choice – they must learn new tricks. Journalists are no longer intimidated by using their mobile to produce, edit, and publish content. They are fully mobile and have become Inspector Gadget in the field. (Chief innovation officer, national online news media)

Most of these resilience activities were geared toward the maintenance or strengthening of existing market positions, for instance, the maintenance of existing distribution channels such as mobile news (*Stavanger Aftenblad*) or strengthening the relationship with target groups, such as parents and children (*Aftenposten*) and young adults (*E24*). Overall, the focus of the bounce-back strategy was on short-term readjustments to retain “business as usual” and rebound to a stable position. The Covid-19 pandemic led to an inevitable surge in news production, and most of the informants reported a tremendous acceleration of already ongoing digitalisation processes, stressing the need to respond to audience demand for up-to-date information. News media that executed a bounce-back strategy are characterised by a high degree of robustness, agility, and the ability to maintain business as usual amidst transformation.

### **Bouncing forward by adapting to a new normal**

The bounce-forward resilience strategy is found in the development of new digital products and services, such as the production of a “corona live tracker” that provided the cumulative number of confirmed Covid-19 cases and deaths per region or municipality (*VG*, *E24*, *Fædrelandsvennen*, *Avisa Nordland*, *Dagbladet*, *Aftenposten*, *Nordlys*, *Adresseavisen*, *Stavanger Aftenblad*), streaming of events (*Aftenposten*, *Avisa Nordland*, *iFinnmark*, *Jærbladet*, *DT*, *Adresseavisen*, *Stavanger Aftenblad*, *Bergens Tidende*, *E24*), and a live news studio (*Dagbladet*, *Aftenposten*, *Bergens Tidende*, *Drammens Tidende*, *Stavanger Aftenblad*, *Dagens Næringsliv*, *Fredriksstad Blad*, *Jærbladet*). Although these types of innovations were part of the general digitalisation process within the media industry, they were radical for most of the news

media in this study. In particular, the innovations reflect a movement of the service system from being product-centric to service-centric, as well as the adoption of a value- and service-oriented mindset that highlights customer value. It illustrates well how resilience as bouncing forward can be understood as the ability to maintain the purpose of an organisation while adopting new ways of organising. A digital editor from a regional news media described the experience as follows:

Taking a public service role in the region of southwest Norway by acting as the town square, where people could gather to access useful and helpful information in addition to experiencing streaming of press conferences, concerts, church services, business conferences, etcetera.

In presenting massive amounts of digital data related to the pandemic visually and comprehensively, some of these innovations played out as service journalism, in which news media provided users with information, advice, and help about issues related to the pandemic. Several informants (*Bergens Tidende*, *Fædrelandsvennen*, *Nationen*, NRK) claimed that producing “pandemic news” helped them develop a better understanding of how to address their audience, either by explaining complex issues regarding Covid-19, providing Q&As, participating in the news media’s online comment sections, or creating a visual presentation of large statistical data.

Service-based journalism also took the form of live news studios and streaming events in addition to live corona trackers. These were extremely resource-demanding projects and were high-risk, without a definite long-term plan or endpoint. Nobody knew how long the pandemic would last or how it would affect society. Several of these projects developed at their own pace, acquiring more and more resources. The corona live tracker developed by VG soon became the most popular source of information about the pandemic in Norway, particularly since the government did not provide such a service for the public. It was initiated by one developer and one journalist on 4 March 2020. In a few days, the live service reached 1 million daily visits, and on 12 March, the day Norway experienced its national lockdown, VG registered an all-time high of 4.6 million visits (Online Journalism Awards, 2020). The exact and visual live update page quickly became a must-have tool for both the public and the Norwegian government, and the staff exceeded 40 people within a short time, including both news reporters and the editorial development team. In smaller news media, too, covering the pandemic was both time- and resource-consuming:

Journalists worked systematically every day collecting information about Covid-19 from eleven municipalities’ chief medical officers and mayors of the area. One of the journalists has sent 1,500 text messages to the municipal chief medical officers. (Managing director, regional news media)



Some newspapers (*E24*, *Dagens Næringsliv*) expanded the live corona tracker with, for instance, information about temporary layoffs and dismissals and the impact of Covid-19 on stock markets, gross domestic product, and currency markets. This combination of producing new types of services and at the same time carrying out normal activities, both in terms of breaking news and investigative journalism, is a good example of positive adaptability within the bounce-forward strategy.

Videos are another example of this resilience strategy. Before the pandemic, few of the smallest newsrooms were familiar with live video presentations and live transmissions. This changed dramatically following the outbreak of Covid-19. For instance, in November 2020, *E24* launched breaking news video updates twice every day. Another example is *Dagens Næringsliv*, which broadcasted more than 300 live transmissions with news videos in 2020, increasing the traffic to video content by more than 80 per cent compared to before the pandemic.

These types of innovations were often linked to reorganisations of the newsroom (*Nordlys*, *DT*, *Jærbladet*, *Avisa Nordland*, *Vårt Land*, *Bergens Tidende*) and collaboration across departments (*Nationen*, *BA*, *Fredriksstad Blad*, *Adresseavisen*, *Dagens Næringsliv*, *NRK*, *VG*). Editorial developers, designers, and concept developers were brought closer to the newsroom to create comprehensive journalism. At *Dagens Næringsliv*, the front desk collaborated with the subscription unit, focusing on value delivery through better audience experiences.

Several of the informants stressed the importance of live news studios with news presenters and regular broadcasts, illustrating how the news media gradually moved away from print-based articles to live video coverage. As an editor-in-chief from a regional news media explained:

We have done live-streaming in the past but realised live images became more important during Covid-19, for example, through daily press conferences. We also live-streamed a church service, which quite a few people saw, and several concerts. In addition, *Bergens Tidende* took the initiative to revive the festival Vill Vill Vest [Wild Wild West] in digital format, broadcasted on bt.no. This provided new knowledge and opened more external event collaborations in the future. It gives *BT* a different role than we would otherwise have, for example, in terms of broadcasting concerts.

Such organisational changes are characterised by a co-existence of previous experiences and new activities. Several of the news media organisations were already in a rather flexible and absorbing mood for change. The pandemic boosted these trends, for instance, the use of Big Data in journalism and more live video coverage. A few newsrooms (*Bergens Tidende*, *E24*, *Dagens Næringsliv*, *Aftenposten*) introduced differentiated newsletters and applications during the pandemic. At first, newsletters do not seem particu-

larly innovative, but they alter the daily work of some journalists in online newsrooms. More importantly, as newsletters are more personal channels of communication, they offer the newsroom a better opportunity to build a relationship with readers and increase their engagement with online news. In sum, the bounce-forward resilience strategy may help develop new audience markets (e.g., young people), as in the case of *Stavanger Aftenblad*, *E24*, and *Dagens Næringsliv*; new distribution channels (NRK's use of Snapchat and *Jærbladet*'s use of Facebook and Instagram); or boost digital instead of print (as in the case of *Nationen*, *Telemarksavisa*, and *Klassekampen*), with the main purpose to provide stability to the news organisation.

### **Bouncing beyond by restructuring and reorientation**

The third way to innovate, bouncing beyond, is about the co-creation of value, community engagement, stronger interdepartmental collaboration, and restructuring the organisation. In the ideal form, servitisation permeates all operations of the organisation. For instance, this strategy takes place by developing new services and products in close relation with people outside the newsroom: municipalities, artists, and the audience. Most news media are familiar with user-generated content, and during the pandemic, this initiative increased through services such as “The Corona Help” (*Fædrelandsvennen*, *Agderposten*), “The COVID Map” (*Dagbladet*), and “The Corona Round” (*Romerikes Blad*), or simply by asking the audience for pictures, videos, and content as restrictions made meeting with sources unlikely. For instance:

“The Corona Help” was created as a public involvement matching service. Some people bought groceries for the elderly or performed other types of labour for their most vulnerable neighbours. (News editor, regional news media)

The public service broadcaster NRK launched an interactive participation section on their website the day after the lockdown began, called “NRK answering”. During the first month, NRK answered 20,000 questions about the pandemic from the public. Community engagement as a bounce-beyond strategy was described by some respondents as collaboration with external actors (*Stavanger Aftenblad*, *Nettavisen*, *E24*, *Vårt Land*, *TV 2*, *Adresseavisen*). Virtual “corona concerts”, in which news media streamed live concerts in collaboration with artists and municipalities, turned out to be a win-win situation for all parties. Live-streamed concerts, festivals, Christmas carol events, religious services, and more, were regarded as highly successful events for all news media, and several of them will continue providing coverage of such events post-pandemic. Other types of services developed during the Covid-19 pandemic were digital conferences and webinars, for example (*Dagens Næringsliv*, *E24*, *Adresseavisen*, *Aftenposten*). According to both *Dagens Næringsliv* and *Aftenposten*, a large event portfolio was forced to adopt a

virtual model overnight, but the news media managed the transformation creatively, technically, and financially.

The bounce-beyond strategy also includes radical changes and the restructuring of an organisation amidst a crisis. In this study, the biggest change for all the informants was the massive shift to remote work, digital workflow and online meetings. Again, the news media organisations were not unfamiliar with digital technology, but the lockdown following the pandemic's outbreak forced *everybody* in the newsrooms to work digitally and remotely. The forced shift was most evident in the case of the public service channel TV 2. As the pandemic turned television production upside down, TV 2 established remote production solutions within just a week, allowing technicians, programmers, news anchors, and journalists to broadcast television programmes from home. Highlighting Covid-19 as a kind of catalyst for the increasing use of (partly new) digitalisation in organisations, most informants stressed the benefits of such transformation (more work-life flexibility, improved digital workflow, streamlined processes, better cooperation, more effective formats and meeting structures, improved digital communication, and increased productivity), claiming that the digital workplace fostered a culture of belonging and community (*Stavanger Aftenblad*, *Nettavisen*, *Nationen*, *Avisa Nordland*). Some informants claimed that the reorganisation of the newsroom was the biggest innovation process instigated by the pandemic. At *Bergens Tidende*, old departmental divisions were replaced with new project groups working across the whole organisation, in which both managers and journalists were assigned new tasks and responsibilities. Similarly, the newspaper *Nordlys* divided the newsroom into three large groups, each with a separate editorial focus. According to an editor-in-chief from a regional news media,

the pandemic accelerated an already intended clean-up of work division and work shifts. [Organisational] silos were broken, and people are working together across departments. The tripartite division will continue after the pandemic.

The reorganisation at *Nordlys* quickly led to a changed mindset and more flexible working practices, as people work with different tasks. A similar regrouping of the newsroom took place in the newspapers *Avisa Nordland*, *Vårt Land*, *Bergensavisen*, *Dagsavisen*, and *Romerikes Blad*.

The most extreme example of bouncing beyond in crisis is represented by the digital-only news media in the sample. When noticing that Covid-19 fuelled a surge in online shopping, on 12 March, *Nettavisen* established an online shop selling books, chocolates, games, and home accessories. The news media also launched math learning games and a club concept (Curious), where users buy memberships to access various activities and services. In addition, *Nettavisen* holds an open editorial meeting via the social media app Clubhouse, founded in April 2020, allowing the audience to pitch an idea or topic to the editors.

Within the bounce-beyond strategy, there were radical efforts to increase services to the audience by offering the possibility to pay via mobile payment application (*E24*), adding a social media editor to expand the news media's social media coverage (*Klassekampen*), and operating as a community platform matching people in need with neighbours able to help (*Fædrelandsvennen*). Both *Aftenposten* and *Dagens Næringsliv* offered podcasts, webinars, and newsletters during the pandemic aiming at niche target groups and topics (e.g., management, wine, career, marriage, seafood, cars, and politics). However, only one informant addressed changes in the business model explicitly, when claiming that growth in digital subscriptions compensated for the decline in advertising and that journalism had become more important than ever, suggesting that a renewed strategy may have emerged in the news media where he worked.

Summing up the analysis, news media initiated a range of innovations across areas of product and service development, ways of working together, positioning processes, and the basic orientation of news media (see Table 2.2). Most changes took place as process innovations in terms of digitalisation, adapting new newsroom practices, and implementing a service-oriented mindset. Moreover, process innovations took place in close relation to innovations within products and services, both in developing and in improving digital products and services, suggesting that one news media organisation can display various innovation initiatives. In terms of resilience strategies, the analysis reveals rather even distributions between bouncing back (73 initiatives), bouncing forward (68 initiatives), and bouncing beyond (78 initiatives) (see Figure 2.1), although bouncing beyond is more at play in process innovations. One could therefore argue that a news media organisation could experience bouncing beyond in process innovation in terms of remote work, digital workflow, and online meetings, and bouncing back in product innovation as incremental changes of existing products and services.

## **Discussion: Robustness, adaptability, and restructuring**

This analysis informs existing research in media innovation by identifying product, process, position, and paradigm innovation initiatives across three resilience strategies (bouncing back, bouncing forward, and bouncing beyond) for coping and recovering from a crisis.

Bouncing back is characterised by resistance, robustness, and the ability to quickly return to pre-crisis activities. According to Stark (2014), robustness is paradoxical: Sometimes, the more things change, the more they stay the same, while other times, things must change to stay the same. The latter argument explains why this study identified many product and service innovations along with the extensive process innovations as part of the bounce-back

strategy. Several news organisations were forced to accelerate the ongoing digitalisation process of their journalistic practices to cope with the unique challenges of the pandemic, as also noted by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (Cherubini et al., 2020). Norwegian news media managed, however, to bounce back quickly – often overnight or within a week – suggesting that they were ready to embrace the challenges of Covid-19. Following two decades of digital transformation, the news media was highly adept at responding and changing at a rapid pace. This robustness is also characterised by the ability to build the “capacity for resilience” (Degbey & Einola, 2020) and the newsrooms’ capability to change their work practices – which in turn sustained the performance of the news media. The crisis seemed to have brought out the best in the news organisations, focusing on the importance of traditional journalistic values in serving society, and the greater good. Although the analysis suggests that the bounce-back strategy led to continuity, it does not suggest path extension in terms of stagnation of constraints (Isaksen & Trippel, 2016), but rather a conservative approach of “doing journalism as usual” (García-Avilés, 2021).

Compared with bouncing back, the notion of bouncing forward is to see a crisis as an opportunity and a game-changing moment, as described by Quandt and Wahl-Jorgensen (2021) and Euchner (2019). The optimistic disposition of bouncing forward enabled news media to carry through long-term changes through adaptation to a new normal. Such organisational adaptation to changes in the environment is vital for a company’s survival, to stay competitive and at the forefront, and for organisational learning. Under normal circumstances, cultural resistance is often considered the biggest hurdle for newsroom innovations in terms of changes in journalistic practices (García-Avilés, 2021) and service transitions of product innovations (Findsrud, 2020). Concerning the Covid-19 crisis, the bounce-forward strategy embraced the paradox of change and stability, meaning that stable structures, such as culture, enable adaption while simultaneously ensuring security and consistency that prevents the organisation from collapsing. For instance, achieving successful service innovation is challenging and demands an agile approach to resource integration (Findsrud, 2020) and co-creating value in terms of changing practice, organisational learning, and experimenting (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). This suggests that, although many innovative activities taking place during the crisis may not endure and succeed amid crisis, they are as important as “learning by doing” and as “trial and error” adaptive practices (Wildavsky, 1988).

Bouncing beyond is characterised by the ability to adapt resources and skills to the renewal of an entire system and includes signs of both radical and disruptive innovations in the organisation. To develop sustainable organisations during the lockdown, all the news media in the sample quickly implemented digital meetings, remote work, digital workflows, and hybrid

work practices. Although the purpose of this digital transformation in some cases was to maintain the structural stability of the organisation to prevent it from collapsing (bounce-forward ability), some of the news media claim this resilience strategy changed the entire organisation's culture, mindsets, and structures. Such a reorientation towards service-oriented value creation includes a renewal of how the news media view their audiences (Costera Meijer, 2020), in addition to transforming the traditional two-sided business model away from advertising and towards user subscription.

Stressing that bouncing beyond is a strategy for coping with the crisis, the analysis does not reveal any information about long-lasting resilience and the development of this working paradigm post-pandemic, for instance, in terms of hybrid work models. As argued by Boin and colleagues (2010: 8), "a true mark of resilience is thus the ability to negotiate flux without succumbing to it". However, speaking of a new normal after the pandemic suggests that the way of living and working will not return to the way it was before the pandemic. The news media have built a more digitally enabled workforce and boosted more sustained cross-departmental collaboration, strengthening data journalism and advanced multimedia journalists.

## Conclusion

Part of the ambition behind this book is to unpack news media's ability to innovate and to understand how news media organisations navigated the crisis as it unfolded in Norway. This chapter sheds light on the early and critical phase of the pandemic in 2020, where resilience acted as a source of innovation by supporting innovative processes, particularly within incremental product and service developments and organisational changes. As the data come from only 2020, long-term effects can't be suggested, but the findings suggest responses loaded with innovation initiatives, both in terms of product and process innovations. Position innovations were much less, and paradigm innovations were hardly identified, because such innovation types belong to larger transformational processes of a complete restructuring of a media system, business models, and organisational mindset.

For most news media in Norway, the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital technologies and digital ways of working (remote and/or collaboration). Although digital technologies were implemented in most newsrooms before the pandemic, the crisis accelerated the pace and depth of digital transformation. In addition, the crisis advanced the way news media viewed their audience, paying more attention to user needs and wants on an ever greater and more thoughtful level than before. An audience-first approach, together with digital technologies, enabled a move from a product-oriented to a service-oriented newsroom, through which news media provided services and solutions to users, helping them cope during the pandemic. However, some changes brought about by the pandemic may

not endure, as they involve uncertainty and risks. Setbacks and failures will challenge the surge in digitalisation that happened during the pandemic, such as digitalised workflow, new practices, more agile organisations, strengthening collaboration, and the breakdown of traditional departmental boundaries.

Furthermore, resilience is about navigating both existing and future crises. For many of the respondents, leaning on bounce-back initiatives, the main goal was to maintain continuity and uphold existing activities. As a result of the robustness and flexibility associated with this resilience strategy, most of the news media managed a speedy recovery from Covid-19. A different strategy towards recovery was the path towards change. Some of the news media bounced forward successfully by turning the crisis into an opportunity for large improvement. In these cases, the organisations absorbed disturbance and adjusted their workflow, routines, and competencies. The endurance of changes caused by the pandemic is associated with the last resilience strategy, bouncing beyond, and the renewal of the entire system. Whether the effects of the pandemic may linger and how short-term changes on individual, team, and organisational levels become sustained in the long term remains to be seen. This study underlines the positive organisational learning outcomes, as Norwegian news media emerged stronger and different after the pandemic than before it.

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# Positive renewal in newsrooms through crisis in crisis

GUDRUN RUDNINGEN

WORK RESEARCH INSTITUTE, OSLOMET, NORWAY

## ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study explores how the Covid-19 pandemic was an occasion for sensemaking and for (re)organising newsroom practices. Interviews with both journalists and editors from three Norwegian newsrooms in May 2022 demonstrate how the Covid-19 crisis was experienced as an opportunity for positive renewal and innovative ways of organising. The pandemic reinforced the ongoing changes in the media ecosystem and was hence viewed as a “crisis in crisis”. This chapter reveals the lived experience of the pandemic, and the findings offer an enriched understanding of how the crisis created opportunities for collective efforts and differentiation of modes of organising work guided by flexibility, creativity, autonomy, and solidarity.

**KEYWORDS:** newsroom, sensemaking, resilience, crisis in crisis, renewal

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## Introduction

I wonder – because you’re getting really fed up with corona, I’m sick of corona. Is there anyone who can bear to read what you come up with? Or is it just going to be put in a drawer until someone is ready to read it?

The above question was posed to me by a journalist, in the middle of an interview, engagingly talking about the experience of being a journalist during the Covid-19 pandemic. This was two years into the pandemic, when lockdowns and much of the news interest in Covid-19 had come to an end, and many looked forward to a “new normal”. The quote addresses several interesting issues explored in this chapter: first, that Covid-19 is understood as a state of emergency, an isolated period one wanted to leave behind but that had some lasting effects; second, the state of mind among news workers when this research was conducted and how they perceived the pandemic narrative’s end; and third, an awareness of the epistemic value of studies *of* and *during* the Covid-19 pandemic, and what can be taken from them.

This book’s main question – How did Norwegian news media respond to the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of innovation and value creation? – is addressed in this chapter by considering how the pandemic created opportunities for different modes of organising and innovation relating to work practices seen through narratives and insights from three Norwegian newsrooms during the Covid-19 pandemic. The findings are summarised in the concept of “crisis in crisis” based on how members of the news organisations experienced the pandemic as a crisis in an already existing crisis narrative – seen as both an occasion for (re)organising and a catalyst for positive change. The Covid-19 pandemic was hence experienced as meaningful, an experience that also ties to increased readership and motivation by the social responsibility aspect of their work. The initial excitement and work spirit was followed by a backlash, and this study shows how the enduring effects of the crisis encouraged collaborative efforts of innovation in journalistic work modes. These effects of remote and flexible working conditions formed a sensitivity to different modes of working creatively and collectively and a higher level of trust between editors and journalists, resulting in experiences of increased autonomy and solidarity. This chapter contributes to a wider understanding of how crises motivate different modes of organising in a situation in which the context of available technology, governmental regulations and recommendation, and organisation’s ability for resilience set the premise.

## Theory and background – the “crisis in crisis”

Crisis is normally perceived in negative terms as the condition of disorder that follows the plot of rupture (Roitman, 2013). In this chapter, however, the aim is to enrich our understanding of the term crisis by exploring the Covid-19

pandemic as a possibility for positive renewal, leaning on the empirical material and existing theory of crisis (e.g., Turner, 1969; Weick et al., 1999). Crisis is a well-known concept, found in everyday speech as well as used (or maybe sometimes misused) in explaining the time we live in – “an omnipresent sign in almost all forms of narrative today” (Roitman, 2013: 3) and a key theoretical concept in modern society (Koselleck, 1959/1988). If we look at the etymology of crisis, tracing it back to ancient Greek, we arrive at the term *krinô*, meaning to separate, to choose, to decide, and to judge. Interestingly, this meaning of the term indicates creation of order. However, the term appears to be currently understood as the condition of disorder creating particular narratives, meanings, responses, and actions (Roitman, 2013). In organisational studies, the definition of crisis is highly fragmented, but folds into two main conceptualisations: crisis-as-event and crisis-as-process (Williams et al., 2017). Whereas the first reflects sudden incidents, threats, and disasters that cannot be planned for and responses seeking to get back to equilibrium, the latter regards crisis as developing over time, forming a new order and reflections. In a process-oriented view of organisational change, these are not necessarily exclusive perspectives. It is “the reweaving of actors’ webs of beliefs and habits of action as a result of new experiences obtained through interactions” in the attempt to prevent changes that actually generates them (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002: 570). Organisations are first and foremost stabilising chaos (Hernes, 2014). This theoretical lens is applied here to understand that change is fundamentally embedded in organisations, with organisations defined by a continuous becoming through human interaction.

To actively use the concept of crisis as a nexus for ethnographic investigation and analysis in relationships between persistence and change is not new in social sciences (Beck & Knecht, 2016), but in the global context of the Covid-19 crisis, existing literature falls short of fully understanding the complexity of the pandemic’s effects (Sarkar & Clegg, 2021). And even though news media have always been in flux, characterised by continuous uncertainty (Deuze, 2008) and continuously facing new challenges and reorganisations (Breese, 2015), the Covid-19 crisis is considered a critical moment to “rethink the meaning and practices of digital journalism”, and additionally, the research of it (Quandt & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2021: 1204). Crises are powerful occasions for sensemaking, both during and after a crisis, as they trigger creative and alternative reasoning despite the normal flow of events being disrupted (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Crisis always comes with some threats (Frandsen & Johansen, 2016), but crisis can be looked upon as encouraging a positive renewal through which new social order can be established (Turner, 1969), a precondition of hope: the awareness of multiple possibilities and the willingness to act under such conditions, “even embracing situations of uncertainty” (Kleist & Jansen, 2016: 383) and provoking positive adjustments through resilience (Weick et al., 1999).

In this book, the concept of resilience is applied to understand organisational change during crisis. We differentiate between three dimensions of resilience: first, persistence is the ability to regain stability or to get “back to normal”; second, adaptability refers to the ability to adapt or adjust; and third, transformability refers to a long-lasting radical renewal of the organisation (see Olsen & Solvoll, Chapter 1; Solvoll, Chapter 2). Thus, resilience is about collaborative sensemaking and (re)organising. In this chapter, I investigate crisis-driven innovation that takes place in newsrooms during a crisis in crisis.

The concept of crisis in crisis is based on how the informants in this study considered the Covid-19 pandemic as a crisis-as-event in an already pre-existing crisis-as-process – in other words, an isolated rupture in a prolonged chronic crisis. The grand media crisis narrative attests to the long period of economic instability and disturbance in the established news ecosystem over the last decades: an economic, political, and social crisis (Curran, 2019) marked by massive losses in revenues for print journalism, but also by technology-driven development, new forms of distribution (e.g., through social media), global competition, new user habits, and new media actors. Worldwide, the structures within which journalists operate have undergone fundamental changes during the last decades, and Norway is not an exception. However, Norwegian newspapers are market reliant yet publicly funded. They are operating in a well-established media system with institutionalised self-regulation, strong protection of press freedom, and a tech-savvy, news-reading population. Even though there is scholarly scepticism towards naming the period a crisis (Zelizer, 2015), the emic understanding of the state of the art these years attests to a chronic crisis, that is, that the conditions are endemic rather than episodic: Crisis has become the context (Vigh, 2008).

Recent studies of journalism assert how the Covid-19 pandemic has altered journalism, “facilitating the changes that were already taking place, creating new challenges and opportunities, exacerbating existing problems, and so forth” (Lee, 2021: 1433), and points to a crisis that became immersed in the changes that were already taking place (complying with the crisis in crisis concept). There is a vast body of recent research from all over the globe emphasising the effect Covid-19 has had on journalistic practices; in the US (Finneman & Thomas, 2021; Hoak, 2021), Australia (Hess & Waller, 2021), Europe (García-Avilés, 2021; García-Avilés et al., 2022; Libert et al., 2022; Šimunjak, 2022), Asia (Tandoc et al., 2022; Zhang & Wang, 2022), and Africa (Matsilele et al., 2022; Ndlovu & Sibanda, 2022; Santos & Mare, 2021). These studies mirror many of the findings presented in this chapter, and I draw on some of these insights throughout.

## Method and data

This chapter draws on empirical data from three Norwegian news organisations: one local, one regional, and one national newspaper. The organisations are different in terms of newspaper reach, but similar in terms of organisation: with approximately 30 employees each, 36,000–76,000 daily readers, and owned by larger media companies. In addition, the organisation of work and challenges faced in the last decades and during the Covid-19 pandemic have been alike. In this chapter, I thus emphasise the similarities across newsrooms, rather than differences. In the years leading up to the pandemic, all newspapers went through a digital transition towards a focus on the online version of the newspaper with new digital tools, reorganisation of the newsrooms, and new digital business models (Rudningen Skjælaaen & Bygdås, 2019). The three newspaper organisations were part of a research project called OMEN – Organizing for Media Innovation (2015–2019) (Bygdås et al., 2019). I draw on insights from that project, but the chapter is mainly based on 15 semi-structured one-to-one interviews conducted in May 2022, most of them done face-to-face, but some on Microsoft Teams. Four to six interviews were performed in each organisation, and interviewees included management, journalists, and the union leader among the journalists. These interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes, in which the interviewees were asked to recall the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, recapitulate the events that took place, and reflect on how these events affected newsroom work practices, relations, and cooperation.

The interviews were transcribed and analysed based on an inductive approach and a methodology inspired by grounded theory, in which theory is built in a flexible and innovative way (Gioia et al., 2013). The analysis is empirically based and thematically structured, and this chapter has been written around the codes that arose from the material (e.g., “motivation”, “social responsibility”, “fatigue”, “collective practices”, “meaningful”, “media crisis”, “sources”, “tools”, “trust”, “flexibility”, and “hybrid meetings”). The quotes for each code were the starting point for writing the analysis, and the themes were inspired by these codes and quotes. Some of the themes derived directly from one code (e.g., social responsibility), others were joined together (e.g., flexibility and collective practices; and meaningful and readership). Interview excerpts quoted in the chapter have been translated to English, and informants are anonymised in line with the guidelines for research ethics for social science and humanities (National Research Ethics Committees, 2021).

The timing of these interviews is crucial for a full understanding of the empirical data of the chapter. In May 2022, the “new normal” following the pandemic had started to take form, yet there was still uncertainty about what this meant. During the two years of occasional lockdown (March 2020 to March 2022), all newsrooms had ongoing reorganisation projects initiated

*before* the pandemic, for instance, moving to new premises, new owners and collaborators, new systems and technology, new working routines, and new colleagues – circumstances that have affected them independent of Covid-19. Hence, this study cannot be isolated from the wider political, economic, and social context and processes it is part of. My informants found it difficult to determine what was to be regarded as a direct consequence of the pandemic and what was not. However, they noticed that Covid-19 “accelerated”, “triggered”, “nurtured”, “boosted”, “hindered”, and “stopped” various aspects of working life. These words indicate that ongoing reorganisations experienced changes due to Covid-19.

In the following, the chapter follows the narrative of the pandemic from the perspective of news workers – from the excitement of covering a once-in-a-lifetime event in the beginning, through the period of news fatigue and endurance, to what the journalists and editors will take with them from their working experiences during the pandemic. The narrative captures the experience of a crisis in crisis that paved the ground for new ways of organising that is outlined before a discussion at the end.

## **Making sense of the crisis for positive renewal**

### **When the pandemic hit – motivating excitement**

You remember it very well; it is a very special experience. (Journalist)

All informants remembered exactly what happened the day everyone was ordered to work from home, 12 March 2020, when then Prime Minister Erna Solberg called for “the largest intervention in our time”: a national lockdown in Norway. In the interviews, my informants spoke in detail about the first lockdown. Some drew parallels with other events, like one of the editors: “To put it bluntly, it was almost like the war in Norway. There was such a great professional will to work journalistically with this”. A journalist had the same experience as on the day of terror in Oslo and Utøya in 2011:

I worked the evening shift July 22. It was somewhat the same feeling I had on March 12; I have not been involved in anything like this before. It is a completely unreal situation. It gives a kick in a way.

There was also excitement and feelings that what was happening was beyond belief. One of the editors put it like this:

The first phase was an adrenaline rush. We felt we were part of something big, something that would shape both our careers and lives forever. It produced motivation and inspired journalists, at least in relation to that large workload. There was no problem getting anyone to work.

A journalist gave a similar description:

In the emergency phase, we were surprised, relieved, and satisfied. It is a bit of an adrenaline boost when so much happens and everyone clicks on our page and there is a need for information. When it's bad for others, it can be good for us in the media, in a somewhat cynical way. It was acute and dramatic, but I remember it as a positive time, the first few days anyway. We managed to make a newspaper from home, and it somehow went beyond all expectations.

Even though many found the outbreak of Covid-19 exciting and compared it with other events, many experienced it as a “cosmology episode”, to use Weick’s term (a *vu jàdé*, i.e., the opposite of *déjà vu*): “I’ve never been here before, I have no idea where I am, and I have no idea who can help me” (Weick, 1993: 633–634). Events like these are especially triggers of sensemaking, as they disrupt the ongoing activities in the organisation and thereby impel participants to make sense of them and act (Weick, 1995).

Interviewees described the adrenaline rush as ambiguous, as it was accompanied by worries. Many Norwegian newsrooms experienced an immediate cancellation of advertising revenues and had concerns about funding news production (Olsen et al., 2020). One of the editors in charge was sitting next to a sales employee and told me: “We looked at the ads. They leaked, meaning they were cancelled. They just disappeared. We saw all cancellations ticking in, and the money was gone”. The editor continued to talk about the absurdness of the situation and said that it was difficult to envision the consequences at the start, but “it hasn’t gotten as bad as we feared at first, rather the opposite”. Worries were also connected to infection control and how they were going to organise the work. Another editor recalled all the questions and worries in the first phase of Covid-19: “One thing was that we should work from home, but how are we going to do our work? What can we do and not do? Shall we meet sources? It was a completely untested situation then”. This narrative is summed up well in this quote from a journalist: “It was a bit panicky, what do you do, right? But it went surprisingly fine”.

When the restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic began, all newsrooms experienced that they were well equipped for starting to work from home, mostly due to technological upgrades, recent courses, and well-working digital communication (e.g., Slack, Google Hang-out, Microsoft Teams, and the planning tool Trello). Still, the pandemic took them by surprise:

Although we had been warned, it happened suddenly. I was impressed how incredibly well we got things to flow with communication, right from the start. You know, it is the same PC, but you are sitting at home. It was a very big transition for everyone. (Journalist)



“Surprised” and “impressed” are words that echoed through the interviews: “I never thought that we would make it work, to make a newspaper in that way. We went digital in every possible way” (Editor). All three newspaper organisations had experienced a massive digital transformation during the previous decades, and especially in the most recent years. An editor said that if it had happened half a year earlier, their organisation would have been in trouble, and that newsrooms had practiced working from home just a day in advance, to be prepared: “It suddenly became reality, then it hit us. The exercise became practice from day one”. This illustrates that during a crisis, sensemaking often occurs through “thinking by acting”, characterised as an immediate sensemaking in the present (Weick, 1988). Given the timing of the interviews, the informants also indicated sensemaking in retrospect, reflecting on how they were working:

We just hung onto the wheel that turned and turned and turned. In hindsight, we could certainly have taken a step back and gotten better quality out of it by structuring ourselves a little better in the initial phase. (Editor)

Many of the editors were in the process of evaluating the state of Covid-19 coverage and work at the time of the interviews, as they considered the crisis as something to learn from at that point: a good occasion for re-organising. At the start of the pandemic, there was a paradoxical nature between the loss of income engendering an existential anxiety and finding the work meaningful.

### **Accelerated growth – meaningful work**

Many found it exciting, when it’s something happening; your work is read and important to the public; the figures just exploded all the time. (Journalist)

During the pandemic, most newspapers in Norway had growth in readership and subscribership, alongside a slight increase in trust (Jortveit, 2022). As with many other news providers all over the world, especial on digital platforms (Pavlik, 2021), my informants agreed with the sentiment that “news media in times of crisis matter more than ever” (Van Aelst et al., 2021: 1225). The informants underlined how the need for news was experienced as motivating and highlighted their social responsibility, particularly for one local journalist: “For once it was the societal mission in centre, not just missing cats and small accidents”. All three newspapers had worked towards digital subscribership in the years leading up to the pandemic and witnessed this development accelerate: “We surfed a huge wave because we had many stories and all were well-read, and all the curves pointed upwards” (Editor). Another editor asserted the following:

The boost in the media started long before the pandemic because the digital business model has worked, which means that people in Norway choose to pay for editorial news content. Therefore, we have a far better financial foundation than we did a few years ago.

Many informants talked about Covid-19 as being helpful for the digital transitions and digital subscribership. For instance, a journalist stated:

Corona has helped to get more readers online. We have forced digitalisation on our readers when we have invested less in print. But in addition, with corona, it accelerated, went faster than we had hoped for.

During the pandemic, readers increased their digital competence, and consequently, digital subscribership grew. The three newspapers in this study have experienced that though the numbers have decreased after the pandemic, the willingness to pay for news has continued. An editor spoke about it similarly: “Corona helped the newspaper organisations. Now that the dust has settled, we have managed to retain and bring out a few more readers”. The above quotes highlight how respondents considered the pandemic crisis as a catalyst for change.

Even though the pandemic itself produced a large supply of news stories for immediate publishing, it did not necessarily boost journalism. One of the editors addressed this issue directly: “If I’m honest, much of the journalism was very simple. After all, we received press releases about infection numbers and deaths. Pretty basic journalism”. Even though the crisis became a source of increased news interests, it was “one dimensional”, in which the main interest was reduced to numbers of contamination and deaths.

However, since the whole community was shut down, press conferences, digital lectures, and national meetings – everything – was streamed digitally. Thus, it was easier to work journalistically from home:

There was not a journalistic challenge to cover things and it was easier to have source meetings since it was natural to talk on the PC or phone. It was a lower threshold for interviewees to talk digitally, not so scary anymore” (Journalist).

This was considered positive, but infection control affected journalism, as it was forbidden to meet people for long periods and required to keep a distance of two meters; for example, one couldn’t take the photographer in the car, podcast studios with guests had to be closed, and interviews had to be done over the phone or computer. An editor addressed the disadvantage of not meeting sources:

It is not positive for journalism. We constantly work on these issues because you are missing out so much. And, you don’t know *what* you are missing out. If you meet sources, in two out of three cases you’ll get something more. So, we constantly work to resist the temptation to make it too easy for ourselves.

A journalist who was covering Covid-19 said that with digitally streamed meetings, “you don’t get the feeling in the room, you can’t approach anyone during a break, or accidentally meet someone. You cover what is happening, formally. But getting that good or unique angle is difficult”. Both journalists and editors who were interviewed pointed out that the pandemic didn’t help journalism as such, but that it triggered motivation to improve:

Now it might be the other way around, after such a time of endurance, you think it’s a little more worth the effort to go out and meet people, maybe a little more, actually, than before the pandemic. (Editor)

### **Social responsibility – handling the news interest**

To handle their social responsibility and to convey all information, the studied newsrooms organised differently in relation to reach and readership. The regional newspaper created a live news studio with journalists dedicated to Covid-19 news, which was always on the front page of their online edition. The news from municipalities they cover were always on top of their website, with many municipalities sending press releases directly to the newspaper. They also provided opportunities for the public to ask questions. The live studio was active throughout the pandemic but was especially important at the start. Readers didn’t need a subscription to view content from the studio, which attracted a lot of readers. People visited daily, “not necessarily to read anything concrete, but to confirm that nothing new had happened” (Editor). Readership increased and page views “went through the roof” (Journalist).

In the local newspaper, a separate news desk handled all Covid-19 coverage. The desk was established just before the outbreak of the pandemic, and it was staffed with seven employees working shifts, seven days a week. The municipality’s press conferences were live-streamed every day, with two journalists physically present: “It was also a good way for us to get hold of sources. We knew that once every day, in the morning, they were there to answer questions” (Editor). It was open for the public because they saw it as part of their social responsibility. The journalists who had attended the press conferences processed the information and made “plus stories” for subscribers. An editor acknowledged that “it was a very good move. We got a lot of new subscribers. In that sense, it was a success and underlined the importance of all media in Norway when something really happens; how important local newspapers are”. The employees at the local news desk were not sent to work from home: “It was maybe the biggest decision we made then”, according to one editor. In this newsroom, they considered it almost impossible to operate properly without having an operational place where the journalists who handle the current news picture could cooperate. A journalist elaborated:

It has never been such unity, exchange, and professional discussion. It was challenging because it had to go very fast and there were tough stories. But we became more confident, got more feedback all the time, stories were read, we did something important. Many learned a lot and became very motivated.

Many journalists experienced a shift in their experience of working from home after a while. The narratives from the informants became blurrier after the first experience. One editor addressed it clearly: “It becomes a bit of a blur after a while. A lot of back and forth”. The two years melted together in one narrative of coping and testing various new ways of working. After the first phase, many noticed the draining experience of lockdown. This brings us to the second aspect of the dominating newsroom narrative: the backlash.

### **The backlash – enduring the crisis**

We thought it was only going to last a short while, you know. You can’t keep the spirit of hard work (“dugnadsånd”) going for ever. (Editor)

This experience of struggle and endurance applies to all three newsrooms. From one journalist’s perspective, “working from home was good at the start, but eventually we noticed that it affected efficiency. You had a bit of extra energy at the start, but it faded since the routines are not the same when you sit at home all day”. The value of routines was revealed in the interviews, confirming previous findings in the sociology of news (Shoemaker & Reese, 2013), especially in the form of “routinising the unexpected” (Tuchman, 1973). During the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a new awareness of what kind of (digital) infrastructure must be in place to change routines (Finneman & Thomas, 2021). In the newsrooms, daily routines structure the workday. A journalist discovered “how much you need to be connected to others – to have an environment around you to produce”. An editor put it like this: “There was a kind of wear and tear. Home office made creativity low; the digital meetings were uninspired, more silence. It was difficult to start major journalistic projects”. This mirrors the most important findings of a study among editors during the pandemic: the difficulty in motivating creativity (Appelgren, 2022). Another editor addressed the experience of being in charge and leading digital meetings:

It feels like you’re speaking into nothingness – a black hole, there’s no response, everyone was just sitting there. So, we felt that this is the world’s most pointless thing, but the feedback was that most of the employees wanted it.

Even though it felt “pointless”, the fact that the employees wanted it attests to the value of routines and doing journalism as usual during the pandemic (García-Avilés, 2021). The three newsrooms all conducted surveys about what

employees wanted, and they started different social events, for instance, a Friday quiz, with varied success. One editor underscored that “it gradually became clear that this was the way it was. It characterises the entire rest of the period”. Also, the same resignation was noticed among the audience: “There was a bit of news fatigue, too much of the same I think” (Journalist). News avoidance was found to protect feelings and improve well-being during the pandemic (de Bruin et al., 2021), and that it is inherently human – meaningful and situated (Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021). In addition, journalists themselves were exhausted by always being on guard and not being able to take a break from the news they were covering:

The journalists have had an exciting and important task, but personally it has been tiring, that you are unable to put it away – difficult to take a break because you are in it all the time. It has been exciting, educational along the way, but at some point, you get full, but you have to stick with it. Everyone has had their own experiences, but journalists have been in it all day every day. (Journalist)

The journalists pointed to the special situation journalists found themselves in: not being able to take a break from Covid-19 news. Other studies of journalists reporting on Covid-19 have found that the “emotional labour” can cause trauma amongst journalists (Jukes et al., 2022; Šimunjak, 2022) and that organisational support is important for stress-release and commitment (Hoak, 2021). Based on these experiences, the news organisations in this study started with different ways of (re)organising the work.

### **Modes for (re)organising: Flexibility, creativity, autonomy, and solidarity**

The renewals presented in the following came about due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated restricted working conditions, but they are not necessarily totally new. Rather, the crisis was an occasion for reorganisation, to experiment and gain new experiences from lingering in the inescapable situation. Most importantly, work restrictions and imposed work from home induced a sensitivity for which kind of work practice suits different tasks. As such, it became an occasion for learning and discerning how different tasks require different modes of organising. The advantages and disadvantages of the work forms (at home or from central offices) have become clear (for details, see Olsen et al., Chapter 6). In the following, four modes for organising are presented: flexibility, creativity, autonomy, and solidarity.

First, there was an opportunity to explore more flexible modes of organising work, where physical location was replaced by technology as a mechanism for cooperation and integration. The values of the different forms of working alone or together, whether at home, in a hybrid format, or physically present have been acknowledged. Most informants considered the flexibility of

working remotely a privilege that is probably going to last. Indeed, working from home is starting to be taken for granted: “If we had not been given the option of that flexibility, there would have been an uprising” (Journalist, union leader). The editors noticed this, as exemplified by one: “Journalists say: ‘today I’m just going to write these two things, then I’ll do it at home’. They didn’t say that before”. At the same time, they expressed that it cannot be taken for granted, as one editor noted: “We must be generous with each other. But no one must abuse it”. One of the journalists posed an interesting question: “I don’t think we’ll let it go completely, but it’s *how* one uses it that will be the issue going forward”. At the time of the interviews, the three newsrooms tested different hybrid and remote work models, from total flexibility to specific days that all employees were required to come to the office for physical meetings. The editors underlined that they were in a mode of testing that was going to last; flexibility in work forms call for flexible modes of organising.

Second, the Covid-19 crisis forced people to cooperate on different terms, for instance, in smaller groups and meeting in various places to walk while talking, which again created opportunities for discovering new creative practices as well as advantages with new modes of organising cooperation to advance creativity. For instance, due to regulations of social distancing, one was not allowed to meet more than five people in a room. In the local newspaper, editors and journalists met outside in small groups and walked together through the town while discussing ideas. They experienced that walking and talking generated new ideas, not only by meeting each other, but also, when walking through the town, they discussed the sites in front of them:

You don’t need to take notes, because you remember what you talked about when you passed the new house, right. We always come back with at least one idea for a new story. It is primarily for the psychosocial, but just as much for discovering new things. So, we’ve tried going to slightly different places. And there is something about our brain that works a little differently when you are not sitting in a meeting room. In here, there is nothing to rest your eyes on; nothing that activates anything. You are forced to sit and look at each other. It’s not very comfortable. You don’t get anyone to actually talk. We have been inside and at home so much. We will continue with going outside. It’s the best thing we take with us. (Editor)

Even after society re-opened, this team continued to walk together because of the experienced value for new ideas that strengthened their news coverage. All newsrooms had tried similar organising before with varied success, but during the pandemic, they were forced to experiment and to linger in new ways of organising for the future. Smaller groups were a necessity in order to get work done and for the psychosocial work environment, but these new ways of working proved to be successful beyond the requirement.

Third, the dynamics of how responsibilities are distributed have changed during the pandemic. As such, it was a process of reorganising the foundations of the trust relations at work through organising of the self and self-governing. A journalist talked about how this came about: “The first phase was not very well managed, but that was the best things; that I could manage a lot myself – a mixture of taking but also being given responsibility”. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the possibility to work from home was restricted in all three newsrooms. During the pandemic, the editors disclosed that employees not only delivered on time but delivered stories with high quality from home. A journalist expressed that “compared to before, many felt that managers did not have confidence in us. We feel they do now”. This led to a higher degree of self-management and autonomy among journalists. One of the editors put the demonstrated efficiency while working from home in relation to autonomy: “Journalists became quite efficient and structured when they were home alone. And they also became more independent. Which contributed to the efficiency, I think”. Correspondingly, there was higher trust among the editors and journalists in all newsrooms: “Everyone is incredibly responsible and takes on responsibility. I think the most important thing we learned is that it doesn’t matter where you work” (Editor). This was also recognised by the journalists: “You take responsibility when you gain that trust”. One editor admitted that has to do with technology:

It was more difficult to contact people before. Now we see in Teams that they have a green bubble: They are available. We can chat with them and see if they respond. If they go away from the screen and wash clothes, Teams will turn yellow [laughter]. It is very concrete. We see that they are at work without them sitting next to us.

With technological platforms, control can be negotiated in a way where trust is gained and given. Technology represents a confidence mechanism, in increasing the ease by which managers and co-workers can contact each other and in terms of opportunities for control for the editors.

Fourth, respondents underscored the sense of solidarity that the crisis brought forth. Whereas the economic disturbance of the previous decades divided the management and the employees, the pandemic was a crisis that brought the employees together across disciplines and rank:

It was a crisis we were in together, on all levels. That was not the case in other types of crises for economic reasons. We must figure it out together now, especially post-pandemic. That is different – such a sense of community. (Journalist)

Crisis is a reminder of solidarity for the wider community (Hess & Waller, 2021), also among news workers. The informants for this study put this in relation to the huge turnover among the staff during recent years in all

newsrooms, referred to as a generational change. They had recruited many new young journalists recently and thought that new colleagues change the work environment: “The new [employees] need a community. And then we discovered that everyone enjoyed the meetings, not just the new ones” (Editor). Together with a better economic situation, which started before the Covid-19 pandemic, it creates synergies that affects the work environment.

## Discussion

You have been able to see the best and worst during the pandemic. You have had time to think about it.

When you’ve been through something as serious as a pandemic, I think everyone looks at working life and appreciates working life in a different way.

Above, the interviewed editors point to the Covid-19 crisis as an occasion for sensemaking in which resilience and the ability to cope and respond to the crisis became clear. The crisis presented a turmoil in an already uncertain situation: The current ways of working were disrupted, and the newsrooms were compelled to find new ways of organising their work.

While operating in a high-risk environment, a robust finding is that it requires sensemaking for noticing, reflecting on, and understanding the significance of crisis, especially between employees and managers (Weick et al., 1999). Crisis is seen as an opportunity to assess an organisations’ ability of resilience (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2011), the interactive process of sensemaking, acting, and changing – a process of organising.

This chapter illuminates the Covid-19 pandemic as a crisis in crisis, indicating a crisis-as-event, defined as sudden incidents, threats, and disasters that cannot be planned for, in an already established crisis-as-process developing over time. The crisis-as-process was the context for the newsrooms when the pandemic hit: They were already in a mode of resilience. More specifically, they were in a process of reorganising the way they organised their work for the digital era. All newsrooms point to this state as the backdrop for being equipped to handle the Covid-19 crisis.

To understand the concept of crisis in crisis, it is necessary to consider the grand media crisis narrative that has encompassed the newspaper industry since the Great Recession, which has even been found to change the meaning of the very word crisis for some in the industry – as crisis has become the norm (Frandsen & Johansen, 2016). An editor put it this way:

Ten–fifteen years ago I feel it was more dramatic. Because then you closed the entire business base for all the media houses throughout Norway. So, my experience is that [the financial crisis] was much, much more upheaval than the pandemic. Being employees was much more tiring because of the



uncertainty. You didn't know if you had a job. That was the reality. Back then I sat with the PC in my lap the whole time, mostly using Excel sheets to count everything: What will it take to avoid having to fire someone now? Or give a severance package? The two years now of course have been full of misery, for instance, because of redundancies in the marketing department. But, in many ways, we have managed to use the pandemic to grow, to become more digital in the way we socialise and have meetings. We have new working methods and ways of organising. Both we and others have managed to get a lot of benefits out of it. It applies to working life in general. I want to believe that. Then we'll see if the way we do it now is the right way.

The media crisis effected both editors and journalists. A journalist recalled this state: "We were afraid of losing our jobs back then, but now there is more trouble finding good journalists to hire. The wind has totally turned". Another journalist gave the following description of the experience after Covid-19:

I have a feeling that it's all-time high now – financially, technologically, the quality of what we deliver. I didn't work in the 80s, but it's never been so good to work in a newspaper as right now. The pandemic was a crisis, but not a crisis for the media. It only contributed to positive development in the media companies: a development that one had already seen in relation to getting the reader over to digital platforms. In that sense, the pandemic has changed a lot for the media industry.

This quote addresses how the pandemic was not necessarily experienced as a crisis-as-event within newsrooms, but rather as influencing a crisis that the news organisations already found themselves in – accelerating effects that were already taking place and regarded as meaningful. However, this study has shown that during the pandemic, the modes of organising were different than previous reorganisation projects. The regular set of actions were limited, confined, and untested. It has been acknowledged that "the pandemic has disrupted how people take action" (Christianson & Barton, 2021: 574): The pandemic interfered with what kind of actions were possible, but also the way actions are taken. For instance, rather than highlighting different perspectives, editors and journalists made sense together for responding to the situation they found themselves in. The mode of reorganisation was collectively motivated since everyone was "in it together". The crisis in crisis constituted a necessity of active and deliberate collaborative efforts of organising, with a closer interaction and connection between employees of different professions and rank in an experimental mode. Paradoxically maybe, their resilience was inherently collaborative, and there was a higher level of solidarity and sense of community even when they were socially and physically distant.

The Covid-19 crisis created an occasion for differentiation of modes of organising, and with that, a sensitivity towards different dimensions of re-

silience: what practices worked (persistence), what practices ought to be adjusted (adaptation), and what practices should be totally changed (transformation). There seemed to be a collective sensemaking process of the differentiation of the dimensions of resilience, rather than on specific isolated reorganisation projects. The experimental phase of improvisation and testing laid the ground for reflections, insight, and narratives based on the current experiences of new practices. Since resilience is fundamentally about action and sense to be synchronised – to be resilient, we must make sense of the actions we enact – the pandemic offered an opportunity to see the best and worst and to encounter this in practice. In this process of reordering work, different practices were employed as they unfolded and emanated, offering an expanded understanding of what is gained and what is missed by different modes of organising. The pandemic instigated more flexible working conditions, reorganisation of collaborative and creative work, an occasion for emergence of trust, increased autonomy for the journalists, and a higher degree of solidarity among all employees in the newsrooms.

Thus, the crisis in crisis was constituted, on the one hand, by the creation of order (and the term's original meaning: to separate, to choose, to decide, and to judge), and on the other, collective sensemaking of the condition of disorder (current denotation of crisis). In other words, resilience in crisis is about creating order in a collective experience (of disorder). Crisis in crisis motivates reordering, in which different dimensions of resilience become clear and the nuances of different modes of organising have been tested and reflected upon together. Informants for this study spoke about the “new normal” soon to transpire, indicating the prospect of a mode of organising of continual stabilisation. As outlined before, the “normal” before the pandemic was predominately a state of reorganising. When informants for this study expressed both that they will probably “not go back to how it was before” or “not work very much differently after the pandemic”, these are not necessarily exclusive perspectives. It points to a normal of becoming.

## Conclusion

The Covid-19 crisis created an opportunity for collective sensemaking and different modes of organising work practices through an experienced crisis in crisis: a crisis-as-event in an already existing crisis-as process, a larger “media crisis”. The pandemic was regarded by the news workers as meaningful, both because of their social responsibility as news providers and because it was an occasion for sensemaking and reorganisation. This chapter demonstrates the collaborative mode of resilience when facing a crisis in crisis and a sensitivity to differentiation of work practices through experimenting. The collective efforts towards reorganisations engender resilience in terms of positive renewal characterised by flexibility, creativity, autonomy, and solidarity.

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# The digital shift in news media's revenue streams during the Covid-19 pandemic

JENS BARLAND<sup>I</sup> & RAGNHILD KR. OLSEN<sup>II</sup>

<sup>I</sup> DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION, KRISTIANIA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, NORWAY

<sup>II</sup> DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM AND MEDIA STUDIES, OSLO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY, NORWAY

## ABSTRACT

This chapter sheds light on the economic resilience of Norwegian news media during the Covid-19 pandemic, with a particular focus on the shifts in revenues within the newspaper industry amidst the crisis. The business disruptions caused by the pandemic inevitably impacted the revenue streams of news media organisations. By analysing revenue data from the Norwegian Media Authority and officially published reports, combined with expert interviews, our study unveils the diverse impact the pandemic had on news media in Norway. The findings reveal that while some outlets encountered cash-flow problems, others successfully navigated digital markets, leveraging the accelerated digital shift in media consumption and advertising during this period. Additionally, the study highlights that only a fraction of the extra funds granted by the state to assist the news business through the crisis was utilised.

**KEYWORDS:** revenue streams, media business, news media, subscription, advertising

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## Introduction

Economically resilient companies tend to have stable and well-functioning financial systems, which can provide access to capital for research and development as well as innovation. This financial stability creates an environment conducive to innovation by enabling organisations to secure funding for innovative projects and initiatives. As such, the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on media companies' economic performance provides important insights that can contribute to understanding news media's ability to allocate resources for innovation. While not explicitly examining media innovation as such, in this chapter, we contribute to the overall ambition of this book by providing insights regarding the economic resilience of Norwegian news media, and thus its innovation ability, by exploring and discussing how the crisis influenced news media's financial system. As described in Chapter 1, financial resources are an important innovation building block, and revenue streams are essential contributions to a news organisation's resource base. Against this background, the research question we address in this study is how Norwegian newspapers' revenue streams were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Previous research has painted a gloomy picture of how the pandemic affected the business of news, particularly at the early stages, when the crisis was seen to crush the advertising business of commercial news media (Olsen et al., 2020). As noted by Mathews (2022), newspaper organisations, already beset by the digital revolution and battered by the Great Recession, experienced another major blow to their economy, resulting in an accelerating closure of news outlets during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, these insights are often based on observations from the US and similar media systems, where news media, such as newspapers are entirely reliant on market forces, where state support in the form of subsidies is limited or non-existing, and legacy news media have found it difficult to adapt to the digital transformation of the media landscape (Pickard, 2019). Moreover, most existing accounts of the pandemic's impact on news media's economy are fragmented and short-term, providing a snapshot of the phenomenon (e.g., Ohlson et al., 2021; Norwegian Media Authority, 2021a). In this chapter, we aim to address this gap in the research literature by investigating the revenue development among news media in Norway before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. When the pandemic began, Norwegian news media and newspapers were arguably more economically resilient than their counterparts in other media systems, due to Norwegian newspapers' comparatively successful transition to a reader-revenue-dominated business model and the country's long history of public subsidies for newspapers (Olsen et al., 2021). That said, Norwegian newspapers also experienced a significant drop in profitability during the pandemic – from an operating margin of 7.1 per cent in 2018 to 2.2 per cent in 2022 (Norwegian Media Authority, 2022). Digging into the underlying revenue dynamics of these figures, specifically the transformation of news

media's two-sided market model, this chapter reveals how the pandemic created economic winners and losers among Norwegian media. Drawing on industry reports and secondary data, combined with qualitative interviews with industry experts, we demonstrate how size and digital preparedness played a key role for news media's economic performance amid the pandemic. We start the chapter with a literature review of relevant research on news media's two-sided market model and how this has developed in recent years. This constitutes the analytical lens for our empirical investigation. Next, we present our methods, describing how we collected and analysed data. From this, we move on to presenting and discussing our findings before concluding the chapter.

## Literature

The underlying premise for this study is that news media's economic resilience relies on a well-functioning revenue model. As noted by Corodescu-Roşca and colleagues (2023), (economic) resilience is not clearly defined in the research literature. However, most studies in this field associate resilience with the (long-term) capacity to adapt and to follow positive dynamics, combined with the capacity to respond to repeated short-term shocks. In this chapter, we are primarily concerned with the latter aspect of economic resilience, focusing on Norwegian news media's ability to withstand and recover from the economic shocks and challenges brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. We address this by looking at fluctuations in revenues before and during the crisis, treating revenues as an indication of economic resilience. Notably, resilience also concerns other aspects of the newspaper economy, such as cost structure and so on. However, in the current context, we focus on revenue generation by applying perspectives from media economy as our analytical lens.

The digital transformation of the news business has put news media's revenue model under severe pressure. Traditionally, commercial news media, and newspapers in particular, have been organised as two-sided operations, generating revenues from both advertisers and the audience (e.g., Anderson & Gabszewicz, 2006; Filistrucchi et al., 2013; Ohlsson & Facht, 2017; Picard, 2010). News and information are sold to audiences and audience attention is sold to advertisers. The latter source of revenue offers financial resources that can be channelled into the production of news and information. A key premise of this model is that the size and composition of news media's audiences determine their value to advertisers, that is, that there is an indirect positive network effect from audiences to advertiser (e.g., Sjøvaag, 2022). This interdependency means that a news operation must attract both advertisers and audiences to make the revenue model work. To achieve this, it may be sensible to offer content free of charge to build a sizable audience, which can then be marketed to advertisers (Filistrucchi et al., 2013). As commercial



newspapers transitioned to digital publishing, the prevailing strategy involved providing news content to audiences free of charge, with the expectation that this approach would draw in advertising investments (Chyi & Ng, 2020). However, as audiences moved online, advertising spending also shifted from legacy news media to global platform players, offering more advanced, efficient, and cheaper advertising solutions beyond those offered by news media (e.g., Bakke & Barland, 2022; Myllylahti, 2020). Combined with severe declines in newspapers' print circulations and advertising, the failure to attract substantial digital advertising resulted in a deepening revenue crisis among news publishers during the first decades of the twenty-first century. In an attempt to establish a new digital revenue source, many news publishers implemented various types of paywalls – which restrict public access to digital news and entice audiences to pay for online news services – and moved further into business models influenced by the digital attention economy. That is an approach where the readers' attention and engagement determine how the news media select content and design their digital services, inspired by social media, Netflix, Spotify, and so on (Bakke & Barland, 2022). While the introduction of paywalls entails considerable risks related to decreases in audience reach and further loss of advertising revenue (Olsen & Solvoll, 2018), the Norwegian newspaper business has been comparatively successful with this strategy. As evidenced by our previous examination of revenue diversification within Norwegian newspapers, together with Bente Kalsnes (Olsen et al., 2021), there has been consistent growth in reader revenues over the years. Notably, the digital component, represented by revenue generated from digital subscriptions through the implementation of paywalls, surged from 0 to 24 per cent of total revenues over a 13-year span from 2006 to 2019. During the same time frame, Norwegian newspapers experienced a 17 per cent decline in overall revenues, primarily attributable to the rapid decrease in print advertising revenue, which plummeted by 65 per cent. Digital advertising, on the other hand, increased steadily from 2010 onwards, albeit with some fluctuations (Olsen et al., 2021). In summary, this indicates that before the pandemic, there had been a notable shift in the Norwegian newspapers' two-sided market model, with readers' revenue emerging as the primary drivers of economic value creation. Simultaneously, the newspapers faced persistent challenges with their digital revenues, which proved insufficient to offset the decline in print revenues. Interestingly, prior to the pandemic, Norwegian newspapers exhibited limited progress in developing additional commercial revenue streams. From 2006 to 2019, revenue generated from sources beyond readers and advertisers declined significantly, dropping from 968 million to 497 million Norwegian kroner (Olsen et al., 2021).

In addition to commercial revenue, Norwegian news media receive state subsidies aimed at mitigating market failure, that is, systematic underinvestment in media content that has positive societal effects. Within the Nordic media

systems, this type of state support has been a prominent component of newspapers' revenue mix since the 1960s (Norwegian Media Authority, 2021b; Syvertsen et al., 2014). The Nordic media policy regimes encompass both *indirect* subsidies – such as Value Added Tax breaks or zero Value Added Tax, reductions in postal and telecommunications rates, and funding of research, education, and innovation in the news industry – as well as *direct* subsidies in the form of payment to newspaper organisations (e.g., Kammer, 2016; Kind & Møen, 2015; Murschetz, 2020; Nielsen & Linnebank, 2011; Picard, 2007). The latter subsidies primarily target newspapers operating under exceptionally challenging market conditions, such as small local newspapers. Prior research has illustrated that direct press subsidies have remained a relatively stable yet modest component of the Norwegian newspaper industry's overall revenue (Olsen et al., 2021). Still, these subsidies are a pivotal factor in bolstering the economic resilience of the news industry.

## Methods

To address our research question, asking how Norwegian newspapers' revenue streams were affected by the pandemic, we applied a mixed-method design drawing on secondary quantitative data on Norwegian newspapers' revenues from 2006 to 2021, industry reports on ad spending from 2019 to 2021, and qualitative in-depth interviews with five expert informants from the industry. The research design followed a sequential and dependent mixed-method approach, wherein data collection and analysis for one component occurred after the completion of data collection and analysis for the other component, and these processes relied on each other's outcomes (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Specifically, the first author of this chapter (Jens Barland) first collected secondary quantitative data, followed by the collection of qualitative data. The integration of these datasets occurred during the analytical stage of data analysis and during the inferential stage, when we drew conclusions based on our datasets (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

The dataset on revenues among Norwegian newspapers was sourced from the Norwegian Media Authority. It comprises comprehensive revenue data for the Norwegian newspaper industry, gathered from self-reported figures submitted by individual newspapers to Norwegian Media Authority. This data were categorised into six distinct commercial revenue segments, encompassing digital advertising, print advertising, single-copy sales, digital subscriptions, print subscriptions, and other commercial income sources. Additionally, a seventh category accounting for direct subsidies was included. The data analysis builds on our previous work with Bente Kalsnes (Olsen et al., 2021). By expanding our previous examination of revenue trends from 2006 to 2019, we were able to provide context and evaluate the longer-term effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on both print and digital revenues derived

from advertisers and readers. Additionally, we considered the evolution of direct subsidies and other revenue streams. This analysis serves as the focal point of our investigation.

To provide a more comprehensive perspective and evaluate the trajectory of newspaper revenues within the larger landscape of commercial news media, we incorporated additional data concerning the performance of commercial broadcasters, including television and radio. These broadcasters are in direct competition with commercial newspapers for advertising expenditures. Data for this was sourced from the Norwegian Media Businesses' Association (Mediebedriftene, MBL), which monitors the advertising market for the news media in Norway, and the Institute for Advertising and Media Statistics (IRM), which collects, analyses, and publishes data about the advertising and media markets in the Nordic region. We rely on data that delineates the allocation of advertising expenditures across various media channels, encompassing national print newspapers, inner-city print newspapers, local print newspapers, radio, television, and digital platforms, spanning 2019 to 2021. Data for 2022 were unavailable at the time of our research, which is a limitation. Nonetheless, the figures from 2019–2021 effectively serve their purpose in illustrating variations in how the pandemic impacted different types of newspapers and in highlighting distinctions between newspapers and other commercial news media. While secondary data analysis provides the advantages of cost-effectiveness and research convenience, especially when researchers can access high-quality existing datasets with larger samples and comprehensive coverage, it also presents challenges related to limited data availability and the presence of missing data (Johnston, 2014). In order to strengthen the validity and reliability of the secondary data analysis, we followed a series of evaluative steps including data source evaluation and data quality assessment, data documentation review, and assessment of data collection methods (see, e.g., Stewart & Kamins, 1993).

The inclusion of qualitative data in our material served as an additional quality control of the quantitative data analysis. The study gathered qualitative primary data by conducting five research interviews. The respondents were strategically chosen for their specialist knowledge in their respective fields. They are all top-ranked senior experts associated with the media industry and representing these organisations:

- ANFO Norwegian Advertisers
- The Norwegian Media Businesses' Association (Mediebedriftene, MBL)
- Tenk TV (Think TV, an organisation for commercial television in Norway)
- The Association of Norwegian Local Newspapers (LLA)
- The Norwegian Local Radio Association (NLR)

The respondents were interviewed in person or via a digital platform using a semi-structured interview format, with each interview lasting up to one hour. The purpose of these interviews was to get a deeper understanding of how the crisis was perceived to affect the news industry in general and the newspaper sector in particular. The interviews took the form of conversations with questions regarding revenue development within the sector. The respondents were asked to reflect on both the general development and the underlying factors that contributed to the variations between different media. Each of the interviewees was specifically requested to provide commentary on the study's quantitative data. Consequently, the interviews played a dual role in validating and enhancing the insights obtained through secondary data analysis. Evaluating the data retrospectively may be described as engaging in retroactive rationalisation, a process that can differ from contemporaneously assessing the sources during the period when the changes occurred. Nevertheless, permitting this retrospective reflection, which involves examining the phenomenon from a certain distance, has the potential to offer more nuanced insights compared to those that might have been obtained amid the crisis itself. The restricted number of interviews is a limitation to our study; still, the composition of the participants allows a breath of perspectives, as it included representatives from a broad range of relevant organisations. The interviews adhered to established ethical and research guidelines for qualitative research (Tracy, 2020). For the purposes of this chapter, quotes have been translated to English.

## Findings and discussion

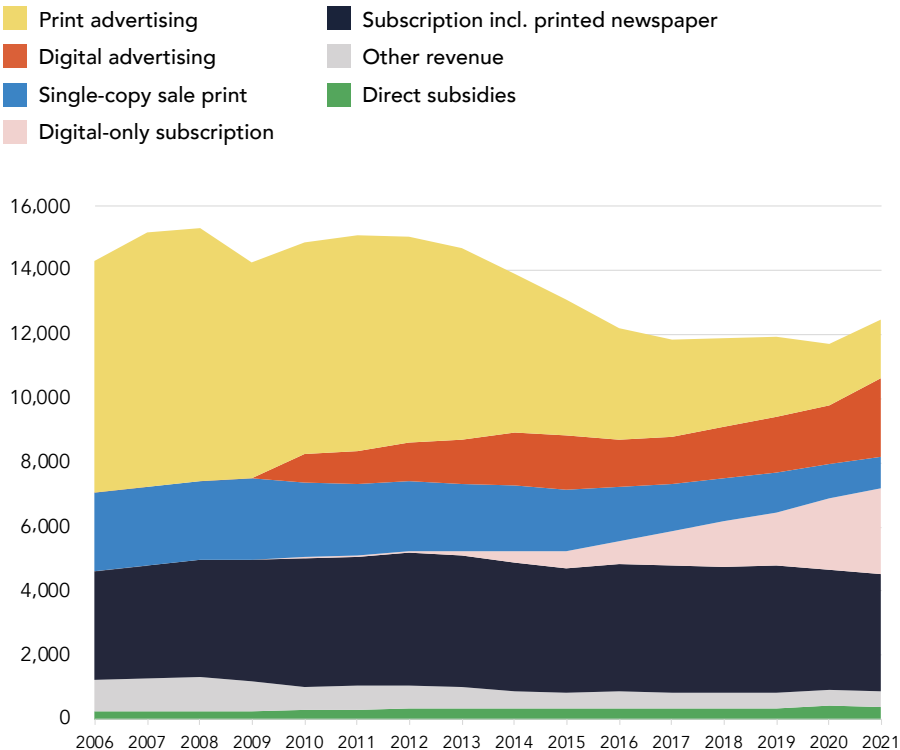
In the following section, we present and analyse our findings. To begin, we offer an extensive overview of the newspapers' revenue streams over multiple years, supplemented by insights from industry experts gathered through interviews. Next, we delve into the distinct effects of the Covid-19 crisis on each revenue stream individually, drawing upon data from industry reports and quantitative interview responses. Lastly, we provide an in-depth exploration of the revenue trends within the realm of local media, a facet that proved particularly intriguing in the context of our research question.

### Overview of revenue streams in newspapers over the years

Figure 4.1 provides an overview of the evolution of the Norwegian newspaper industry's revenue streams in the 14 years leading up to the outbreak of Covid-19. Additionally, it highlights the transformations that transpired during the pandemic in 2020–2021. Concerning revenue categories, it's worth noting that single-copy sales are primarily associated with printed newspapers, as digital editions in Norway are predominantly offered through subscription models. Digital subscriptions pertain to paid access to the newspaper's digital

editions, including web and PDF versions, while print subscriptions encompass any subscription that includes a printed newspaper, including bundled subscriptions that combine print and digital editions. The advertising category encompasses all advertising revenue without distinguishing between different types such as content marketing, programmatic, and display marketing. Direct subsidies denote financial support provided to newspaper companies by the government and other revenue encompasses any additional commercial income that does not fit within the advertising or reader revenue categories.

**FIGURE 4.1** Revenue streams in Norwegian newspapers, 2006–2021 (NOK million)



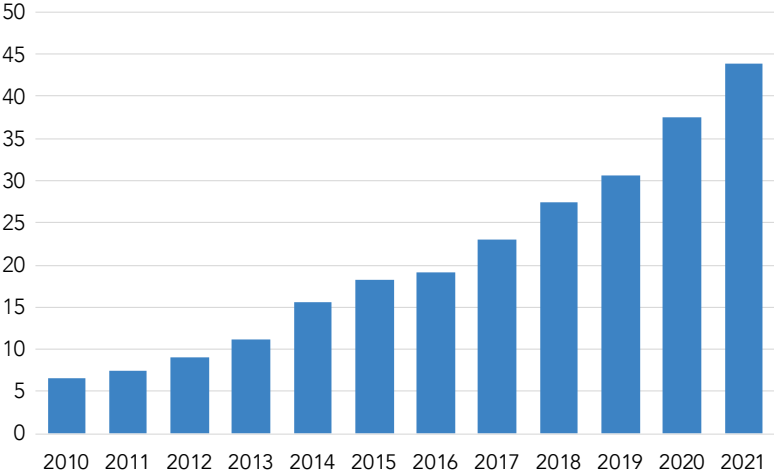
Comments: The data include newspapers reporting their accounts to the Norwegian Media Authority.  
 Source: Norwegian Media Authority

The overarching trend reveals that the pandemic accelerated the ongoing digitalisation process within the news media industry, resulting in a rise in digital revenues while the analogue aspects of the business continued to decline. Reflecting on this shift, the interviewee from the Norwegian Media Businesses' Association offered the following insight:

What we saw for the newspapers during the pandemic was not a new development. There were already ongoing trends which were reinforced. Paper-based revenues from advertisements, subscriptions, and single-copy sales had been in steady decline over the years leading up to the pandemic. This trend was amplified by the pandemic. In parallel, the trends for increased digital revenues, both from advertisements and digital subscriptions, were reinforced during the pandemic.

The expedited digital transformation of the revenue model within Norwegian newspapers is portrayed in Figure 4.2, where the digital share of total revenues from advertising and users is graphically presented. Prior to the pandemic, in 2019, digital revenues accounted for 31 per cent of Norwegian newspapers' total income; as the pandemic neared its end, this share had surged to 44 per cent.

**FIGURE 4.2** Digital share of newspapers' summarised revenues from advertising, subscriptions, and single-copy sales (per cent)



Source: Norwegian Media Authority

Underlying this shift from print to digital, we find an accelerating transformation of the industry's two-sided market model whereby digital reader revenue increased during 2020 and 2021. In 2021, the mix between overall advertising and reader revenues was 37 and 63 per cent, respectively. Advertising revenues dropped significantly to 3.7 billion Norwegian kroner in 2020 but recovered and increased above pre-pandemic levels to 4.3 billion Norwegian kroner in 2021, mainly due to growth in digital advertising sales of 2.4 billion Norwegian kroner (see Figure 4.1). This resulted in an overall increase in total revenues during the second year of the pandemic, suggesting that Norwegian newspapers were in fact financially more robust at the end of the pandemic than they were during the three years leading up to the Covid-19 crisis. According to the figures from the Norwegian Media Authority, the newspapers' total advertising and user revenues grew from 11.1 billion Norwegian kroner in 2019 to 11.6 billion in 2021. In light of the bleak assessment of the detrimental effects of the Covid-19 crisis on commercial newspapers' revenues, as highlighted in previous research (e.g., Olsen et al., 2020; Radcliffe, 2020), this observation stands out as particularly noteworthy. It prompts a deeper exploration of the factors that shaped both advertising and reader revenue among Norwegian newspapers during the tumultuous years of the pandemic. Furthermore, it encourages us to explore whether the crisis created opportunities to diversify and generate other revenue streams for the news media. We are also encouraged to conduct a more in-depth examination of direct subsidies, which experienced a marginal increase during the Covid-19 crisis, as shown in Figure 4.1 and Table 4.2. This is especially relevant in the context of local media, which, as noted in previous research, were particularly hard hit by the pandemic (Finneman et al., 2021; Olsen et al., 2020; Quandt & Wahl-Jørgensen, 2021). In the next sections, we explore these dynamics, bringing together insights from interview data and other data sources. Our discussion revolves around advertising and audience revenues, as these constitute the primary components of commercial newspapers' two-sided model.

Subsequently, albeit with somewhat less detail, we report significant developments in direct subsidies and other newspaper revenue streams during the Covid-19 crisis.

## **Accelerated digital transformation of the two-sided market model**

To gain a more profound insight into the evolution of advertising revenues among Norwegian newspapers during the pandemic, it is pertinent to adopt a comparative approach that highlights the performance of various newspaper categories in relation to other commercial media outlets. Ad expenditure data from the Institute for Advertising and Media Statistics (IRM) provide some important insights. Notably, these data are estimates based on market

monitoring, rather than compilations of actual ad revenues. Nevertheless, ad spend estimates confirm the overall impression from the foregoing section regarding advertising revenue among Norwegian newspapers during the Covid-19 crisis: Total ad spending decreased in 2020 (-6%) but increased significantly in 2021 (18.4%) the second year of the pandemic, according to IRM figures (see Table 4.1). Concerning digital ad expenditure, there was even a slight uptick in 2020. The digital share of the overall advertising market in Norway surged from 56 per cent before the pandemic to 66 per cent by the end of the pandemic in 2021. Crucially, these digital figures are influenced by the inclusion of global tech giants such as Google, Facebook, and YouTube. According to media actors, these global tech giants have about a 40 per cent share of the total advertising market in Norway (Flaaen, 2022). From this, it can be deduced that the global tech giants have around a two-thirds share of the *digital* advertising market in Norway. Hence, the estimates of digital ad spend offer valuable insights into the broader trends in digital advertising within Norway during the pandemic, albeit without enabling an assessment of newspapers' specific share in this market. The computational complexity of digital advertising (e.g., Helberger et al., 2020) makes it difficult to specifically identify the position of Norwegian players within the global digital ecosystem. All interviewed informants emphasised Norwegian media's connection to the global digital advertising market, where tech giants have gained a dominant position. As the informant representing ANFO Norwegian Advertisers said: "The advertising market ran smoothly like an old machine [during the Covid-19 pandemic]. Digital advertising grew – and Google and YouTube ran away with increasing shares".

Regarding ad spending on printed newspapers, data from the Institute for Advertising and Media Statistics (IRM) reveal that both local newspapers and national and inner-city newspapers encountered significant declines during the initial year of the pandemic, with the sector as a whole witnessing a sharp decrease of -24.9 per cent. In relative terms, local newspapers did experience a somewhat more notable impact of the pandemic compared to other newspaper segments, with a decline of -27.6 per cent. However, it is worth highlighting that the overall decline is remarkably consistent across various newspaper outlets in the material and notably more substantial than the decline observed in the case of radio and television (-7.4% and -7.8%, respectively, in 2020). In the case of local printed newspapers, the decline persisted in 2021, albeit at a notably slower rate (-4.6%). Conversely, other newspaper categories witnessed a slight yearly upturn in printed advertising revenue. However, none of the newspaper categories in the material returned to pre-pandemic levels in terms of print advertising.



**TABLE 4.1** Advertising revenues in the Norwegian market, total, and in the news media, 2019–2021

Category	2019		2020		2021	
	Revenue (NOK million)	Growth (%)	Revenue (NOK million)	Growth (%)	Revenue (NOK million)	Growth (%)
Ad spend (total)	21,084	2.4	19,824	-6.0	23,469	18.4
Ad spend (digital)	11,805	10.8	12,206	3.4	15,552	27.4
Newspapers, total (print)	2,305	–	1,731	-24.9	1,664	-3.9
Newspapers, national (print)	202	–	151	-25.3	155	2.6
Newspapers, inner-city (print)	597	–	442	-26.0	454	2.7
Newspapers, local (print)	1,180	–	854	-27.6	815	-4.6
Radio	552	–	511	-7.4	619	21.1
Television	3,615	–	3,331	-7.8	3,528	5.9

*Comments:* Per cent growth compared with previous year.  
*Source:* Institute for Advertising and Media Statistics (IRM)

The data on print advertising losses among local newspapers calls for further examination. Based on the interviews, we find that among smaller local newspapers, those owned by or affiliated with larger media groups were better equipped to seize the emerging digital opportunities and “weather the storm”, as compared with independently owned newspapers. According to the informant at the Association of Norwegian Local Newspapers, nearly 40 of their 115 member newspapers lacked access to the technology provided by media groups, which is essential for operating in the digital market. These newspapers faced substantial revenue losses during the pandemic, with some even resorting to laying off advertising salespeople and lacking the financial means to rehire them after the pandemic, this informant told. Similar challenges were observed among local radio stations, as highlighted by the informant from the Norwegian Local Radio Association. In the most severe instances, local radio stations were forced to reduce their staff by up to 40 per cent, either through layoffs or furloughs. These observations suggest that in Norway, as in many other countries around the world (Finneman et al., 2021; Olsen et al., 2020;

Quandt & Wahl-Jørgensen, 2021), local media – especially the smallest ones – experienced a more profound crisis compared with many other media organisations.

Several factors related to the pandemic account for the shifts in overall advertising spending. For example, tourism came to a complete halt, local shops and restaurants closed their doors, and nightlife paused. Cross-border shopping in Sweden ceased, and cultural events that relied on physical gatherings, such as theatre performances, concerts, cinema showings, and sports events, became infeasible. Consequently, marketing initiatives in these sectors experienced significant cutbacks, according to the informants representing ANFO Norwegian Advertisers and the Norwegian Media Businesses' Association. Further, these two informants emphasised how the pandemic also disrupted supply chains, causing delays in parts for manufacturers and goods for sellers. These logistical challenges had a significant impact on global trade, particularly concerning the shipment of goods from China to Europe. Industries reliant on these goods reduced their marketing efforts to avoid potential customer disappointment, these informants pointed out.

Furthermore, the constantly changing government measures, including travel restrictions and variable business opening hours, created additional uncertainties for advertising buyers. Many businesses hesitated to invest in marketing services when unsure of their ability to deliver products and services as planned. Therefore, uncertainty among advertising buyers due to delivery disruptions and unpredictability surrounding future government measures further contributed to the decline in advertising purchases and the revenue streams of news media, as noted by the informant from the Norwegian Media Businesses' Association: "The advertisers' behaviour and fear of risk were probably more important in such cases than a real failure in the business".

Although these factors contributed to a decline in advertising spending, especially in 2020, it is crucial to acknowledge that the pandemic did not solely have a negative impact on businesses. As people spent more time at home, there was a notable increase in marketing efforts for products designed for daily domestic life. This encompassed a wide range of items, from those associated with home renovations and digital equipment to media consumption at home (such as streaming services) and fitness-related goods. According to the informant representing commercial television, these advertisers already had a large share of television commercials: "During the pandemic it was seen that this category increased. By the way, in England, online shopping has become the largest category in TV advertising, a sign of the same trend". The informant representing ANFO Norwegian Advertisers explained how this trend also was important for the relatively favourable development in radio advertising compared to, for example, newspaper print advertising: Radio advertising is conducive to swift, tactical sales messages, making it an ideal

choice for industries that experienced heightened sales during the pandemic, such as home improvement stores and goods and equipment for home activities.

These observations underscore the significance of acknowledging that the pandemic presented not only challenges but also opportunities for marketers and advertising channels like news media. The informant representing commercial television referred to a Danish study which had examined many research projects on marketing in times of crisis (Jensen, 2020). The main finding was that crises provide a great opportunity for strong players to increase their market shares. Strengthened marketing is profitable in the long term. They then take advantage of a situation where competitors are weakened. This informant, in addition to the informant representing ANFO Norwegian Advertisers, had observed that in Norway, some large companies in the sectors of consumer goods and telecommunications increased their advertising purchases during the pandemic, which increased opportunities for revenues for commercial news media.

Another pivotal development in advertising was the response of businesses forced to close their physical storefronts, which strategically shifted to online operations with physical pickup points. This strategic adjustment significantly redirected marketing efforts toward the digital sphere. The interviewees from the Norwegian Media Businesses' Association and ANFO Norwegian Advertisers described how this increase in online shopping and marketing resulted in an increase in digital advertising revenue for Norwegian newspapers, in the same way as for television advertising, discussed above.

In summary, these accounts underscore how the advertising side of the newspaper business was influenced by market fluctuations in both positive and negative ways. Considering the interconnected nature of the newspapers' two-sided market model, it is also pertinent to delve into the pandemic's effects on newspaper readership. As several chapters in this book note, there was a significant increase in the public's demand for news and information, especially during the initial stages of the crisis (see, e.g., Mtschedlidze, Chapter 5). This resulted in a surge in news consumption. The share of adults in Norway with a paid online newspaper subscription increased from 26 per cent in 2019 to 36 per cent in 2021 (MediaNorway, 2023). Consequently, news publishers had a considerably larger audience to offer advertisers during the pandemic than they did previously, particularly online. More importantly, though, the increased demand for continuous local, regional, and national news updates on digital platforms had a significant impact on Norwegian newspapers' subscription figures. Our analysis of revenue fluctuations based on data from the Norwegian Media Authority (see Figure 4.1) shows that Norwegian newspapers' digital subscription revenue increased by 60 per cent from 2019 to 2021 (996 million Norwegian kroner). This can be attributed to the fact that most newspapers in Norway had a well-established digital paywall and

a subscription-based business model in place when the pandemic struck. As emphasised by our interviewee from the Norwegian Media Businesses' Association, this demonstrated a crucial readiness for a digital transformation among Norwegian newspapers:

A prerequisite for this change was that the media had already innovated good systems for digital subscriptions. It paid off in this situation. Newspapers without such systems in place were badly hit and did not take part in this opportunity to increase digital revenues.

News about Covid-19 locked behind a paywall thus served as a key driving force in converting non-subscribers to subscribers and in generating new revenue, as non-subscribers became more willing to pay for a digital subscription. According to the data forming Figure 4.1, revenues from paper subscriptions (often including digital access) declined by 7 per cent from 2019 to 2021 (-285 million Norwegian kroner). Moreover, single-copy sales were hit by a decline of 20 per cent from 2019 to 2021 (-242 million Norwegian kroner). This can be explained by the numerous restrictions on social life, resulting in closure or limited opening hours among news agents, as well as people staying at home rather than frequenting places where newspapers are typically sold. Even though the decline in single-copy sales was sharp, it aligns with the trends observed in the figures since 2016, which averaged a 10 per cent annual decrease. Overall, there was a transition of reader revenue from print to digital during the pandemic. Revenues from purely digital subscriptions increased by 60 per cent (996 million Norwegian kroner) from 2019 to 2021, and total user revenues increased by 7 per cent (469 million Norwegian kroner) during the same period. Revenues from advertising dropped during 2020, but the total figures were about the same in 2021 as in 2019. However, the digital share of these Norwegian newspapers' advertising revenues increased from 41 to 57 per cent during this pandemic period.

### **“Unused” direct subsidies and new opportunities for alternative revenues**

During the pandemic, the Norwegian government introduced several measures designed to support businesses and industries, seeking to alleviate the adverse economic impacts of the crisis. As the country's commercial news media faced a rapid decline in advertising revenue during the initial stages of the pandemic, this development sparked notable concerns among industry representatives about the sustainability of this vital information infrastructure. Within the commercial news media's two-sided market model, advertising revenue has historically played, and continues to play, a fundamental role in funding news production. According to the informants representing the Norwegian Media Businesses' Association and ANFO Norwegian Advertisers, there was a strong sense of crisis within the media industry at this stage. Consequently,

calls were made for government emergency support to assist the struggling news businesses, and media organisations requested additional state support amounting to 1 billion Norwegian kroner (Norwegian Media Businesses' Association, 2020). It was argued that an increase in direct state subsidies would empower the news media to continue serving as a crucial information channel for the public, which was especially vital during the pandemic. In essence, while numerous news media outlets were grappling with financial challenges, the broader discourse highlighted their pivotal role as key knowledge producing institutions in society.

In May 2020, the Norwegian government implemented a temporary financial compensation scheme for editorially managed media that had had a significant fall in turnover due to the Covid-19 outbreak (Norwegian Media Authority, 2020). 300 million Norwegian kroner was allocated to assist the media in sustaining their operations during and after the pandemic (NTB, 2020). This marked a significant uptick in direct subsidies to the industry. In the two years prior, the total direct subsidies had fluctuated within the range of 308 to 316 million Norwegian kroner. However, as illustrated in Table 4.2, the programme did not achieve full success, with only 92 million Norwegian kroner of the allocated subsidies being distributed.

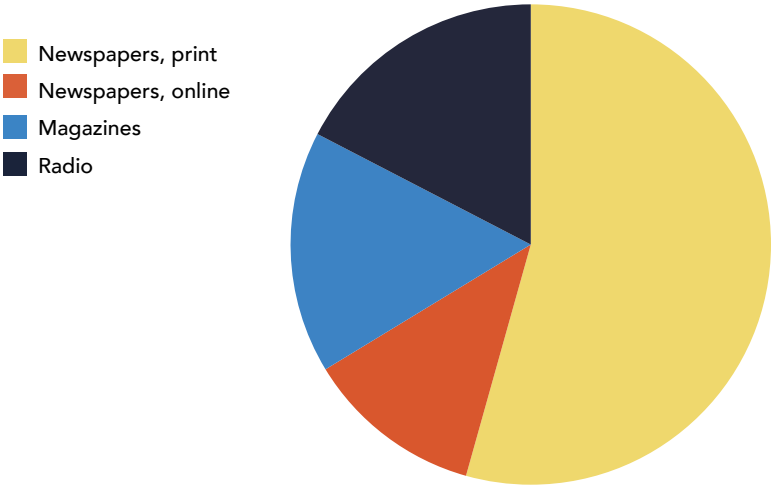
**TABLE 4.2** Direct subsidies to newspapers allocated through the Norwegian Media Authority

Year	Amount (NOK million)
2018	308
2019	316
2020	358 (+ 92 as compensation related to the negative effects of the pandemic)
2021	370

*Comments:* The figures for 2018–2019 do not account for government funding provided to the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) or partial funding for TV 2's commercial public broadcasting. The figures deviate slightly from the subsidy data reported in Figure 4.1, which only includes newspapers which have consistently reported revenue figures to the Norwegian Media Authority throughout the analysed period.  
*Source:* Norwegian Media Authority

The subsidy scheme received criticism from the media industry due to its design, which led to funding being poorly targeted. Many media outlets found it challenging to meet the eligibility criteria, resulting in a high number of rejected applications (Norwegian Media Authority, 2020). Ultimately, the scheme provided Covid-19 support to 132 media outlets. The distribution of compensation for the various media categories is shown in Figure 4.3.

**FIGURE 4.3** Distribution of Covid-19 support among media outlets



Comments: Total support = 92 million Norwegian kroner.  
Source: Norwegian Media Authority

While the criticism of the support scheme design from within the industry is understandable, in hindsight, it becomes clear that the situation was less dire than initially feared. Despite 2020 being a financially challenging year for many segments of the media, organisations with robust digital business models and strong positions in digital markets fared well, despite experiencing a temporary decline in revenues. Consequently, it appears that the less precise targeting of the 2020 emergency government funding did not have a lasting adverse impact on the news media.

Furthermore, our research reveals that while the Covid-19 crisis had a detrimental impact on the print advertising business, it simultaneously created fresh avenues for revenue generation beyond the traditional newspaper markets. To illustrate, the surge in online shopping during the pandemic indirectly stimulated innovative revenue strategies within media companies. In a bid to compete with postal services, newspaper distribution channels expanded their home delivery services, which in turn led to enhanced revenues, according to the interviewee representing the Norwegian Media Businesses' Association. For media organisations with ownership of such distribution channels, this shift translated into increased and more diversified income as a direct consequence of the pandemic. According to the data forming Figure 4.1, other revenues rose slightly in 2020 before falling back again in 2021. However, these are risk-exposed revenues, dependent upon the distribution of physical newspapers, explained this informant.

## Conclusions

Utilising insights from media economics, in this chapter we delved into an examination of revenue streams within Norwegian newspapers throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, drawing comparisons between the economic performance of these news outlets and other commercial news media. Grounded in the foundational premise that financial resources are essential for innovation, as established in Chapter 1, our aim has been to explore the dynamics of revenue development both before and during the crisis, with the overarching goal of gaining a deeper understanding of the economic resilience of newspapers in times of crisis.

It is crucial to emphasise that revenues serve as the lifeblood of any news operation, without which their functioning and capacity to innovate would be severely compromised. In response to our central research question regarding the impact of the pandemic on Norwegian newspapers' revenue streams, several key insights have emerged from the observations presented within this chapter. First, we find that the pandemic acted as a catalyst for the digital transformation of Norwegian newspapers, influencing both advertising and audience revenues. The crisis thus had significant impact on the two-sided market model of newspapers, increasing digital reader and advertising revenue and reducing revenues from print subscriptions and advertising. The crisis stimulated a surge in online shopping and digital news consumption, benefiting those newspapers that were prepared to adapt to these changing market dynamics. In this context, Norwegian newspapers held an advantageous position compared to many commercial news operations in other countries. They had initiated the transition of their print subscription base to digital formats well before the pandemic, boasting a well-established system for managing digital subscriptions. Furthermore, leading newspaper groups such as Schibsted, Amedia, and Polaris had long been focused on digital advertising revenues, having developed sophisticated systems for online sales and customer management. As such, the Covid-19 crisis yielded winners within the news industry, primarily favouring those that had previously forged robust connections with the digital infrastructure of advertising and consumer markets. Notably, the media entities that reaped these benefits were the industry's largest and most well-resourced players. Additionally, small local newspapers and digital news outlets affiliated with these major media groups also emerged as winners, as they could leverage the existing digital infrastructures to tap into digital revenue streams.

Nonetheless, it is crucial to not underestimate the profound sense of crisis within the industry resulting from steep and rapid revenue losses. Overall, the Norwegian news media sector bore a significant brunt from the decline in advertising revenues at the outset of the pandemic. The abrupt disappearance of print advertising in 2020 significantly impacted local, inner-city, and national newspapers. While the fact that no Norwegian newspaper faced

bankruptcy during the crisis, and that less than one-third of the designated crisis relief package for the industry was distributed to eligible news outlets indicates relative economic resilience within the Norwegian newspaper industry, it's important to note that some media entities faced greater challenges than others and can be categorised as Covid-19 crisis losers. These entities were primarily media outlets operating outside the digital marketplace. They heavily depended on reader revenue generated from printed single-copy sales and advertising space within print newspapers. Small local media providers, including independent local newspapers and local radio stations, which lacked the necessary infrastructure connecting them to digital markets, faced significant challenges during the pandemic. The crisis could thus be seen as a wake-up call, compelling traditional print-based news media to rethink and adopt new strategies for the future.

The findings of this study on Covid-19 winners and losers complement and expand upon the insights provided by others' research in the same domain. For instance, an analysis of European media (Carlini & Bleyer-Simon, 2021) underscored that the pandemic's impact on different media sectors was primarily determined by their susceptibility to analogue weaknesses and their strengths in the digital realm. Additionally, an international study conducted by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (Nielsen et al., 2020) painted a somewhat pessimistic picture based on data from the early stages of the pandemic when a prevailing sense of crisis was widespread. This study identified only a limited number of winners, most of whom had strong ties to digital media markets.

Our study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the time frame is limited. While our analysis covers the period from 2006 to 2021, enabling us to identify long-term trends influenced by the pandemic, such as the shift to digital and reader revenue, it's important to note that the study does not explore the longer-term effects beyond the pandemic, which officially ended in 2022. Second, it's essential to exercise caution when attributing all observed changes to the pandemic alone. Although the crisis garnered significant attention, it was not the sole external factor influencing the media economy during the studied period. Other factors, such as the increasing influence of digital platforms, especially in the advertising sector, were briefly touched upon but not thoroughly explored in this study. Relatedly, the analytical framework of the two-sided market model, while informative, can be somewhat limiting. Future research should delve into the dynamics between platforms and publishers and their implications for Norwegian news media's revenue generation, both in the context of the Covid-19 crisis and beyond. In this regard, adopting a multi-sided market perspective, as proposed by scholars like Sjøvaag (2022), may offer additional valuable insights.



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# Crisis-driven newsroom innovation

JUNAI MTCHEDLIDZE

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION, KRISTIANIA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, NORWAY

## ABSTRACT

Despite the extensive body of knowledge in innovation studies, there is a lack of literature that studies crisis-driven innovation in newsrooms. Whether the crises contribute to innovation or rather restrict it remains an under-researched topic. In this chapter, I study the factors that facilitate rapid innovation processes in news media outlets, using the news media business during the Covid-19 pandemic as a case study. Through qualitative semi-structured interviews with journalists, developers, data journalists, editors, and product managers at four Norwegian news outlets, I identify key factors that facilitate quick, crisis-driven innovations in newsrooms. I argue that there are four important factors that drive innovation in newsrooms during crisis: the need for information in the population; initiative among the news staff; existing technological expertise in the newsrooms; and collaboration among editorial developers and journalists.

**KEYWORDS:** crisis, innovation, innovation factors, innovation pace, news media

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## Introduction

Social crises may take on different forms, including pandemics, earthquakes, and extreme events that pose a threat to society or organisations. The need for information becomes especially pervasive during these times, and journalists are more willing and open to innovate (Posetti et al., 2020). Bessant and colleagues (2015: 2) have highlighted how innovation may avoid negative consequences of a crisis, by introducing the concept of crisis-driven innovation. With the goal of analysing crisis-driven newsroom innovation, in this chapter, “crisis” is conceptualised as an event that 1) threatens high-priority values of the organisation, 2) presents a restricted amount of time in which a response can be made, and 3) is unexpected or unanticipated by the organisation (Hermann, 1963: 64). In journalism, crises and critical incidents can be defined as the events that result in the reconsidering of “the hows and whys of journalistic practice” (Zelizer, 1992: 67). For example, the Covid-19 crisis has instigated innovation in newsrooms in terms of finding new ways of gathering data and new ways of producing as well as consuming news (Cools et al., 2022). During the Covid-19 pandemic, “journalism has become more essential than ever to keep societies informed and to translate the impact of public policies on people’s lives” (García-Avilés, 2021: 1239). Quandt and Wahl-Jorgensen (2021: 1200) suggested that “journalists were also compelled to dramatically change the content of their reporting [during the pandemic] – the stories they tell and the way they are framed”.

In this chapter, I focus on innovation in newsrooms during a crisis in response to an increasing demand and need for information in the population. How the media industry addresses the pressing need for information, and hence innovation, during the crisis is not well understood. First, since a “crisis is fundamentally related to the idea of time” (Fleischer, 2013: 314), studying the factors that influence high-pace innovation is important. Belair-Gagnon and Steinke (2020) suggested that an understanding of the innovation in newsrooms and the factors that contribute to the failure and success of certain innovations is important in scholarly research. In this chapter, I seek to answer the following research question: What key factors facilitate newsroom innovation during a crisis? Using data from qualitative interviews, I identify four factors that facilitated fast innovation in Norwegian newsrooms during the Covid-19 pandemic: the need for information in the population; initiative among the news staff; existing technological expertise in the newsrooms; collaboration among technological and journalistic staff.

In this chapter, crisis is understood as the threat and danger to the media organisations that calls for change and immediate reaction. In line with the overall idea of this book, innovation is considered a tool with which to respond to crisis with resilience. Therefore, the factors identified in this study are important in building the resilience and creating value for news organisations. For example, creation of news items or news services during the

Covid-19 pandemic is considered as value creation for the organisation itself, for audiences, and for the democratic role of media in society. As outlined in the introductory chapter of this book, crisis can destroy organisations or oppositely encourage innovation and value creation. Therefore, I have studied the successful media outlets that have created value during the pandemic and which have offered new digital services to their audiences within the Norwegian context. Thus, this chapter is guided by a theoretical framework of innovation studies, and I utilise the “social shaping of technology” perspective to better understand the role of technology in the innovation processes. The following sections present the theoretical framework, followed by an account of the data and methods. Subsequently, empirical results are presented followed by a conclusion and implications for further research.

## Theoretical framework

Innovation in the media industry is driven by both internal and external factors. Storsul and Krumsvik (2013: 198) have suggested that the factors driving media innovation can be grouped into four categories: media institutional factors, technological developments, sociocultural conditions, and power relations. Specific factors range from technology, market opportunities, regulation, and user and competitor behaviour to industry norms, company strategy, leadership and vision, but also organisational structure, capacity and resources, culture, and creativity. In addition, Storsul and Krumsvik (2013) pointed out that media organisations are driven by a norm of newness. Løvlie (2016: 81) highlighted the importance of working iteratively and quickly: “To address the need for speed and novelty developing new media products, we have developed a strong focus in our courses on idea generation and concept development in fast, iterative process”. Krumsvik and colleagues (2019: 201) found the following:

Innovations in media occur for a variety of reasons, take place within a variety of conditions, and take shape in different ways inside and outside of media firms. [...] In the innovation process, it is important to consider the roles and relations between all the people, organizations, and technologies involved.

Trappel (2015) suggested that scholars should explore the structural conditions that foster media innovation. This chapter answers those calls by elaborating on existing factors and identifying new factors involved in crisis-driven newsroom innovation.

Pavlik (2013: 190) pointed out that innovation is “the key to the viability of news media in the digital age”. That said, there is no consensus on the definition of newsroom innovation among scholars (Belair-Gagnon & Steinke, 2020; García-Avilés, 2021; Paulussen, 2016), though Schmitz Weiss and Domingo

(2010: 1158) defined the process of innovation in newsrooms as “new product features or new technological tools, that help in the distribution, acquisition, processing, display and storage of news and content that (online) journalists work with”. As implied by the quote, the idea of newsroom innovation and newsroom technology is interconnected. Inspired by that, this study is based on a perspective interested in the social shaping of technology.

The idea of the social shaping of technology is central to most studies on journalism and newsroom change. According to Paulussen (2016), a significant amount of the research on the innovations in the newsroom has used the “social shaping of technology” perspective. Here, technology is specifically understood as the software technologies used in newsrooms. Not only is it important to have capacity for technology in the newsroom, but skills, knowledge, and expertise also affect the pace and nature of innovation.

Wenk (1989: 6) stated that “the most powerful engines of change [in contemporary society] are a human invention, innovation, and the applications of scientific knowledge”. In this chapter, I attempt to understand the relation between knowledge and expertise in technological newsroom innovation.

Success in organisations does not necessarily depend on economic well-being – “having the money” – but on achieving technical solutions through a knowledge base in organisations. In other words, just having technologies available does not guarantee success; knowledge on how to implement and explore such technologies is important. Thus, this chapter outlines both the knowledge base and the implementation process as equally important in innovation in newsrooms. Fincham and colleagues (1995) stated that organisations have different perspectives and knowledge, which are needed to create new technologies. Collaboration and having similar perspectives on the innovation processes are assumed to be the keys to success. To study the implementation of technologies in newsrooms, Williams (1997: 5) has pointed out the importance of local knowledge, expertise, and experience in organisations:

First the importance of local expertise and experience – including knowledge of the user organization, its methods, and business context, and knowledge of the implementation process – which must be combined with more generic forms of knowledge (of computing techniques and artifacts) to create functioning information systems.

Williams (1997) suggested that we need to understand the interplay between technology and work organisation as a complex process, by focusing on the emergence, diffusion, and adaptation of technological tools within organisational settings. In the words of Roberts and Grabowski (1999: 159): “Organizational constructs give us important insights into the role of technology in organizations and highlight the importance of considering technology as a process as well as a product in our examination”.

Lievrow (2006) suggested that technology and society are undergoing mutual shaping, which effects technological adoption in newsrooms and which has economic, organisational, and cultural consequences. Therefore, researching the adoption of technological innovations is necessary to see the phenomenon in professional and organisational contexts, because journalists and news workers have an impact on how innovation is implemented (Paulussen, 2016). Innovation during a crisis is a rapid process that requires social forces and different interest groups with essential resources and technological expertise. This is why the “social shaping of technology” perspective is relevant for studying crisis-driven innovation, as it assists in identifying the capabilities at play in innovation as well as the actors and dynamics that shape it. Several studies have developed frameworks building on “sociotechnical systems” (Hughes, 1983), “sociotechnical constituencies” (Molina, 1989), and “sociotechnical ensembles” (Bikjer, 1987). The process of innovation is often characterised by “imperfect knowledge and bounded rationality” (Williams & Edge, 1996: 873).

## Method and data

This study is a qualitative multiple case study using data generated from qualitative semi-structured interviews. Qualitative interviews were used as a method to gain insight into individual experiences, attitudes, and views (Singer et al., 2011). Interviewing enables the identification of “areas of broad cultural consensus and people’s more personal, private and special understanding” (Arksey & Knight, 1999: 4). The sample of informants is made up of twelve participants practising different professions in the newsrooms, such as developers, journalists, project managers, chief-developing executives, and interaction designers, in four news outlets in Norway:

- VG (national tabloid newspaper *Verdens Gang*)
- BT (local newspaper *Bergens Tidende*)
- *Aftenposten* (largest national print newspaper in Norway)
- NTB (news agency)

The newspapers VG, BT, and *Aftenposten* are owned by the Schibsted media group. Schibsted is one of the largest media holdings in Norway, and its turnover in 2021 was 1.5 billion euro (see, e.g., Konow-Lund et al. 2022; Konow-Lund, 2013; Barland, 2012). NTB is owned by Schibsted and other media groups. This news agency is known for its innovativeness, use of new technological tools, and robot journalism. The interview guide focused on the process of innovation in newsrooms and the participants’ involvement in it. Semi-structured interviews were carried out using the online software Zoom (seven) and in person (six). Interview duration ranged between 40



and 60 minutes, took place in 2021 and 2022, and the interviews were recorded and transcribed. For the purposes of this chapter, quotes have been translated to English. Open coding of the data enabled the identification of eight themes (collaboration, innovation, expertise, knowledge of technological tools, computational mindset, information need, pace, and timely response to the demand for information). By further analysis of those themes, four key factors driving news innovation were identified: the need for information in the population; initiative-taking among the news staff; existing technological expertise in the newsrooms; and collaboration among technological and journalistic staff.

Journalists and developers interviewed for this study were the individuals who have worked with innovations during the Covid-19 pandemic, providing the information that was needed to answer the research questions. To assure balanced results, not only journalists and developers who were directly involved in innovation processes were interviewed, but also individuals with different roles and professions in the newsrooms, in order to confirm the reliability of the findings. The informants were promised anonymity in their responses to assure the unbiased assessment of the phenomenon.

The results are grouped into the four factors identified as key in the development of timely innovations during the crisis: need for information; initiative taking; technological expertise; and collaboration. Results further show that the four factors spurring innovation in crisis were in one way or another connected to a fast pace, consequently identified as a central feature of crisis-driven innovation.

**TABLE 5.1** Overview of informants

No.	Profession	Organisation/ Newspaper	Interview Date	Selection aim
1	Editorial developer/ Data journalist	Verdens Gang (VG)	Spring 2021	Has worked on Covid-19 live tracker
2	Editorial developer/ Data journalist	Verdens Gang (VG)	Spring 2021	Has worked on Covid-19 live tracker
3	Journalist/Reporter	Verdens Gang (VG)	Spring 2021	Has worked on Covid-19 live tracker
4	Journalist/Reporter	Verdens Gang (VG)	Spring 2021	Has worked on Covid-19 live tracker
5	Interaction designer	Schibsted	Autumn 2021	Participating and contributing to innovation processes

6	Product manager	Schibsted	Autumn 2021	Leading and organising innovation projects
7	Editor-in-chief	Verdens Gang (VG)	Summer 2021	Has taken decisions regarding Covid-19 live tracker
8	Product director/ Previous reporter and editorial manager	Verdens Gang (VG)	Summer 2021	Has taken decisions regarding Covid-19 live tracker
9	Editorial developer/ Data journalist	Bergens Tidende (BT)	Autumn 2021	Has worked with journalists to cover data-driven stories under crisis
10	Newsleader/Voice	Bergens Tidende (BT)	Autumn 2021	Supervised data journalists to cover data-driven stories under crisis
11	Editorial developer/ Data journalist	Aftenposten	Spring 2022	Has helped journalists to cover data-driven stories under crisis and Covid-19

## Results

The emergence of a social crisis is directly linked to the information need in society. When information needs increase, journalists and reporters are willing to innovate and adapt to new methods of information gathering and reporting. Specifically, in the digital age, the information domain has altered, because it is represented not only physically, but digitally as well. Digital interfaces provide the opportunity to receive, process, and communicate information with different scales and scope, especially given the availability of huge datasets that result in the distribution and visualisation of data-driven stories. For example, in the case of Covid-19 reporting, the Covid-19 live tracker enabled the presentation of large statistical data to the audiences in real time. The live tracker was visualised as a dashboard that illustrated the information about the number of infected individuals. The creation of the live tracker was achieved through individual initiatives of journalists and data journalists in the newsroom, through the aid of in-house technological expertise, and collaboration between journalists and editorial developers.

## The increased need for information during a crisis

In a crisis, the need for information is extremely high, and news workers need to adapt their practices according to the increased demand for information in society. Informants underlined that the most interesting innovations are created during crises. As one of the developers at *VG* pointed out, “good things” emerge in extraordinary situations, especially when there is a need to react immediately. A developer at *VG* underlined that “usually ‘good things’ are created while extraordinary events happen and when the extreme need for information and innovation arises, for example, such as during the Covid-19 pandemic”. Similarly, the former manager of the data journalism department at *BT* said:

When extraordinary situations happen, for example, terrorist attacks or fire, the task of data journalists is to find out what we can give to the reader to illustrate news events. And those are the instances when the best innovations are made.

In extraordinary situations and critical incidents, newsroom workers are challenged to be creative, work hard, and come up with new ideas. A developer at *VG* said: “The culture of news is oriented around drama. Thus, when such critical incidents happen, it’s like all hands on deck. We step up and create new things”. However, during the Covid-19 crisis, access to information was restricted, as was face-to-face work processes, as some employees had to work from home.

While developing new products and innovations is time-consuming, during a crisis, there is no time to wait. For example, in the case of the Covid-19 live tracker, developers used two days to create an interactive dashboard where Covid-19 data was registered and where the audience could get information about the numbers of infected by Covid-19. However, the first version of the live tracker was not optimal and required enhancement. Developers at *VG*, *BT*, and *Aftenposten* thus created prototypes of products, then refined them later. One developer at *VG* described how “the ways we work don’t allow us to create the new products rapidly, so we first create things immediately and afterwards work to improve and maintain them”.

However, the ability to create the products at a high pace is an advantage in newsrooms, specifically in breaking-news departments. While in other settings, journalists work with different projects, the Covid-19 pandemic was a longitudinal project for all the informants working on Covid-19 reportage. The prioritisation of news related to Covid-19 was, of course, a response to the pressing demand for information by the public. As a journalist at *VG* stated: “In times of crisis, journalists are forced to prioritise the crisis-related happenings”. She described how they started to work on the Covid-19 live tracker: “The chief developing editor called us and said, now we should have something special, and they told the developers, ‘Just leave what you were

doing and start doing this instead” . Time, resources, and the prioritisation of tasks were underlined by the former manager of data journalism department at *BT* as “the factors that lead to newsroom innovation. If data journalists have enough resources and time, they can solve all kind of tasks”.

### **The importance of individual initiative in innovation processes**

Newsroom innovations can be crisis-, leadership-, or employee-driven. Hence, in the interviews, I also sought to identify who takes initiatives during the crisis-driven innovations – management or employees, journalists, or developers. There is little research on initiatives on innovation processes in newsrooms. As the developers said during the interviews, journalists as well as developers come up with good ideas. The leader of a data journalist department at *BT* said that innovation is often initiated bottom-up, not from managers, but from the data journalists or developers. The journalistic mission is to critically question not only sources but also data. Journalists could be initiators of innovations, and, with collaboration and technical expertise, these innovations emerged in newsrooms. For example, while describing the work process for developing the Covid-19 live tracker, a journalist at *VG* said: “It was me and one of the developers who fought for this. It was me who was the driving force for prioritising this project”. Prioritisation is an important aspect in the media industry, and data journalists, as well as developers working within the newsroom, should be able to prioritise correctly. The interviews show that idea-generation is expected from everyone in the editorial team; sometimes, journalists take initiative, and sometimes developers. As a developer at *VG* put it:

We see the opportunity, we know what can be and is possible to create/build. Sometimes journalists come and suggest creating something new. But there is a difference. Some journalists understand the developers more, which means that some journalists often have experience in collaborating with developers from previous projects, so they have the right expertise to help us create new products.

However, there is a difference between the younger and older generation of journalists, specifically those who have worked with both paper and digital formats. Informants pointed out that the younger generation understand technological tools better, and they underlined the difference in mindsets.

Another aspect brought up in the interviews is synergies when working in diverse teams. As a developer in *VG* said:

Sometimes journalists come up with very good ideas that I would never think of. It’s difficult to say who is more innovative, journalists or developers, in newsrooms. [...] Machines can’t innovate but can help to release the time that humans can use to innovate and be creative.

Creativity is about coming up with good ideas, and the informants pointed out that in newsrooms, creativity is connected to everyday tasks – there is no need for extraordinary or special creativity. Though journalists with computational mindsets may come up with good ideas and see opportunities better than others, creativity is expected from both journalists and developers, because both professions are always seeking something new, such as news stories to tell and new ways of telling them.

### **In-house technological expertise and knowledge**

All informants agreed on the central role of technological expertise and knowledge needed in the newsroom for staff to take initiative and to be able to collaborate successfully during a crisis. And it was not only the developers who had to understand the technology, but also journalists. In this sense, expertise, knowledge, and experience are the factors identified as practically affecting the innovation practices and facilitating the immediate reaction to the crisis.

The chief development editor at NTB pointed out that the people with technological expertise are the most expensive resource for organisations. However, editorial resources such as news production are also important. As the product manager at Schibsted explained:

Technological resources are crucial. You can have an innovative idea and solution for something, but not be able to execute it if you don't have technical resources. But editorial resources are also required for news products, and then you need input factors from both sides.

Technological expertise is connected to the ability to code and help journalists to find, analyse, and visualise large datasets, but technological innovation in newsrooms is also dependent on the ability to understand journalistic logic and principles. Developers are expected to create new products in a short time (and iterate them continuously), demonstrating a need for technological literacy in newsrooms that was crucial during the Covid-19 pandemic; specifically the reporting of large infection numbers would not have been possible using only traditional journalism methods. Developers in newsrooms can hence be regarded as one of the most valuable resources in a newsroom; however, employees who are extremely skilled technological experts are few and far between, according to the informants. As the product manager at Schibsted outlined: “The more support and resources you have, the more chances you have of succeeding. But you also see several examples of success in small units if you have the right people”.

To sum up, technological tools and expertise in the form of human resources are obvious success factors within newsroom and media organisations in times of crisis. In the words of the product manager at Schibsted: “The most important success factors are solving user needs and having a business model. You must have technology and competent staff”.

## **Developer–journalist collaboration**

Another factor identified as driving newsroom innovation in crisis is collaboration between journalists and developers. As outlined above, both technological and editorial resources are needed to create successful innovations. But these two competencies also need to work together to achieve results. As the chief development editor at NTB stated: “If we put developers and journalists who understand the programming together, I think that we’ll be able to create lots of good products”. Furthermore, he stated that “the majority of the projects we have built up were due to successful collaboration between journalists and developers”.

Developers help journalists with data collection and analysis as well as data visualisation. In newsrooms, besides developer–journalist collaboration, developer–developer collaboration is a common way of organising work processes. For example, in the case of the Covid-19 live tracker, one developer started work on the tracker, and later, it was iterated by another developer. In addition, sometimes developers take on journalistic tasks. For example, one of the developers described how he contacted hospitals to obtain readable formats for the infection numbers and the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration to obtain numbers of vacant positions over a period of ten years to understand the situation and capacity of hospitals during Covid-19. An important criterion for collaboration among journalists and developers is understanding and “speaking the same language”.

Norwegian newsrooms have established departments that often combine editorial technologists and journalists. The developers in newsrooms are often individuals who can code and have studied journalism, or vice versa, journalists who have learned to code. Developers assist journalists in presenting journalism in new formats, such as graphs and maps. Developers also assist journalists in everyday tasks, such as research, data gathering, analysing, and visualisation. As one developer at VG said: “What we do is to help journalists to become more productive, specifically during investigative projects. For example, in analysing the dataset, cleaning the dataset, and mainly working with data”. The chief development editor at NTB outlined that the key to developing new products in the future is based on successful collaboration between journalists and developers. However, he said: “It is difficult to find journalists who can code, but it is much easier to find developers who can understand the logic of journalism”.

## **The common denominator of newsroom innovation in crisis:**

### **Fast pace**

Innovation and consumer needs are interrelated. In the words of chief editor of VG, “it’s vital to determine customer needs as soon as possible”. The question of time and pace was the most mentioned theme in the empirical

data. Interestingly, the interviews show how developers' modes of operation have been changed and adapted to fit the pace of journalistic logic in newsrooms. While in other settings, innovation and the development of IT products lasted weeks and months, the newsroom setting requires innovation (such as new products or services) to emerge within days, or even hours. The chief editor at VG said that the developers in the breaking-news team are drivers of innovation at a fast pace and pointed to the fact that the collaborations with developer teams not accustomed to working in newsrooms were unsuccessful. The reason for this was the slow pace of collaboration and creation. As the chief editor said: "We tried along the way to expand this Covid-19 live tracker with some other components. We tried to do this with other teams that sat further from the editorial office, and it took much longer time". Collaborating with developers in other departments "was harder because they didn't know each other. There were different work processes and different ways of working, different ways of approaching the issue, that prevented the pace that is necessary when delivering within breaking news", continued the chief editor. In times of crisis, journalists as well as developers are expected to innovate and iterate immediately. The product manager at Schibsted described how "in the case of Covid-19 live tracker, for example, we just had to iterate and work from gut feeling because you don't have time to go through all those procedures of the process". Furthermore, a developer at VG pointed out that "while in other companies the pace was much slower, in the newsroom environment, developers react fast in extraordinary situations".

The importance of rapid innovation is highlighted as the main feature of innovation during the Covid-19 pandemic. As the chief development editor underlined: "I think that we should be more prepared to innovate at high paces and according to customer need". However, not all media companies are able to be as timely as the user need demands. The chief development editor at NTB explained: "We do lots of things that we call innovation. However, the pace of innovation is not as fast as it should be". The chief development editor explained that high-pace innovation requires prior strategical planning and preparation:

Information needs such as that which arose during the coronavirus crisis creates new customer needs, and then creates new products in a couple of days. Because you have to think far ahead for a long time before that. Because if you get a customer demand and you haven't taken the time to think through possible future scenarios then it takes a long time to understand what you are going to deliver.

Taking the time to be a visionary and to think far ahead is hence necessary to be able to innovate as quickly as needed when a crisis emerges.

## Discussion and conclusion

This study is an example of how exogenous factors, in this chapter, the Covid-19 crisis, drive innovation in newsrooms. The findings point to a special characteristic of innovation in crisis: fast pace. A quick pace is inherent in newsroom culture, and the constant need to produce news places demands on news workers to work at high speed. Similarly, innovation processes are adapted to the newsroom logics and culture. Consequently, the process of innovation is sped up in the context of crisis. Thus, this study highlights the need for fast innovation in crisis and identifies factors facilitating newsroom innovation.

As outlined in the result section, four key factors drive innovation in newsrooms during crisis. Here, I pointed out that the pressing need for information arises during crisis or extraordinary situation. For example, the findings from VG suggest that when Covid-19 was spreading in Norway, news leaders instructed the teams of developers and journalists working within breaking-news departments to create “something special”, later labelled as “Corona Special”. In this sense, the crisis and the need for information calls for innovation, and hence value creation, for organisations and for audiences.

Initiative-taking is another key factor that plays crucial role in innovation processes. As the findings suggested, initiative might come from different groups of newsroom staff – sometimes from journalists and sometimes from editorial developers or data journalists. In the case of Covid-19, developers together with journalists have initiated and created the Covid-19 live tracker to report the news about Covid-19. In-house technological expertise and collaboration between journalists and developers have played a crucial role in this case. Having previous experience and technological expertise is important, for example, at VG, that influenced the fast pace of the creation of the live tracker. The expertise and knowledge that is accumulated in the newsroom are important factors not only driving innovation, but creating the innovation. As outlined by Wenk (1989), the most powerful engine of change lies within human invention, innovation, and knowledge. Therefore, success is dependent on the knowledge and expertise of humans: in this case, developers and journalists in newsroom. Similarly, Williams (1997) underlined the importance of local knowledge, expertise, and experience in organisations, which is evident in the findings of this chapter. Indeed, journalists and developers possess the technological skills, understanding of technological logic, as well as principles of journalism, who base their expertise on experience. The journalists and data journalists in this study outlined that they have been working on similar projects before, for example, while reporting the election results. Therefore, it is argued that the in-house technological expertise and collaboration between journalistic and technological staff drive innovations in newsrooms.



In addition, the findings indicate that technological development is not the only factor driving innovation (as suggested by Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013) in newsrooms. Also technological capacity, which is understood as technological software and hardware, as well as competent staff with special technological skills and knowledge, is necessary to bring about innovation in newsrooms. Not all media organisations possess such skilful staff, therefore they lack the technological expertise to promote innovation.

The ability to collaborate across departments is also necessary for innovation, as outlined by previous studies (Fincham et al., 1995; Fleck, et al., 1990). The collaboration between journalists and developers can be seen through the model of “innofusion” (Fleck, 1988) in the context of newsrooms, where journalists and developers learn and create together with the aid of technological tools. As the findings show, the process of technological innovation in newsrooms is influenced by customer and information needs (social), initiated and constructed by social actors and their technological expertise. This points to the importance of local knowledge and expertise and experience, as suggested by Williams (1997). Studying innovations in newsrooms shows that the interplay between technology and social actors within an organisation is a complex process with a central role of knowledge and expertise. Moreover, this study shows that different media organisations, and even departments within the same media organisation, possess different knowledge and expertise (Fincham et al., 1995).

Løvlie (2016) has also underlined the pressing need to react quickly and addresses this speed as an important aspect while creating media products. This study, too, addresses fast reactions and fast innovation as a characteristic of crisis-driven innovation. However, the fast innovations might not be as viable as the innovations in regular times; therefore, future research must seek to understand the broader implications of quick-paced crisis-driven innovations (Pavlik, 2013). Moreover, future research can address the economic, organisational, and cultural consequences of media innovations during crisis (Lievrouw, 2006). However, one might argue that the biggest outcome of innovations during crisis is the experience that news workers gain through collaboration, which is vital for future crises. The findings show how crisis might become a catalyst of innovation and quicken the process of creation of novelty in newsrooms. The ability to transform, iterate, and innovate in times of crisis can be assumed as the resilience exercised by news media organisations.

This chapter focuses on internal stakeholders such as journalists, editors, developers, and programmers participating directly or indirectly in innovation and value creation during crisis. Journalists and developers managed to utilise existing resources and competence within newsrooms to create products and services according to audience needs. In this case, the crisis could be regarded as an opportunity to create and innovate and hence create value for different stakeholders. To sum up, in this chapter, I have attempted to highlight and

point out key factors behind innovation processes in the media industry in a Norwegian context during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The results are organised into four factors identified as key in the development of timely innovations during crisis: the need for information; initiative-taking; technological expertise; and collaboration. The findings show that the four factors spurring innovation in crisis were in one way or another connected to a fast pace, consequently identified as a central feature of crisis-driven innovation. This chapter utilises the Norwegian news media business during the Covid-19 pandemic as a case study. I suggest that future research should concentrate on studying the pace of innovation processes in detail to understand the impact of it through different contexts and settings.

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# Exploring telework innovation's value for news workers

RAGNHILD KR. OLSEN,<sup>1</sup> CECILIE ASKER,<sup>11</sup> & MARIA KONOW-LUND<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM AND MEDIA STUDIES, OSLO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY, NORWAY

<sup>11</sup> AFTENPOSTEN, NORWAY

## ABSTRACT

This chapter offers a framework for examining the advantages and challenges associated with a significant innovation in newsroom work that emerged during the Covid-19 crisis: the introduction of teleworking. Applying service innovation research perspectives, which emphasise that innovations should create value for all stakeholders, our study explores how news workers experienced the swift and extensive shift to digital work modes during lockdowns and periods of strict social distancing. The analysis, based on interviews with reporters, developers, and newsroom managers in three leading newspaper companies in Norway, shows how working at a distance by means of digital tools generated complex and ambiguous value experiences among news workers. Based on this, we argue that future research applying service innovation perspectives on journalism needs to pay more attention to the value of innovations for employees. Otherwise, this research risks overlooking a stakeholder group which plays a key role in news media's service provision to the public.

**KEYWORDS:** Covid-19, innovation, telework, value creation, news workers

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## Introduction

Perspectives from service theory have recently been applied in media innovation research to capture how news media are transforming into digital service providers through new service offerings and modes of operating (Cestino & Berndt, 2017; Olsen & Furseth, 2023). A key premise for research in this tradition is that value creation, be it economic, social, or any other value, is the main objective of innovation during crises and otherwise. Value creation for all actors involved is crucial for an innovation to succeed and be sustainable over time (Furseth & Cuthbertson, 2016). However, while asserting the importance of value creation for a firm's customers, business partners, and owners (Furseth & Cuthbertson, 2016), service innovation research rarely addresses whether or how innovations contribute to increased value for the *employees* involved in innovation processes. Consequently, this research tradition runs the risk of applying a too simplistic view of value creation and innovation by overlooking how new or improved value for some stakeholders, for example, a company's customers and owners, may in fact result in reduced value for the company's employees. As noted by Picard (2010), news workers, like journalists, are key stakeholders in value creation among news media. Value creation for news workers involves reasonable wages and non-pecuniary benefits related to their ability to pursue professional ambitions and conduct their work at desirable levels of quality. The latter kind of benefits are particularly relevant when assessing news workers' experiences with innovation that involves new newsroom practices, behaviours, and tools. During a crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic, such innovation could have a significant impact on the well-being of news workers. Previous research has demonstrated how increasing reliance on new digital tools has been a source of mental and physical burnout for journalists working within new online and digital work environments (Bossio & Nelson, 2021). This suggests that innovations in newsrooms not only represent benefits but also challenges to news workers, and furthermore, that such ambiguity should be considered when assessing value creation for "all involved parties" as the overall goal of innovation.

With this study, we seek to enhance the understanding of innovation and value creation in journalism by examining how news workers experienced new technology and working practices during the Covid-19 crisis. Specifically, we address the central theme of this book by investigating how Norwegian news workers responded to the rapid transition to telework practices during the pandemic and by providing an analytical framework for evaluating their value experiences based on perceived benefits and challenges. We understand telework as "a type of work and/or provision of services done remotely, at a distance, and online using computer and telematics technologies" (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés, 2020: 2). The scale of teleworking during the Covid-19 crisis was a major innovation in the way newsrooms operate (García-Avilés et al., 2024). Moving the entire newsroom online and keeping it up and

running for weeks and months during pandemic lockdowns and strict social distancing regulations represented something fundamentally new for media organisations. The comprehensive shift to telework radically changed news media's service system, that is, their infrastructure for news production and distribution. Previous research has demonstrated how this innovation was essential for Norwegian news media's ability to create value for audiences by means of new journalistic services, which, in turn, generated economic value from subscribers (Olsen & Furseth, 2023). As such, the innovation of the service system created value for audiences and news organisations by enabling new and improved customer experiences and increased revenues. However, research on how news workers coped with this innovation of the newsroom has revealed several negative experiences, such as increased levels of stress (e.g., Backholm & Idås, 2022; Hoak, 2023; Tandoc et al., 2022), emotions of anxiety, frustration, loneliness, and nervousness related to work (Šimunjak, 2022), as well as managerial challenges such as difficulties with inspiring, supporting, and motivating newsroom employees (Appelgren, 2022; see also Rudningen, Chapter 3). This transition to telework amid Covid-19 is thus an interesting case that encourages a broader discussion of what value creation for "all involved parties" entails in the context of media innovation. This chapter enhances knowledge of value creation and innovation by considering news workers' perceptions of telework benefits and challenges as indicators of how they value this new way of working. Analysing how news workers experienced teleworking during the Covid-19 crisis can further our understanding of such innovations' sustainability over time. Moreover, it encourages us to critically reflect on the potential downside of technology in journalism, which is often overlooked in the news industry's overriding and celebratory focus on innovation (Creech & Nadler, 2018).

In the next sections, we position our study within the field of service innovation research, which highlights the importance of value creation in innovation. We elaborate on telework as an innovation of news media's service system whereby journalistic practices are moved from the physical newsroom to digital spaces. We utilise pertinent research literature to construct an analytical framework, delineating emotional, functional, and strategic benefits and challenges as indicators of telework's value for news workers. Based on this framework, we delve into the experiences of Norwegian news workers with telework as a new working mode during the Covid-19 crisis. Our investigation draws from qualitative data gathered from in-depth interviews with 45 participants across local, regional, and national news outlets in Norway, allowing us to uncover both positive and negative telework experiences and consider the long-term sustainability of this innovation.

## Value-driven service innovation among news media

Applying perspectives from service innovation literature and describing newsrooms and news workers as a news organisation's "service system" may seem like an unusual approach to studying innovation in journalism. Two key premises underpin this choice of theoretical framing: 1) the business of journalism is shifting towards a "reader first paradigm", which emphasises value creation for audiences (Bakke & Barland, 2022); and 2) such value creation for audiences is increasingly based on the provision of intangible, digital news services, rather than physical goods, as well as on nurturing deeper, reciprocal relationships with audiences (Villi & Picard, 2019). As such, news media are experiencing a service shift which can be observed across a multitude of socioeconomic sectors (see Olsen & Solvoll, Chapter 1). Innovations in news media's services qualify as service innovations, as traditional forms of journalism, adapted to digital platforms, are supplemented by a multitude of innovative digital services distributed on mobile and social media platforms, often in personalised formats (Olsen & Furseth, 2023). Consider, for example, the launch of Covid-19 live trackers amid the pandemic, which, based on large datasets and interactive features, allowed users to search and find updated news information about Covid-19 in their own municipality or region (Konow-Lund et al., 2022; Olsen & Furseth, 2023; see also Mtchedlidze, Chapter 5). Such new services are examples of service innovations in journalism that require the newsroom to adopt a service-oriented mindset and integrate resources in a reliable service system which offers new or improved user experiences. Creating value for paying audiences by introducing new or improved services can be regarded as an innovation imperative for news media operating according to a "reader first paradigm" (Bakke & Barland, 2022).

The development of new digital services often requires close cooperation between the newsroom and the research and development department of the news organisation (Konow-Lund et al., 2022; see also Mtchedlidze, Chapter 5), which constitute key parts of the news organisations' service system. The service system integrates both technology and human resources from different parts of the organisation to deliver audience experiences which can be monetised through, for example, subscriptions. The service system is thus closely connected to the news organisation's business model. According to Furseth and Cuthbertson (2016: 124), the service system is "the culmination of processes and activities" required to achieve the intended customer experiences within the given constraints of the operation's business model to create the desired value for all stakeholders. Translated to media and journalism terminology, the service system encompasses the journalistic production process, including the people, technology, competency, and other resources required to provide news and information to the public. Notably, the service system of news organisations is not restricted to operating

and managing newsrooms and research and development departments but encompasses a variety of actors and activities such as quality management, information systems, and performance measurement. In the current context, however, we focus our analysis on service system activities that involve news workers, including newsroom managers, journalists, and developers.

In their proposed value-driven service innovation framework, Furseth and Cuthbertson (2016) described the service system as a key component of service innovation. Treating news workers as service system actors is arguably productive to capture the dynamics of service innovation among news media and the organisational resources and capabilities required to provide new audience experiences and increase revenues (Olsen & Furseth, 2023). However, as noted above, there is a risk of putting too much emphasis on customer value and economic value generation for the media organisation, without paying sufficient attention to news workers as key stakeholders in the innovation process. To address this shortcoming of the service innovation perspective in journalism, we turn to the case of telework to explore value perceptions among individual news workers when introduced to new technology and working modes. We incorporate research focusing on telework and virtual newsrooms to extract benefits and challenges that signal the value of this service system innovation for news workers.

## **Benefits and challenges of telework**

The shift to telework during the Covid-19 crisis moved news production into virtual newsrooms with communication systems and workflows supported by digital tools like Zoom, Teams, Meet, WhatsApp, Slack, and Telegram (see, e.g., García-Avilés et al., 2024). As noted in the early research literature on telework (Baruch, 2000), the successful transition to such a remote, digital working mode depends on several factors, including the nature of the job (can it be digitalised?), the organisation (is management supportive of telework arrangements?), the home–work interface (is the home and family a suitable context for work?), and the individual (is the worker suited for this way of working?) (Baruch & Nicholson, 1997). The rapid and forced shift to virtual newsrooms during the Covid-19 pandemic did not allow news organisations to carefully consider these factors. As such, the service system was radically changed, even though the conditions for successful implementation of telework were not necessarily in place. This could have significant impact on how the value of this innovation was perceived among news workers.

Moreover, virtual newsrooms represent a distinct working environment, not only in physical terms but also regarding the experiences, relationships, and power dynamics they generate among news workers (Bunce et al., 2018). Thus, the virtual newsroom and the telework taking place in this digital space have certain characteristics which may or may not create value for the



individual news worker. Pre-pandemic research had already identified advantages and disadvantages of teleworking, which are relevant for understanding the value creation potential of this service system innovation for news workers. Baruch (2000) summarised the possible benefits and challenges of teleworking for individuals, describing how working remotely offers opportunities for improved performance and better productivity, more autonomy, less time spent on commuting, less work-related stress, and more time for family life, while simultaneously increasing risks of detachment from social interactions and weaker affiliation with colleagues, less influence over people and events in the workplace, and increased home-related stress. More recent studies have described how working from home limits the opportunities for face-to-face interaction and may reduce the ability to learn through informal interaction with co-workers (Allen et al., 2015). Moreover, while telework could facilitate interdepartmental collaboration, it does not necessarily result in new relationships being formed in the organisations. As noted by Azarova and colleagues (2022), barriers between different employee groups could be higher in the digital space, and this in turn could lead to digital joint conversations changing to individual one-on-one conversations. Regarding telework in the context of Covid-19, research has described isolation, a lacking sense of belonging, and lower-quality relations as the “dark side of telework” (Miglioretti et al., 2021; Wöhrmann & Ebner, 2021). The lack of ad-hoc meeting venues and physical interruptions in everyday work has been found to create a higher threshold for interaction between employees, as well as less knowledge-sharing and spontaneous coordination, as communication became more targeted and effective (Waizenegger et al., 2020).

In journalism research, studies of newsroom collaboration on digital platforms have demonstrated that digital communication tools have the potential to facilitate increased interaction and collaboration among news workers (Bunce et al., 2018; Koivula et al., 2023), and that digital communication tools can help break down hierarchies (Gibbs et al., 2015; Moran, 2021) by allowing communication to be more simultaneous and transparent (Bunce et al., 2018). Furthermore, working together by means of digital platforms has been identified as an opportunity for solidifying as well as developing new friendships with colleagues (Bunce et al., 2018). On the other hand, previous studies in journalism also show how telework has disturbed news workers’ work–life balance and created challenges for managers in supervising their employees (Bunce et al., 2018; Owen, 2015). Research on telework during the Covid-19 crisis confirms that working in digital spaces reconfigured relationships among colleagues, encouraged less hierarchical decision-making, increased collaboration, and shaped new practices and communication protocols, while simultaneously raising problematic issues regarding work-overload and psychological distress (García-Avilés, 2021). There are also reports on how telework made newsroom creativity more challenging during the pandemic. For example, Appelgren (2022) observed

how managers found it difficult to keep the energy flowing in the news organisation, spur creativity, and motivate employees when teleworking. Similarly, García-Avilés (2021) concluded that digital tools cannot replace the creative environment of the traditional physical newsroom. According to Koivula and colleagues (2023), the role of telework in creative work and innovation in journalistic teams is full of tensions: On the one hand, technology serves as a facilitator of communication in dispersed teams and thus also as a requisite for creativity and innovation, but on the other, it also induces uncertainty in dispersed journalistic teams, which could constrain creative work and innovation.

## **Assessing the value creation of telework for news workers**

The foregoing literature review reveals a complex mix of empirical findings, exposing advantages and disadvantages of telework for employees. Drawing from this research, we distil telework benefits and challenges, which inform our empirical investigation of teleworking experiences among news workers during the Covid-19 crisis. These benefits and challenges fall into three categories – emotional, functional, and strategic – with the latter being primarily relevant to the managerial level of the newsroom, while the former two apply to both regular employees and managers. We consider these benefits and challenges as value indicators, forming the foundation for evaluating whether and how the transformation of the news organisation’s service system to telework created value for news workers during the crisis.

Emotional benefits and challenges emerge from the research literature that describes how telework impacts news workers’ well-being and feelings about their work life. Benefits include the positive experiences of work autonomy and a more manageable workday, as well as feelings of inclusion and impact in the workplace due to less hierarchical and more transparent work structures (e.g., Baruch, 2000; Bunce et al., 2018). Challenges included discomfort and concern related to, for example, weaker work affiliation, isolation and detachment from social interactions, disturbance of work–life balance, and more stress (e.g., Baruch, 2000; Bunce et al., 2018; Miglioretti et al., 2021; Wöhrmann & Ebner, 2021).

Functional benefits and challenges encompass experiences with practical or technical dimensions of teleworking identified in the research literature. Benefits include technological solutions which enable people to work together and communicate in more efficient ways, as well as more flexible work environments (Baruch, 2000; Bunce et al., 2018; García-Avilés, 2021; Gibbs et al., 2015; Koivula et al., 2023; Moran, 2021). Challenges encompass technological problems and shortcomings with digital communication tools that are not experienced in face-to-face interaction (e.g., Azarova et al., 2022; Waizenegger et al., 2020).

The third strategic dimension derives from research describing the strategic benefits that telework could have, for example, regarding the news operation's cost, productivity, and attractiveness as an employer (Baruch, 2000), and strategic challenges of telework such as decreased creativity and innovation (e.g., Appelgren, 2022; García-Avilés, 2021; Koivula et al., 2023), which are particularly relevant for individuals on the managerial level in the newsroom.

## Material and method

To address our research question, which asks whether and how the telework transformation of news organisations' service systems created value for news workers during the Covid-19 crisis, we follow a qualitative approach based on in-depth interviews in 20 news organisations in Norway. All but one of the media outlets in our sample are legacy news media organisations with a history of print newspapers combined with an increasingly digitally oriented news production and distribution strategy. The case organisations are thus undergoing a service transformation whereby innovation efforts are directed towards new, digital audience experiences. As we wanted a broad sample representing the diversity and breadth of newspapers in Norway, we included local, regional, and national news outlets in our study, while simultaneously incorporating newspapers owned by the three leading newspaper companies in Norway: Schibsted, Amedia, and Polaris. The data is based on semi-structured interviews with news workers, that is, people working as reporters, programmers, or managers in these case organisations. Specifically, we combine three datasets on experiences with telework during the pandemic collected among news reporters in *Aftenposten*, *Stavanger Aftenblad*, *Bergens Tidende*, and *VG* ( $N = 12$ ); among programmers, reporters, and newsroom managers in *VG* ( $N = 13$ ); and among newsroom managers in *Adresseavisen*, *Avisa Nordland*, *Bergensavisen*, *Budstikka*, *Firda*, *Fædrelandsvennen*, *Glåmdalen*, *Harstad Tidende*, *iTromsø*, *Jærbladet*, *Lofot-Tidende*, *Moss Avis*, *Namdalsavisa*, *Nettavisen*, *Sunnmørsposten*, and *Varden* ( $N = 16$ ). In addition, three top management team representatives from Amedia and Polaris were interviewed, resulting in a total sample of 44 respondents.

The datasets were collected within three separate research projects, taking advantage of the considerable overlap between projects in the efforts to explore experiences with telework. This method, known as pooled case comparison, is based on the sharing of qualitative data for the purpose of investigating new questions or verifying previous studies (Heaton, 2004). Raw data from separate studies are pooled to create a new dataset from which fresh categories and properties are derived (West & Oldfather, 1995). Through a careful assessment, we identified data from each dataset that could be merged within a common analytical framework. This research design did not facilitate a systematic analysis of differences and commonalities between

different news worker groups or media outlets in our material, which is a limitation. However, the pooled case comparison allows us to obtain a broad sense of news workers' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of telework during the Covid-19 pandemic, in line with our overall research objective. For each individual dataset, we used a purposive sampling strategy, which means that participants were selected in a non-random manner based on the knowledge and experiences they possessed regarding telework during the pandemic (García-Avilés, 2021).

To capture how the participants perceived the value– or lack thereof – of telework, we relied on open-ended questions regarding the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the news operations under study, combined with in-depth questions regarding creativity, cooperation, working processes, and culture, as well as newsroom management in a telework context.

The interviews for the individual studies were carried out via the Zoom platform from March to June 2021 and lasted for approximately one hour each. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English. As some of the participants were granted anonymity, the confidentiality principle was followed in the handling of all the interviews, ensuring that the information provided could not be traced back to the individual participant or media outlet. The data collection, handling, and storing was assessed and approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). One of the researchers behind this study, Cecilie Asker works as an editor at *Aftenposten*, one of the organisations under study. This insider role is considered an advantage, as it provides easier access to participants and knowledge of context and internal codes. This allows more precise questions when collecting data and conducting the analysis. On the other hand, research in one's own field also comes with the risk of losing analytical distance, over-identification with the participants, and forgetting to problematise the customary (Støkken & Nylehn, 2002), while simultaneously influencing the way participants respond. While this is another limitation to our study, which should not be ignored, we countered such negative impact by being open and conscious about the insider role and making implicit normative stances explicit throughout the research process (Henriksen, 2011).

The data analysis process followed an iterative approach in which the analysis alternated between emergent readings of the data and the use of existing models, concepts, and theories regarding (newsroom) telework (García-Avilés, 2021). We carried out a series of meetings, during which we identified commonalities in respondents' experiences with telework. We categorised these experiences based on the three types of perceived telework benefits and challenges – emotional, functional, and strategic – forming our analytical framework. Subsequently, we identified common themes within each category, offering a more detailed understanding of how news workers valued telework. We recognise that value perception is a multifaceted con-

cept. In light of this, perceived emotional, functional, and strategic benefits and challenges serve as proxies for value perception, allowing us to evaluate how news workers experienced both the positive and negative aspects of teleworking during the pandemic.

## Findings

### **New opportunities to connect versus feelings of isolation and stress**

Regarding perceived emotional benefits of the shift to telework during the Covid-19 crisis, some news workers described how the digital mode of working provided new opportunities for increased cooperation, stronger relationships with colleagues, and new ways of meeting other people in the news organisation, which made them feel good about their role in the news production. For example, there were reports of how the telework mode of editorial operation reduced the distance between the newsroom managers and journalists. As noted by one reporter regarding communicating with superiors via the chat platform Slack:

Being able to send a message on Slack to the news editor – or even the chief editor – who is above me in the system, is a good thing, really, which could even out hierarchies. It's easier than interrupting them in the office where they always seem to be very busy.

Other accounts revealed how digital communication tools and the telework situation supported a new sense of togetherness, even though people were physically further apart than before. In the words of one editor:

It's a larger (sense of) community – at least on the managerial level where I am. We're close to each other during the day, due to the number of video conferences. You make up for remote working practices by having more meetings which mean that you have a closer collaboration across the management level. The whole working from home situation has forced us to think differently about how the working day should be arranged and how to cooperate and nurture relationships with colleagues.

Digital tools were also seen to enable more equal opportunities for people to participate and have an impact on the news production process and product, leaving less room for personalities who used to dominate physical meetings. As such, telework provided new opportunities “to shine” for some workers. The fact that much of the communication throughout the day took place in writing on chat platforms like Slack was considered a benefit to some of the less vocal people, like younger and less experienced employees. One editor succinctly described how telework had democratised the workplace and made it easier for more people to “take the floor”:

I think in a strange way it has become easier for more people to voice their opinion, make suggestions and comments compared to the physical environment where all the funny and loud people used to dominate [...] All these digital systems make it easier for more people to present ideas, thoughts, concepts, input, and criticism.

These accounts suggest that telework created value for news workers by connecting people and promoting communality while also supporting their sense of purpose and impact in the news production. However, replacing the buzz and noise at the office with the silence and serenity of home also entailed emotional challenges. While some felt closer to their colleagues in the telework environment, others reported experiences with social isolation and weaker relationships with colleagues. According to these latter accounts, the feeling of being an important contributor to the news cycle was weakened when the news workers and managers were no longer together in the physical newsroom. One of the journalist participants described the importance of being present in a physical newsroom like this: “When you are in the newsroom you have your finger on the pulse. You are updated on the latest news. You are part of what’s happening, and part of the big picture”.

Due to the absence of daily office interactions, participants reported reduced interaction with colleagues from different teams and departments. Their daily routine circled almost entirely around the people they met in their scheduled online meetings. In other words, digital interactions did not replicate the serendipitous encounters that occur naturally in a physical workplace. According to one of the journalists, the sense of being part of a larger community was lost when teleworking: “Now, I’m only part of a small community and know so little about other people”. Another reporter noted that the “love and friendship in the newsroom” was difficult to maintain digitally. The data material reveals how meeting colleagues physically on a daily basis was seen to create a sense of comfort: “They sort of become your second family”, according to one reporter. Several attempts were made to replicate culture-building activities from the physical environment in a digital context. However, according to the interviews, such attempts were not very successful. Digital meetings with the purpose of socialising, snacking, and chatting were launched and tried out, only to disappear after a short while. These initiatives were described as “forced and unnatural”.

Another emotional challenge that stands out in the interview data is managing work–life balance and coping with increased stress due to telework. Spending work hours and leisure hours in the same physical space was perceived to blur the line between work and private life. One reporter described it as “easy to do some extra work, when you’re in the same space and just sitting there”. Another reporter added that it was more difficult to take natural breaks during the workday when alone, and that lunch was often forgotten.

Even though the digital newsroom at home could be experienced as a lonely place, participants also reported that being constantly digitally available, including outside of work hours, caused increased levels of stress. “The distinction between work and private life has largely been erased”, one reporter explained. Another reporter described how the digital chat tool Slack “feels really intruding with the pinging at all hours”. Some of the participants described how they tried to reduce the stress with new routines – like ignoring the red light that showed unread messages in Slack. In the words of one reporter: “Sometimes I mute channels, because they’re always flashing red, and I feel I have to check who it is”.

In sum, these reports of isolation, detachment, and stress reveal considerable ambiguity regarding the value of teleworking among news workers. On the one hand, this transformation of the service system was perceived as a valued opportunity for collaboration, communication, and participation, which created positive feelings about work and colleagues. On the other hand, those who felt alienated and stressed by telework expressed how they perceived this as an inferior working mode, which created negative emotions and less value than meeting colleagues face-to-face.

### **Increased efficiency and flexibility versus communication difficulties**

Turning next to the functional benefits of the telework transition during the pandemic, we observe how the digital tools and platforms employed by the news organisations were often described as useful and timesaving by the news workers. For example, some participants described how quick and easily accessible messages on Slack replaced more formal and arduous e-mail correspondence with colleagues, and how digital chatrooms provided an efficient way of working together in small groups. One editor described how the news staff explored the technological advantages of chat rooms as a digital meeting venue that was always accessible: “Smaller groups and closer cooperation work well in chat rooms. We use it a lot. With only 5–6 people in the room, the chat is going on throughout the day”.

Supplementing this account, a senior developer in another news operation described how they had developed an entirely new service for audiences mostly via a chat channel: Being able to exploit the possibilities of the tool – sharing videos, text files, and so on – meant that the news workers were “technically equipped” to innovate without any physical interaction. The way digital communication platforms enabled people to work closely together regardless of geographical distance was also seen to encourage new ways of organising news work and bringing together people who had previously been regarded as too far apart to cooperate in an efficient way. One editor described how the technical advantages of digital communication tools had been an eye-opener for cooperation between different newsrooms in the

company: “We have realised that it’s fairly easy to have people sitting in six different locations in Norway and produce a newspaper together. I don’t think we believed that would be possible before the corona crisis”.

Others emphasised how the digital tools at hand offered better ways of streamlining work processes and increased autonomy in the news production process. For example, some of the journalists described how they did not have to run decisions by managers from various departments in newsroom meetings. As such, telework was perceived to reduce bureaucracy and increase autonomy. Others emphasised how communication with digital meeting tools became more targeted and to the point, with less time for chit-chat. As noted by one reporter:

You remove the unnecessary stuff. You spend your time more efficiently and make discussions shorter. Everyone has the same objective: OK – we’re going to talk about this for 15 minutes and find a solution to this, and not talk about what we’re having for dinner or the last stupid thing our kids did at school.

Being able to shift working hours around to accommodate other activities during the day was also described as a good thing about teleworking. For example, one editor noted how telework had made it easier to combine work with family life, allowing more space in the daily schedule for “exercising, for taking care of oneself and making dinner for your family”. Others described reduced absenteeism as a functional benefit of telework, as people could contribute and be part of the news production even if they were unable to come into the office. For example, staying at home with a kid who was not feeling well could more easily be combined with working. One manager emphasised how telework was thus seen to enable a more inclusive work environment during the Covid-19 crisis, “making it easier to take care of employees who otherwise would have been excluded from the workplace”.

In sum, these accounts suggest that telework represented multiple opportunities which were highly appreciated by some of the news workers. These functional benefits of teleworking were seen to create value by making news work more efficient, flexible, and autonomous, which in turn had a positive impact on how people felt about their job. As such, functional and emotional benefits often went hand in hand, resulting in an overall favourable perception of telework. There were also, however, multiple negative experiences with technology that nuance these positive accounts. These were often related to interface and user experience issues with digital communication tools. Some news workers described how they found it more difficult to interrupt people during a digital meeting than in real life, because of the half-second delay that is common on video conference platforms. This delay led to people talking over and interrupting each other. The participants described how in a physical meeting they could interpret the body language and tone of voice of the other participants, which helped them understand when a person had finished



an argument and provided an opportunity to interrupt in a slightly more comfortable way. As described by one reporter, with teleworking, there was a fear of hurting or offending colleagues by saying something critical – or being perceived as rude. According to one journalist, “it’s easier to get around those things when you’re in the same room”. Another reporter mentioned the fear of being misunderstood or just saying something stupid, which was perceived as being more difficult to sort out in online conversations than in “real life”. Once again, we note that the functional challenges of working solely through digital communication were accompanied by emotional challenges, particularly among those who felt insecure and awkward when required to communicate via screens instead of in person. There were also accounts of managerial challenges, such as following up on employees’ everyday lives and having an impact on the staff’s professional development. As pointed out by one manager, communicating solely on digital platforms made it more difficult for leaders to notice when people were struggling, and to take the right course of action. Supplementing this, a reporter described changes in power dynamics whereby the managers had become “instructors”. According to these participants, digital meetings reduced discussions between employees and managers, emphasising a traditional hierarchy in which leaders assign tasks and employees execute them.

Diverse experiences with the functional aspects of telework highlight the ambiguous value of this working mode for news workers. While some embraced the opportunities offered by online collaborative tools, others struggled with a multitude of technical obstacles such as muted microphones, glitches in the system, and video images that froze. These technical issues were perceived as obstacles to collaboration and cooperation, which in turn could lead to digital fatigue when a telework meeting did not fulfil its purpose. One reporter described the exhaustion of trying to contribute to the digital conversation: “When it fails, it’s easier to resign and just passively answer some e-mails”.

### **Saving costs and increasing productivity versus decreasing creativity**

Regarding strategic benefits of telework, several managers emphasised how telework saved costs and increased productivity. As described by one of the management representatives: “We don’t have to be concerned if people working from home actually produce news – because they really do”. Echoing this observation, another manager described the increased productivity as a persistent phenomenon with telework:

At the beginning of the pandemic, the biggest surprise was that productivity did not go down because of people working from home. Instead, productivity increased. You might say that this was not that surprising during the first two–three weeks when everybody realised that there is a global crisis going on. But this has continued, and it has made us realise that we will benefit from having a more flexible workplace in the future.

Other managers reported how teleworking had made it easier to recruit and retain highly qualified staff. As one described: “One of the consequences of the pandemic is that we recruit people who live elsewhere”. Telework was thus seen to expand the labour market for news organisations competing for competency. There was, however, considerable ambivalence regarding this potential. While some managers were optimistic about recruitment, others were concerned that they would lose skilled news workers who felt less attached to the news organisation when working from home. As stated by one of the editors:

Some are drawn to other industries, as they discover how the competence they have developed within the media industry can be applied in other organisations. This change could be the result of many people working from home and not being part of their regular environment.

There was also concern among managers regarding the negative impact of teleworking on organisational culture and creativity. They described how small talk by the coffee machine, and random meetings between colleagues in the hallway or the lunchroom used to play a key role for idea generation in the journalistic process. When these meeting points disappeared, journalists as well as managers found it difficult to keep the energy and creativity flowing. The exchange of ideas and the bouncing back and forth of thoughts that normally take place at these meeting venues were not merely a social activity, but a core component in developing and refining journalistic content, according to our participants. One manager put it like this:

A physical newsroom is organic. So much happens there during the day. You talk to so many people. People who do the same thing as yourself. And you pitch ideas at such a low-threshold level. This is completely lost when only working digitally. Work becomes less exciting. There are fewer exciting ideas emerging. Too few out-of-the-box ideas.

This was experienced as a problem on a day-to-day basis, with fewer stories being developed through the sort of collective process that produced high-impact journalism in the physical newsroom in pre-pandemic times. It was also perceived as a challenge for journalistic innovation in a longer-term perspective, as innovation processes came to a halt, strategy workshops were postponed, and the general inventiveness in the newsroom was reduced. Several of our interviewees described how sharing ideas and brainstorming processes require a physical and social organisation to work well. As noted by one manager: “I experience the pandemic as an obstacle for idea generation and other things that are important for innovation because people are most creative when working together”. Supplementing this, another manager emphasised how business critical innovation was suffering due to teleworking: “If we want to increase our subscriber base, we can’t do more of what we are

already doing. We need to make something different [...] This slows down when people are working from home”. This quote points to what seems like an innovation paradox: By shifting to telework, news organisations innovated their service systems in ways that enabled them to keep the wheels of the news production running and the news business afloat during the crisis. However, the shift to telework could have a negative impact on future innovations. Even though several of the news organisations in our sample had launched new services while working remotely during the crisis, the management participants in this study seemed less optimistic about their ability to nurture such innovativeness in a telework setting after the pandemic. As such, the strategic benefits of cost reduction, efficiency, and increased production were coupled with concern regarding loss of innovation ability in a telework setting.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

This study has shed light on how a major innovation in the production of news during the Covid-19 crisis was perceived by news workers. While the rapid transition to telework created value for stakeholders such as audiences and news media owners by keeping the news production up and running, and even enabling news organisations to launch new services in response to public information needs (Olsen & Furseth, 2023; see also Solvoll, Chapter 2; Mtchedlidze, Chapter 5), the insights presented in this chapter reveal the significant challenges that many news workers faced during the telework transformation of news organisations’ service systems. The analytical framework in our study provides a productive perspective for dissecting these intricate value assessments. The emotional, functional, and strategic challenges perceived by this stakeholder group contribute to a more nuanced understanding of innovation and value creation during the pandemic and prompt us to contemplate the sustainability of this new working approach in a post-pandemic setting.

In line with research by Baruch and Nicholson (1997), Baruch (2000), and Miglioretti and colleagues (2021), our research identifies advantages as well as pitfalls associated with telework, demonstrating how the value of this innovation to news workers was ambiguous and complex. On the one hand, telework was perceived to provide opportunities for a more efficient and flexible work life. Digital tools allowing news workers to interact with their colleagues and to have more control over the time, place, and pace of their work were seen to generate functional as well as emotional benefits. The flexibility of teleworking has potentially been a giant leap forward in the modernisation of the journalistic workplace, making it more aligned with the expectations of a new generation of employees. Younger people have been found to appreciate telework, considering it a source of freedom to plan time

and enjoy work autonomy (Nakrošienė et al., 2019). For this group, telework is arguably a working mode that creates value by improving their ability to conduct their work at desirable levels of flexibility. The Covid-19 crisis, serving as a massive real-life telework experiment, has made news organisations more experienced in facilitating and managing this kind of work. Offering teleworking opportunities is likely an important element in recruiting highly skilled news workers for the future. Our findings also suggest that some news workers became accustomed to and enjoyed the flexibility that telework entails (see also Rudningen, Chapter 3). Consequently, it seems difficult to turn back the clock to pre-pandemic times and demand that all news workers return to the physical office on an everyday basis, particularly as productivity was reportedly high and news production more efficient with teleworking. Indeed, offering telework opportunities may become an important strategy not only for recruiting but also for retaining employees in the post-pandemic work environment, as flexibility and autonomy reportedly create substantial value for some news workers.

On the other hand, our research brings to the fore the disadvantages of news workers not being together in a physical newsroom and the shortcomings of “the screen” as an arena for generating journalistic ideas and for nurturing organisational culture. This cultural deficit could be particularly taxing for newcomers who are unfamiliar with organisational routines, manners, and jargon and who lack a well-established network of co-workers to lean on for professional guidance and support. Considering physical, digital, or hybrid newsrooms for the future, it is important to critically assess which individuals in the workforce are most in need of the networking and learning opportunities offered in the physical newsroom, and who are unlikely to thrive without such stimuli from their colleagues. In other words, news organisations need to be attentive to how the value of telework is experienced individually and how it influences the employees’ ability to pursue professional ambitions and conduct their work at desirable levels of quality which, as noted by Picard (2010), is essential for news organisations’ value creation for news workers. Our study suggests that nurturing news workers’ creativity represents a particular challenge in a telework setting. Supplementing previous observations by García-Avilés (2021) and Appelgren (2022), we find that reporters as well as managers found it problematic to nurture creativity when working remotely. Based on these negative accounts of telework, we posit that moving forward, news organisations must consider which journalistic jobs can be fully digitalised and which ones require news workers to meet physically. Creative processes may be one area where employees – even those thriving in their working-from-home solitude – are expected to participate physically as team members. Other tasks, such as passing on information or updating your colleagues on your work status during the day, may be better suited for digital meetings.

While these findings on how news workers perceived the benefits and challenges of telework provide important insights regarding the value of this innovation, one cannot ignore the impact of the crisis itself on people's general well-being, socially as well as professionally. The forced implementation of telework ruled out a *voluntary* transition to this mode of working, which would be expected under normal circumstances. While telework otherwise typically offers flexibility, it was an inflexible solution during the pandemic, since for many news workers, this was the *only* work option available. The news workers we interviewed were living through one of the largest societal crises of our time, resulting in substantial emotional distress and discomfort likely to have affected job satisfaction. When assessing the value of telework for news workers, and its suitability for newsroom cooperation post-pandemic, such contextual conditions cannot be ignored.

Having said that, this study has demonstrated how applying an employee perspective provides a more complex picture of innovation and value creation among news organisations. Contrasting the somewhat simplistic assertion that innovation should create value for all actors involved (Furseth & Cuthbertson, 2016), the mixed experiences reported by our respondents suggest that the value of innovation could be highly individual and ambiguous. This represents a challenge for the research field as well as for media organisations. Value creation, albeit a laudable objective of innovation, may prove difficult to achieve for all relevant stakeholders. We posit that future research applying service innovation perspectives on journalism needs to be more attentive to value creation dilemmas and contradictions. Based on the insights in this study, we argue that sustainable innovations in journalism must create value not only for the firm's customers, owners, and suppliers (Furseth & Cuthbertson, 2016), but for its employees as well. Without sufficient attention to news workers as key stakeholders in service innovation, media organisations may push through service system changes that alienate their workforce and create problems for future innovation in journalism.

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# The effects of an external crisis on the prioritisation of innovations

ARNE H. KRUMSVIK<sup>1</sup> & DAVID L. FRANCIS<sup>II</sup>

<sup>1</sup> DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION, KRISTIANIA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, NORWAY; DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM, VOLDA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, NORWAY

<sup>II</sup> SCHOOL OF BUSINESS & LAW, UNIVERSITY OF BRIGHTON, UK; RICHMOND CONSULTANTS LTD., UK

## ABSTRACT

This unique study, for the first time, explores the relative importance of 8 × 2 types of media innovations in the newspaper industry, based on empirical data post-pandemic, from a survey of over 100 Norwegian newspaper executives (i.e., editors-in-chief, managing directors, and publishers). In the aftermath of the Covid-19 crisis, newspaper leaders did not want to make any dramatic changes; rather, they prioritised incremental change. Improving market positions, the products and services, and the existing revenue streams were top priorities. This was not the time to redefine either the concept of newspapers or the genres of journalism. While radical change was not at the top of the agenda, some indications of a willingness to experiment were identified.

**KEYWORDS:** agility, Covid-19, innovation, leadership, media management

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## Introduction

In the first chapter of this book, Olsen and Solvoll introduced the theoretical concepts of crisis, resilience, and innovation and described how these concepts provide frameworks for exploring how Norwegian news media organisations responded to the Covid-19 pandemic, addressing the problem of “how news organisations can cope with and recover from a crisis, and even improve their situation from the pre-crisis status”. In this chapter, we provide additional insights into the theoretical construct of (organisational) resilience and investigate the range of managerial challenges of strategic decision-making in news media organisations during and after a crisis. Our unit of analysis is senior leadership, which we define as the people in news organisations with positions of power (i.e., the members of the organisation’s upper echelon) who make key decisions affecting inputs, transformational processes, and outputs as they find or create, select, realise, and seek to optimise new opportunities, some of which require innovation initiatives.

Our findings are derived from a survey of more than 100 Norwegian senior newspaper executives (including editors-in-chief, managing directors, and publishers), as they had faced a markedly different reality due to the extensive effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. As we are principally concerned with managerial decision-making, we have adopted a more narrow definition of innovation than that presented in Chapter 1 (that “innovation is something new that creates value for stakeholders”). For the purposes of this chapter, we define innovation as a deliverable from specialised work undertaken to transform opportunities, ideas, resources, or needs into something of value that is new to the unit of adoption and strengthens either dynamic or ordinary capabilities or contributes to the achievement of competitive or comparative advantage. By defining innovation as a deliverable from specialised work, we make an unusual distinction. An example clarifies this point: For us, if a news media organisation developed all the systems and procedures required to enable its journalists to work virtually, then this would be a (process) innovation. If the same organisation purchased the required systems and procedures for a virtual newsroom ready-made from a contractor, then (as they did not do the work to transform an idea into an output) we consider this to be an agile initiative. In each case, the output is the same, but the managerial requirements are markedly different.

## Context

In early 2020, news media organisations around the world were confronted with an event that profoundly reconfigured industry-specific landscapes of threats and opportunities in ways that were dynamic, complex, and difficult to define. The trigger was the public health emergency caused by the rapid spread of Covid-19. There was no available vaccine for this novel disease, and the medical profession lacked evidence and capabilities to treat patients effectively. One fact clarifies the scope of the crisis: Epidemiologists predicted

that up to six million premature deaths could occur across Europe (Keeling et al., 2021), with ice-rinks being commandeered for use as temporary mortuaries and hospitals being unable to cope with the quantity of patients.

From the onset of Covid-19, enterprises in the news media industry experienced multiple novel external change drivers: almost all European countries required that the population maintained a high degree of social isolation; working from home became the norm; digital technologies were increasingly used for all forms of communication; patterns of consumption of news changed radically; and news media organisations began to examine how they could be proactive socially in a period of crisis. For media managers (Appelgren, 2022), normal life did not return for almost two years, providing an opportunity for researchers to investigate how enterprises managed organisational evolution and revolution, and the role of innovation practices, during and after a “once in a hundred years event”.

## **Unpacking the construct of resilience**

The quantity, importance, novelty, and significance of multiple change drivers impacting news media organisations from the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic meant that “business as usual” was no longer a viable strategy for many traditional businesses. This placed news media organisations in a condition that can be accurately described as “institutional stress”. Those with greater resilience were better placed to cope with and recover from the crisis and even improve their situation (to revisit the definition in Chapter 1). The theoretical construct of organisational resilience is usefully examined using three different lenses: high reliability organisations; dynamic capabilities; and requisite agility.

The history of research into high reliability organisations dates back to 1986, when similar characteristics were found in organisations that were error-free while operating in error-prone conditions (Cantu et al., 2021:1). Hales and Chakravorty (2016: 2873) explained that organisations that succeed in being high reliability organisations are characterised by 1) intense exploration of possible failures and thought given to how to avoid them; 2) a culture of using rigorous methods for the investigation of problems; 3) understanding how a failure in part of an organisation often has consequences elsewhere; 4) clarifying that responsibility for action should be taken by the best-informed available person (probably not a senior remote boss); and 5) an emphasis on ubiquitous continuous improvement in all parts of the organisation. It is reasonable to conclude that competences such as these can only be built over time, and so those news media organisations that possessed at least some of these capabilities were better prepared to deal with any form of institutional stress and would be more capable of planning how to undertake novel initiatives, including those that were innovative.

The construct of dynamic capabilities was defined in 1994, when Teece and Pisano (1994: 537) observed the following:

Winners in the global marketplace have been firms demonstrating timely responsiveness and rapid and flexible product innovation, along with the management capability to effectively coordinate and redeploy internal and external competences. This source of competitive advantage, “dynamic capabilities”, emphasizes two aspects. First, it refers to the shifting character of the environment; second, it emphasizes the key role of strategic management in appropriately adapting, integrating, and reconfiguring internal and external organizational skills, resources, and functional competences towards a changing environment.

The recognition of the nature and importance of dynamic capabilities has been one of the most significant theoretical inputs into the understanding of strategic management for the last three decades. There have been numerous studies of the micro-foundations or components of dynamic capabilities showing that they include organisational design, climate, culture, resources, and reward systems, for example, by Chen and colleagues (2023: 1727–1728), who observed that “the highest-priority core micro-components are the psychological underpinnings and behaviours of actors”. It is reasonable to conclude that those news media organisations that sought to, and were capable of, going beyond resilience and finding ways to gain advantage within the turbulence of Covid-19 possessed dynamic capabilities that were supported by ordinary capabilities (routine operations) and drove initiatives, experiments, innovation, proactivity, and organisational learning (see also Solvoll, Chapter 2).

Requisite agility is a set of organisational attributes that increase the probability that “an organization (will) (i) adapt proactively and intelligently to situational changes; (ii) create or find, select, and responsibly exploit, sufficient numbers of promising opportunities to gain comparative or competitive advantage; (iii) robustly avoid or mitigate threats and (iv) acquire the full range of assets, resources and competences needed to thrive in a different future” (Francis, 2020: 14). There are several reasons why requisite agility (not more agility everywhere) is needed: not all organisations need to be equally agile; being agile is not the only thing that most organisations need to do; adopting the wrong type of agility will be dysfunctional; and sub-units of an organisation often need distinctive pathways for operationalising agility. Although requisite agility is underpinned by dynamic capabilities (see above), it recognises that a key task for those who make strategic decisions in organisations (the members of the upper echelon) is to identify and prudently exploit opportunities and avoid or mitigate threats. Note the word “prudently”: This quality is essential, as a key challenge in many organisations is not finding ideas, but killing many of them. There could be several reasons for being selective: if all proposed ideas were to be adopted, then the quantity of resources required for implementation would exceed that which can be made available; progressing ideas requires unavailable capabilities; a proposed initiative is contrary to core values or strategic commitment; competitive

or comparative advantage would not be gained; and the quantity of work required to develop an idea into an asset would diminish the capability of the organisation to deliver business-as-usual activities.

When examined critically, it becomes clear that the constructs of high reliability organisations, dynamic capabilities, and requisite agility have fuzzy and overlapping boundaries. Indeed, they can be interdependent. It is reasonable to conclude that, when faced with the disruptive force of Covid-19, news media organisations would benefit from strong dynamic capabilities to drive strategic and operational change, requisite agility to create or capture good (for us) opportunities, and high reliability to deliver new products or services efficiently and effectively.

## **Dynamics of innovation and value creation**

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic meant that strategic decisions had to be taken in a world that can accurately be characterised as having greatly increased VUCA – volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (Francis & Woodcock, 2023). Just how those leaders and managers with the power to make strategic decisions, known as the upper echelon (Hambrick, 2007), are able and willing to adapt their working practices to lead and manage appropriately in an increased VUCA context is a key factor in determining whether their organisation will be able to identify and exploit opportunities and avoid or mitigate threats. The importance of senior leadership functioning as organisational architects and acting as driving forces and enablers was usefully summarised by Teece (2019: 10), who wrote: “At certain critical junctures, the ability of a CEO and the top management team to sense a key development or trend, and then delineate a response and guide/lead the firm in its path forward, is critical to the firm’s dynamic capabilities”.

The task of forming and deploying strategies in VUCA environments has been studied extensively for several decades, especially in military organisations (NATO Science and Technology Organization, 2018). However, it is likely that enterprises that operate in largely predictable environments lack insights into the specialised managerial practices needed and the distinctive managerial capabilities, processes, and infrastructure required to thrive in a VUCA environment. Hence, if an event like a global pandemic occurs in an industry characterised by a lack of volatility, certainty, low levels of complexity, and predictability, then the upper echelon of participating firms will need to undertake rapid, specialised top-team development that will have generic attributes (such as frequent reviews of current change drivers) and organisation-specific factors (such as limitations of resources).

If a news media organisation possesses a beneficial combination of high reliability, dynamic capability, and requisite agility, then a VUCA environment can be generative, as attempting to seize new opportunities and mitigate or avoid new forms of threat is more than a survival tactic – it creates opportunities for organisational learning. For example, in the pandemic era,

some news organisations found that they could act as hubs for the exchange of experience between customers who shared common concerns. News media organisations who created or successfully exploited this opportunity learnt that there was an untapped appetite for peer-to-peer sharing, discovered what capabilities were needed to deliver the new service effectively, and compared themselves with others who performed similar roles – all of which accelerated their organisational learning. Often without deliberate planning, insights were made explicit, structured, and became a service that was part of the organisation’s strategic portfolio and could be reconfigured to meet other opportunities.

To investigate the managerial challenges of strategic decision-making in news media organisations after a period of crisis, we used a novel research typology (the  $8 \times 2$  model, elaborated below) to provide fine-grained insights into the dynamics of decision-making related to media innovations after an extended crisis event.

Based on our findings, we present a tentative hypothesis that, when faced with the multiple uncertainties of a crisis situation, leaders and managers will explore how they can configure and exploit existing resources differently (i.e., become more effectively agile) rather than commit to progressing radical innovation initiatives, unless they have no option (e.g., their current business model has become dysfunctional or they take a strategic decision to use the crisis as an opportunity to reinvent themselves).

For our research into the dynamics of innovation and value creation in the Norwegian newspaper industry, we assembled our  $8 \times 2$  model to provide a fine-grained typology that serves as an analytical framework. By going into this level of detail, our research contributes to the development of middle-range theories that Merton (1949: 39) explained lie “between the minor but necessary working hypotheses that evolve in abundance during day-to-day research and the all-inclusive systematic efforts to develop a unified theory”. Im’s (2018) discussion of a process for the development of middle-range theories was adopted for our investigation, as this provides “a clear, precise, and simple type of theory which can be used for partially explaining a range of different phenomena, but which makes no pretence of being able to explain all social phenomena” (Bearman & Hedström, 2011: 31).

The components of our  $8 \times 2$  model have two variants (“do-better” and “do-different”) of eight dimensions, providing 16 variables. Our previous research has laid the foundation for our  $8 \times 2$  model: Six of the eight dimensions are drawn from research conducted over a 24-year period that led to the  $6Ps \times 2$  model (Francis, 2020: 33–34), while the other components have been developed to customise the Francis model for media innovation investigations (Krumsvik et al., 2019; Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013).

It is important to demonstrate the robustness of analytical frameworks used by researchers. Until 2005, it was generally recognised that there were just two types of innovation: product and process (Utterback & Abernathy, 1975). This perspective was challenged in a widely cited article by Francis and Bessant (2005), who described innovation capabilities as being targeted

at either product (and service) (P1), process (P2), position (P3), or paradigm (P4) – or a combination of these – and being either do-better (incremental) or do-different (novel or radical).

In media industries, most innovations are incremental. They involve small changes of products or processes that do not challenge the economy or the logic of the media market. These innovations are initiated and managed to secure the economic survival of legacy media businesses. Some innovations, however, have more far-reaching consequences. The Internet, and the ways in which it has been used, are good examples of radical and potentially disruptive innovations (Christensen, 1997; Krumsvik et al., 2019). Francis and Bessant (2005:172) explained:

[The] 4Ps are not tight categories: they have fuzzy boundaries. Nor are they alternatives: firms can pursue all four at the same time. There are linkages between them; a firm using innovation capability for positioning, for example, will be highly likely to introduce or improve products.

This targeting typology became known as the 4Ps × 2 model. Francis (2020) developed the model further as his later research found that innovation capability can also be targeted at provisioning (P5) and platform (P6), providing the 6Ps × 2 model. Francis (2020:146) observed that, for innovation to be insightfully targeted,

it is necessary to hunt for promising opportunity spaces in each of the 6P areas separately, as this [...] benefits from the input of divergent thinkers and looks beyond obvious targets, detects weak signals, investigates multiple possibilities and strives to find fruitful future opportunity spaces [...] The aim is to understand selective opportunities in depth, with the intention of finding those that may be promising.

Krumsvik and colleagues, at the Centre for Research on Media Innovation (CeRMI) at the University of Oslo, realised that innovation targets can be innovation specific, and they added two additional components to the 6Ps × 2 model for adaptation to the analysis of media innovations: genre innovation (Krumsvik et al., 2019) and social innovation (Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013).

In summary, Francis's 6Ps × 2 model is generic and the 2 × 2 CeRMI components are industry-specific, which is an important methodological development, as it shows that the 6Ps × 2 model can be considered the kernel for investigation, but it needs to be supplemented with industry or other locally relevant dimensions. For the unit of analysis studied in this chapter, the innovative use of media and communication services for social purposes does not necessarily imply new products or services, as it could reconfigure existing services or products creatively to promote social objectives. We therefore added social innovation and genre innovation in order to more fully conceptualise media innovation, resulting in the 8 × 2 model.

The underlying construct of the 8 × 2 diagnostic model is that innovation capability is akin to a person's physical fitness, as, once possessed, it

can be used for a wide range of physical activities, from running marathons to ballet dancing. Innovation capability is equally multifunctional, but, to drive change, it needs to be targeted at creating or improving specific forms of value creation activities.

In this chapter, we take a broader view of value creation instead of defining it simply as a tactic for creating revenue by the inclusion of genre and social innovation, and we focus our analysis on the relative importance of provisioning innovation. We explore how each of the eight different types of media innovation were prioritised in the newspaper industry after the Covid-19 pandemic in Norway, drawing extensively from recent empirical data.

In order to explore patterns of innovation longitudinally, cohorts of Norwegian newspaper executives have been studied by Krumsvik and colleagues, using online biennial surveys conducted independently since 2005. New insights have emerged from each successive survey. The first empirical analysis of aspects related to media innovation analysed the relationship between size and ownership of newspapers and their approaches to platform innovation. Ownership was found to be the most important factor for the development of innovation capability, as demonstrated by the fact that, in 2011, only newspapers owned by corporate owners (i.e., media groups) had plans for iPad apps. Newspapers owned by media groups were also more positive towards new media developments. These differences were explained by reference to two types of resources provided by media groups: analytical capabilities and capabilities to enhance joint product development (Krumsvik et al., 2013).

The survey data from 2013 revealed that concentrated newspaper ownership facilitated innovation. However, the focus of innovation in newspapers owned by media groups tended to be on (do-better) process and platform innovation rather than (do-different) genre innovation to provide unique features of digital journalism on each publication platform (Krumsvik, 2015).

An increasing influence of owners on platform innovations was documented in the 2011 survey (Krumsvik & Westlund, 2014). Inside the newspaper organisations, based on the 2011 and 2013 survey data (Westlund & Krumsvik, 2014), and later adding the 2015 and 2017 data (Westlund et al., 2020), technologists' interest in innovation was identified as a key predictor for change in intra-organisational collaboration. This demonstrates the important role of the IT department, in relation to the newsroom and the business department, for innovation relating to the production and distribution of news.

## **Concepts of 8 × 2 types of media innovations**

Previous research into iterations of the Francis Ps model demonstrates that it has widespread utility in helping us understand where innovation can add value in commercial and not-for-profit organisations (Bakke & Barland, 2022; Ruffoni & Reichert, 2022; Sartori et al., 2022). Investigations have shown that there are multiple interconnections between the Ps; for example, collaborative

initiatives, such as Linux or Wikipedia, are product innovations developed through collaborative processes (process innovation) that involve changes in mindset as to how services can be developed (paradigm innovation).

Product and service innovation (P1) targets the outputs of an organisation or a sub-unit that are, or could be, provided for external or internal customers, or other stakeholders. Products are tangible goods or forms of service. For sub-units, internal customers can be more important than external customers. Targeting innovation capability on developing new or improved products or services can involve multiple actors engaged in complex and inter-linked processes with a single end in view, which is creating superior value at an acceptable cost for the customer. In relation to news media enterprises, product and service innovation may include content streaming services and innovation of communication patterns, for example, encouraging audience interaction with television programmes through the use of second screens (De Meulenaere et al., 2015).

Process innovation (P2) targets how work is done. Innovation in process frequently aims to make processes faster, more responsive, cheaper, more reliable, accurately measurable, or better integrated. Processes are extensive, interdependent, and, to some extent, will be routinised and integrate forms of technology with human activity. Process innovation is driven by systematic analyses and comparative benchmarking and needs to extend outside of the boundaries of an organisation into its ecosystem. Multiple small improvements can accumulate into large gains. In relation to news media enterprises, process innovation includes how media businesses organise their activities (Baumann, 2013). It also includes processes outside established institutions, for example, where users are involved in collaborative innovation (von Hippel, 2005; Lüders, 2016; Tapscott & Williams, 2006).

Positional innovation (P3) targets how meanings and interfaces between organisations, and its parts, are managed: specifically, how an enterprise communicates with its customers (internal and external), potential customers, entities in its ecosystem, and other stakeholders or influential bodies. It includes two-way communication, both transmitting and receiving. In relation to news media enterprises, positional innovation will include product positioning that involves “advertising, marketing, media, packaging and the manipulation of various signals” (Francis & Bessant, 2005: 175). Typical examples would be a magazine repositioning itself for a new target audience. For example, between 2012 and 2015, the lifestyle magazine *Elle* repositioned itself as *Elle 360*, a multi-platform company (Champion, 2015). Another example would be how the BBC in the 1990s repositioned itself as a global media corporation (Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013).

Paradigm innovation (P4) targets principles of organising and systems of thought. A strategic paradigm is often described as a business model, but paradigm also includes the constructs that people within an organisation use to make sense of the world. Organisational paradigms are a social fact that evolves as people within an organisation come to share values, possess



a common history, and adopt embedded norms (“the way that we do things here”). Paradigm innovation can be described as “changing the rules of the game” and is relevant at all levels of an organisation. In relation to media enterprises, paradigm innovation can be seen when the music industry shifted from CD sales to streaming services. In the newspaper industry, the focus is no longer primarily on print, but rather on online services, meaning that many media companies are increasingly committed in a search for sustainable business models for online services (Barland, 2015). The process of datafication, where user interactions with media content and services are aggregated and analysed for commercial purposes, is a paradigm innovation. Datafication follows from other broad processes of change, such as digitalisation and mediatisation (Schäfer & Van Es, 2017).

Provisioning innovation (P5) targets where and how resources are obtained, including financial, knowledge, technological, locational, contractual, reputational, or legal assets. This is important, as many forms of innovation cannot progress to execution unless adequate resources are made available. Determining what provisions are needed to transform an intention into an innovation reality can be daunting, especially if do-different innovation is undertaken. Adequate provisioning requires a facilitating ecosystem. This can include users, supporters, actual and potential customers, kindred organisations, funding sources, online special interest groups, networking sites, advisors, and resource providers. In relation to news media enterprises, provisioning innovation can be seen in cases where online newspapers have improved their existing form of income (do-better) by developing new advertising formats and they have developed new forms of income (do-different) by developing and exploiting new concepts of content marketing (Barland, 2016).

Platform innovation (P6) targets how outputs are integrated to be useful or accessible. Many platforms are technologically enabled, but the construct can be used more widely as platforms facilitate many forms of intermediation. In the digital era, the cost of creating platforms can be low and enable an ease of collaboration that was previously unachievable, as they are enabled by the extraordinary power of Internet searches and the increasing universality of access to digital resources. In relation to news media enterprises, examples of platform innovation include the creation and ongoing development of new media platforms, such as the iPad or the smartphone, or of new media services, such as web-TV or media apps for tablets (Krumsvik et al., 2013).

Genre innovation is particularly relevant to media and communication industries, since media products and services can be categorised and developed according to genres. A genre innovation can manifest in various ways: for example, combining elements from different genres to form a unique hybrid (e.g., interactive graphics blending text, video, and graphics into one seamless narrative); introducing new stylistic or thematic elements not traditionally been part of a genre (e.g., data journalism using large datasets to derive

stories and visualisations); or, instead of adding something new, reinterpreting traditional elements (e.g., solutions journalism – instead of just highlighting problems, this approach are examining where and how things are working). Research relating to genre innovation has made interesting contributions with regard to conceptualising degrees of novelty. Miller (2016) has explored how genre innovation is often explained through the frameworks of evolution or emergence. She compares these frameworks to the concepts of incremental and radical change and finds that the evolution of a new genre is more analogous to incremental change, while the emergence of genre involves more radical change. Using the example of blogs, she argued that this genre built on a series of evolutionary changes – such as adapting the personal diary to an online format. However, the emergence of blogs as a genre, synthesising a range of incremental changes and the rapid diffusion of this genre among users, was a more disruptive process. Kim (2023) found that the Covid-19 pandemic significantly altered what genre of television shows individuals consumed, with the degree of change increasing further into the pandemic. Drama, horror, and adventure shows became consistently less prominent in individuals’ viewing history. Changes in user behaviour is known to be a trigger for media innovations (Krumsvik et al., 2019).

Social innovation involves the use of media and communication services for social purposes (Ní Bhroin, 2015). Here, social change is introduced through blending new or existing combinations of media products or services, for example, to produce media that caters to the needs of a linguistic minority. This form of innovation targets social needs and aims to improve people’s lives (Mulgan et al., 2007). A study by Feng and colleagues (2023) demonstrated how short videos on social media (e.g., TikTok) fulfilled social roles by helping citizens accomplish social cohesion and social sustainability during the pandemic. The context was Wuhan, China, a city that implemented a 76-day lockdown in the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic. A primary motivation behind social innovation is to tackle societal challenges, whether they’re related to education, health, social inclusion, or environmental sustainability, among others. Beyond addressing immediate issues, many social innovations aim for systemic change.

## Research questions

In the previous section, the  $8 \times 2$  targets for media innovation are described, and each deserves an in-depth study. In this chapter, our key questions are whether the prioritisation of innovation targets changes when an external crisis event occurs, and, if the answer to the first question is “yes”, then what that pattern of change is. Hence, our first specific research question: How do media executives prioritise different kinds of media innovations after a crisis situation?

Further, previous research outlined above has emphasised the role of size and ownership as variables affecting the structural, financial, and intellectual capacity for media innovation, and differences in priority, and perceived

coordination and collaboration, based on executive role. Hence, differences in demographic groups are analysed with the following research question: Are there differences in prioritisation between demographic groups categorising 1) the organisations (e.g., size, ownership) or 2) their executives (e.g., executive role, years in current role, level of education)?

## Method

Our empirical analysis is based on a survey among senior executives (the people responsible for developing strategy for their respective newspapers) of Norwegian newspapers. A publisher in the Norwegian context is an executive with a dual responsibility for both the editorial and commercial departments of a newspaper; hence, it is a position combining the roles of managing director and editor-in-chief. Since our data source is the executives' perceptions, any conclusions we may draw about the organisations they represent will be based on their perceptions of the state of affairs.

Data collection was performed in the spring of 2022, after the Norwegian society opened in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, and before the effects of the invasion of Ukraine and associated political and economic insecurity affected the Norwegian economy.

Invitations to participate in the survey were sent by e-mail to addresses provided by the Norwegian Media Businesses' Association (MBL) and the National Association of Local Newspapers (LLA), using the web-based research service QuestBack. Respondents were not sampled, as all member newspapers of these two associations were included and non-response was interpreted as negative self-selection. The response rate was 37 per cent.

Operationalising the types of innovation outlined previously, the questionnaire entailed statements in Norwegian language (translated to English in Table 7.1), where respondents could choose alternatives for level of importance on a 6-point Likert scale: 1 (unimportant)–6 (very important). The 6-point scale was selected due to a cultural phenomenon in Norwegian news media, where this scale is most frequently used by newsrooms to score cultural and political performances. Examples are book, movie, and theatre reviews, or performance in political debates on television. Hence, the respondents were familiar with this kind of 6-point scale. Demographic data include newspaper size, ownership, executive role, and years in current position. The Norwegian Media Businesses' Association provided the industry standard for circulation categories (paper and online combined). Finally, answers were analysed using the SPSS statistical package, applying ANOVA and post hoc Bonferroni test, t-test, and cluster analysis.

**TABLE 7.1** Operationalisation of innovation types in questionnaire

Type of innovation	Degree of novelty	Question asked in Norwegian	English translation
Product	do-better	Forbedre eksisterende produkter	Improve existing products
	do-different	Utvikle nye produkter	Develop new products
Process	do-better	Forbedre eksisterende prosesser	Improve existing processes
	do-different	Utvikle nye arbeidsprosesser	Develop new processes
Position	do-better	Forbedre eksisterende posisjon i markedet	Improve existing position in the market
	do-different	Ta nye posisjoner i markedet	Take new positions in the market
Paradigm	do-better	Tydeliggjøre virksomhetens formål	Clarify the purpose of the business
	do-different	Endring av virksomhetens formål	Change of business purpose
Provisioning	do-better	Forbedre eksisterende inntektskilder	Improve existing sources of resources
	do-different	Utvikle nye inntektskilder	Develop new sources of resources
Platform	do-better	Effektivisere drift og distribusjonsplattformer	Streamline operations and distribution platforms
	do-different	Utvikle nye drifts- og distribusjonsplattformer	Develop new operating and distribution platforms
Genre	do-better	Forbedre eksisterende journalistiske sjangere (reportasje, kommentar, etc.)	Improve existing journalistic genres (reportage, commentary, etc.)
	do-different	Utvikle nye journalistiske sjangere	Develop new journalistic genres
Social	do-better	Forbedre avisens samfunnsrolle	Improve the newspaper's social role
	do-different	Utvikle nye tilnærminger til å skape et bedre samfunn	Develop new approaches to creating a better society

*Comments:* Question: "In the coming year, what kind of changes will be important for your organisation to prioritise? (1 = unimportant, 6 = very important)".

## Findings

This section presents findings of the executives' prioritisation of media innovation, in response to our first research question. Further, we determine whether there are differences between demographic groups categorising organisations or their executives, in response to our second two-part research question.

There was a low degree of variation within the demographic groups; however, there were notable findings related to incremental (do-better) versus radical (do-different) innovations. Table 7.2 illustrates how incremental change had a strong priority in legacy media organisations. Of the seven innovation categories with highest (mean) score, six were do-better, and of the nine categories with lowest score, seven were do-different.

**TABLE 7.2** Prioritisation of media innovations

Type of innovation	Degree of novelty	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Position	do-better	104	3	6	5.22	.812
Product	do-better	104	1	6	5.21	.821
Provisioning	do-better	103	3	6	4.95	.922
Genre	do-better	102	2	6	4.95	.849
Position	do-different	104	1	6	4.86	1.074
Social	do-better	103	2	6	4.66	.966
Process	do-better	104	1	6	4.63	1.025
Product	do-different	104	1	6	4.58	1.212
Provisioning	do-different	103	1	6	4.57	1.355
Process	do-different	104	1	6	4.37	1.062
Platform	do-better	103	1	6	4.14	1.351
Social	do-different	101	1	6	4.11	1.280
Paradigm	do-better	103	1	6	4.07	1.270
Genre	do-different	102	1	6	4.02	1.251
Platform	do-different	103	1	6	3.83	1.401
Paradigm	do-different	103	1	6	2.45	1.412

*Comments:* Question: "In the coming year, what kind of changes will be important for your organisation to prioritise? (1 = unimportant, 6 = very important)".

In an analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the top priority (see Table 7.2) – “position: do-better” type of innovation – and the size of the newspapers, measured by official circulation numbers (total, print, and digital), scores yielded significant variation among the three circulation groups [ $F(2, 100) = 4.46$ ] ( $p = .01$ ). A post hoc Bonferroni test showed a significant difference between the medium-sized newspapers (circ. 4,000–10,000;  $M = 5.00$ ,  $SD = .830$ ) and the largest (circ. > 10,000;  $M = 5.57$ ,  $SD = .626$ ) (at  $p < .05$ ); the group of smallest newspapers was not significantly different from the other two groups, lying somewhere in the middle (circ. < 4,000;  $M = 5.12$ ,  $SD = .851$ ).

On the same innovation category (position: do-better), we also observed a relation, though not statistically significant (ANOVA analysis performed), with time in current executive position (see Table 7.3). However, a post hoc Bonferroni test showed a significant difference between executives with less than two years in the role and their colleagues with 5–10 years in the role, and this was confirmed by doing a  $t$ -test on these two groups [ $t(45) = -2.895$ ] ( $p = .01$ ).

**TABLE 7.3** “Position: do-better” versus years in current executive position.

Years in position	N	M	SD	Min.	Max.
< 2	21	4.81*	.928	3	6
2–5	25	5.32	.802	4	6
5–10	26	5.50*	.707	4	6
10–20	19	5.21	.787	4	6
> 20	13	5.15	.689	4	6
Total	104	5.22	.812	3	6

\* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level. Post hoc Bonferroni test.

Size and “product: do-different” also indicated significant variation [ $F(2, 100) = 3.55$ ] ( $p = .03$ ). The post hoc Bonferroni test showed a significant difference between the smallest newspapers (circ. < 4,000;  $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 1.337$ ) and the largest (circ. > 10,000;  $M = 4.90$ ,  $SD = 1.155$ ) (at  $p < .05$ ); the group of medium-sized newspapers (circ. 4,000–10,000;  $M = 4.77$ ,  $SD = .971$ ) was not significantly different from the other two groups, lying in the middle.

The willingness to prioritise radical “genre innovation: do-different” varied systematically with ownership (media group or independent) of newspapers; executives in corporate media ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = 1.128$ ) were significantly more willing to prioritise this [ $t(100) = 2.614$ ] ( $p = .01$ ) than their colleagues working for independent newspapers ( $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = 1.292$ ).

On “provisioning: do-better”, by managerial position, we also observe a significant difference between groups [ $F(2, 100) = 3.319$ ] ( $p = .04$ ). There is a

significant difference between managing directors ( $M = 5.16$ ,  $SD = .767$ ) and publishers ( $M = 4.56$ ,  $SD = 1.083$ ), while the editors-in-chief are somewhere in the middle ( $M = 5.02$ ,  $SD = .882$ ).

### Cluster analysis

To develop a richer description of the data, cluster analysis was performed. A hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's method identified three broad clusters. Further, a k-means cluster analysis produced the three clusters ( $N = 42$ ,  $42$ , and  $16$ ; see Table 7.4), and they were cross tabulated with demographic variables to detect over- and under-representation. A description of the clusters follows below.

**TABLE 7.4** Cluster analysis (mean, top-5)

	Priority	Type of innovation	Degree of novelty	M
CLUSTER 1 Keep calm and carry on	1	Position	do-better	5.06
	2	Product	do-better	4.88
	3	Genre	do-better	4.56
	4	Provisioning	do-better	4.56
	5	Position	do-different	4.31
CLUSTER 2 Polish the product	1	Product	do-better	5.33
	2	Position	do-better	4.98
	3	Genre	do-better	4.79
	4	Provisioning	do-better	4.74
	5	Position	do-different	4.57
CLUSTER 3 Go get new revenue	1	Position	do-better	5.57
	2	Provisioning	do-different	5.40
	3	Position	do-different	5.33
	4	Product	do-better	5.31
	5	Provisioning	do-better	5.31

*Comments:* K-means cluster analysis. For total priority, see Table 7.2.

### CLUSTER 1: Keep calm and carry on

Experienced, modest, and conservative are the characteristics of executives in cluster 1. This is the “quiet group”, in the sense of having the lowest average

scores. Top priorities do not deviate from the total average, besides the scores being more modest. Respondents in this group rather strongly agree on setting the very lowest score on the idea of radically changing the paradigm ( $M = 1.44$ ,  $SD = .629$ ) with platform innovation (both do-different and do-better), also at the bottom of the priority list. Leaders with one–four years of higher education and those working in smaller newspapers are over-represented in this group. This group is dominated by experienced leaders, with more than five years in their current position (69% in this group vs. 44% in total).

### **CLUSTER 2: Polish the product**

The executives in cluster 2 have less experience as top executives and a strong focus on product improvement. This cluster gathers executives with a special emphasis on polishing the product or service. This group is dominated by leaders with less than two years in the current position (29% vs. 19% in total). “Product: do-better” is the only category with absolute scores not significantly different between the groups. However, in relative terms, it is on the very top of this group’s priorities, with “genre: do-better” also high on the list.

### **CLUSTER 3: Go get new revenue**

The money-makers are gathered in cluster 3. This is the “loud group”, in the sense of having the highest scores. Unlike the others, they put developing new sources of revenue high on the agenda ( $M = 5.40$ ,  $SD = .936$ ). Two of the top-three prioritised innovations are of the do-different kind, and position is a top priority, both do-better and do-different. At the same time, radical change in paradigm, genre, process, social, and platform have lowest priority, with paradigm (both do-different and do-better) at the very bottom. They are willing to change, however, neither thinking outside the newspaper-box nor challenging the norms of journalism. Executives without higher education (24% vs. 16% in total), working in larger newspapers, are over-represented in this group.

## **Discussion**

From the analysis of the survey data, we conclude that external events, such as a pandemic, cause waves of changes in the strategic opportunity landscape that are experienced by all players in a defined industry, and they define the foundational layer of possibilities on which individual enterprises can add novel initiatives or configure the opportunity spaces differently. This shapes how innovation initiatives are targeted and their priority within the wider strategies of enterprises. Furthermore, the pace of the onset of a “new normal” and the lack of clarity about the consequences of a crisis creates a logic that favours do-better rather than do-different innovation.



Coming out of the crisis, news media executives prioritise incremental changes in product, position, and provisioning. Even the most progressive group of leaders, described in cluster 3, did not challenge the logics of the newspaper market. While previous research on Norwegian newspaper executives concluded that ownership was more important than size (Krumsvik et al., 2013), we observe some indications of size having a stronger influence in the current study.

In media industries, as in other settings, most innovations are incremental or function to sustain existing operations (do-better). They involve small changes of products or processes that do not challenge the economy or the logic of the media market. These innovations are initiated and managed in order to secure the survival of legacy media businesses (Christensen, 1997; Krumsvik et al., 2019).

Some innovations (do-different) have far-reaching consequences. The Internet, and the ways in which it has been used, are good examples of disruptive or potentially disruptive innovations (Christensen et al., 2015). Music streaming has changed music markets fundamentally. Google and Facebook now challenge media advertising income with particular consequences for the news industry. Television is increasingly moving in the direction of niche products, non-linear scheduling, and streaming services. Do-different innovation is an important part of the contemporary context, where the existing media industry knows that the rules of the game are changing and, in order to survive, they must innovate radically.

The analysis in the previous section found that executives in larger newspapers had a higher emphasis on improving the market position (do-better) and were more willing to prioritise radical change in products and services (do-different). This difference might be driven by media institutional factors such as company strategy, leadership and vision, capacity and resources, and culture and creativity (Krumsvik et al., 2019). Further data collection will be needed to analyse the specific capabilities at play. However, previous research indicates that size matters.

Large firms have better facilities, more professional and skilled workers, and the economic strength to invest in innovation and to develop new services. They can also to a larger degree afford the risk of allocating resources to new areas. Being big implies having the power to influence market developments (Damanpour, 1992), and it is a competitive advantage in the market (Porter, 2008). In line with these findings, large newspapers are more willing to prioritise radical change in product and service innovations.

However, the relative high prioritisation of radical position innovation (do-different), also among the most conservative group (cluster 1) indicates a certain willingness in general to experiment and take risks in order to improve market position and provisioning. The most progressive leaders (cluster 3) also had radical change in “provisioning: do-different” and “product: do-different” high on the agenda (see Table 7.4). Hence, while experimentation is not on top of the agenda, the willingness to take certain risks is present.

## **Conclusion**

With the fine-grained  $8 \times 2$  typology as an analytical framework, we were able to identify the priorities of innovations in the aftermath of an external crisis. After the Covid-19 crisis, newspaper executives did not want to make any radical changes; rather, they prioritised incremental change. Improving market positions as well as the products and services and already existing revenue streams were top managerial priorities. The immediate post-crisis period was not perceived as a time for redefining the very concept of a newspaper nor the genres of journalism. While radical change was not on top of the agenda, indications of willingness to experiment were, however, identified.

While this chapter articulates the strategic priority of editors-in-chief, managing directors, and publishers at a specific point in time, further research should investigate strategy as a practice from other perspectives as well, using a wider variety of methodological approaches. That will add to a deeper understanding of priorities and capabilities for innovation for distinct groups of social actors in legacy news media.

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The concept section of this chapter builds in part on the work of Krumsvik and colleagues (2019) and Storsul and Krumsvik (2013).

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## CONCLUSION

# Making sense of a crisis

RAGNHILD KR. OLSEN

DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM AND MEDIA STUDIES, OSLO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY, NORWAY

### ABSTRACT

The Conclusion of this book is closely connected to Chapter 1. As expressed in the Introduction, these chapters, serving as bookends, are designed to be read in conjunction with each other. In this Conclusion, I reflect upon the six building blocks of journalism innovation – resources, technology, organisation, management, culture, and business model – while summing up the empirical chapters of the book. In response to our overarching research question asking how Norwegian news media responded to the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of innovation and value creation, we have found that the crisis served as a catalyst for innovation, a critical test of resilience, and an amplifier of value creation. Based on the insights from our empirical studies, we conclude that the crisis stimulated renewal and transformation, which changed – at least in the short term – how news media operated and created value, economically as well as socially.

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## Lessons learned from an unprecedented crisis

We began this book highlighting the learning potential in the Covid-19 pandemic for academics as well as the media industry. Revisiting this potential for learning, it becomes evident from the preceding chapters in this volume that, despite the negative consequences it imposed on organisations, individuals, and society, the Covid-19 pandemic also presented an opening for news media to gain new experiences and knowledge, and to act, alter their course, and “rethink the practice and meaning of journalism” (Quandt & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2021: 1204).

Assessing in retrospect how Norwegian news media responded during the Covid-19 pandemic’s initial and most tumultuous stages, how they were affected by the crisis in terms of news interest, revenues, working conditions and so forth, and how they think ahead for the future, we can conclude that the crisis stimulated renewal and transformation, which changed how news media operated and created value, economically as well as socially. This volume thus effectively illustrates how crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, have the potential to initiate and expedite innovation. The sense of urgency and need for quick decisions brought about by the pandemic enabled Norwegian news organisations to reprioritise and focus on key challenges, while reallocating and mobilising required resources.

We argued at the outset of this book that innovations mostly create positive change, although there might be some undesirable consequences. This admittedly optimistic view on innovation has largely been confirmed by the research presented in this book. We observe how Norwegian news media interpreted and made sense of the crisis and mobilised people and resources in ways that enabled the media organisations to swiftly implement new working procedures and introduce innovative digital news and information services to the benefit of audiences as well as society at large. Moreover, commercial news organisations were able to keep their businesses afloat and generate substantial economic value from paying subscribers at a time when advertising revenue plummeted. However, we also observe how a major innovation like the transition to telework took its toll on news workers, suggesting that the emergence and implementation of “something new” do not necessarily create positive value for all involved stakeholders. Such insights provide some nuance to the pro-innovation discourse that otherwise dominates much of journalism research (Steensen & Westlund, 2021), and, I may add, our own research agenda in this book.

In alignment with our overarching research goal – to derive valuable lessons from the Covid-19 crisis – in the following sections, I condense the findings of each foregoing empirical chapter and consolidate essential insights regarding the impact of the crisis, coping strategies, and innovations adopted by Norwegian news media in response to the pandemic. To achieve this, I revisit the building blocks of journalism innovation initially introduced in Chapter 1 and elaborate

on how these foundational factors were realised as well as influenced by the crisis. Specifically, I focus on news organisations' ability to cope with the crisis and innovate in ways that created value for key stakeholders. After a brief recapitulation of the building blocks and how they relate to the two other key concepts guiding the empirical investigation of this book – resilience and value creation – I delve into the findings from the empirical chapters individually.

Furthermore, and drawing from the insights presented in the chapters, I delineate and discuss three overarching themes that encapsulate the impact of the crisis on news media's ability to innovate and generate new or enhanced value during times of exceptional uncertainty: the crisis as a catalyst for innovation, an amplifier of value creation, and a critical test of resilience. Following this, I reflect on limitations of the research presented in this book and suggest areas for future research.

## **News media's ability to innovate and cope with the Covid-19 crisis**

In Chapter 1, we outlined our concept of innovation by stressing the value creation aspect of innovation, in addition to innovation as improvements and novelty. Building on different strands of innovation literature (Dogruel, 2015; Furseth & Cuthbertson, 2016; García-Avilés et al., 2018, 2019; Hendrickx & Picone, 2020; Krumsvik et al., 2019; Paulussen, 2016; Posetti, 2018; Steensen, 2009), we identified six internal factors, aligning with a multi-level perspective of an organisation, that are relevant for investigating the ability of news media to innovate during crises. These innovation building blocks have come into play in different ways and in different constellations throughout the various chapters in this book. The crisis impacted or activated 1) resources (tangible assets such as production facilities, intangible assets such as brand value and reputation, as well as financial assets like revenue), 2) technology (platforms and tools for news production, news presentation and distribution, customer management, and more), 3) organisation (a news media organisation's employees as well as organisational structures, routines, competency, and communication), 4) management (the practice of planning, organising, leading, and controlling a news organisation), 5) culture (norms, values, and traditions that could either stimulate or hinder innovation), and 6) business model (the “architecture” by which a news operation generates economic value through the delivery of products and services). The next sections demonstrate how these building blocks of innovation played a role in building resilience and creating value amid the Covid-19 crisis, or alternatively how the crisis impacted innovation building blocks in ways that affected resilience and value creation. As editors of this book, we firmly believe that this interplay is crucial for comprehending how Norwegian news media managed the crisis and extracting valuable insights from their coping strategies.



## **News media's ability to bounce back, forward, and beyond amid the crisis**

In Chapter 2, “Innovations in resilience strategies during the Covid-19 pandemic”, Mona Solvoll explored innovation initiatives in Norwegian new media in the first period of the crisis and identified high innovation activity across three resilience strategies: bouncing back, bouncing forward, and bouncing beyond. Solvoll demonstrated how the bounce-back strategy focused on maintaining existing activities in existing markets to achieve stability and involved rapid adaption and restructuring of operations to cope with the crisis and quickly return to pre-crisis activities. Innovations related to the bounce-back strategy were characterised by the organisations’ focus on “doing business as usual” and involved incremental improvements in operations and service provisions. The bounce-forward strategy, on the other hand, involved developing new digital products and services, such as live trackers, streaming events, and live news studios. Through this strategy, the crisis was regarded more as an opportunity to make long-term changes and overcoming cultural resistance to innovation in the news organisations, reflecting a shift towards service-centric and customer-focused approaches among the news media under study. The bounce-beyond strategy focused even more explicitly on co-creation of value between the news organisation and external stakeholders, as well as community engagement, interdepartmental collaboration, and organisational restructuring. Innovations included user-generated content initiatives, virtual events, and partnerships with external players. This strategy involved adapting resources and skills to renew the entire service system of the news organisation, encompassing both radical and disruptive innovations and resulting in changes in organisational culture, audience orientation, as well as business models. The analysis illustrated how newsrooms relied on technological resources to create novel digital services, such as advanced data visualisation and live streaming services. Through these innovations, the news organisations played a pivotal role in assisting the public to comprehend the uncertainty and chaos of the early stages of the crisis and engage in a variety of cultural activities that would have otherwise been unattainable. The technology was not ground-breaking; in some cases, it could even be considered old-fashioned, such as e-mailed newsletters with updates on the pandemic. Nevertheless, technology played a crucial role in enabling the creation of new services that provided substantial value to the public. The analysis also highlighted the role of newsroom culture in innovation processes, as the crisis was seen to stimulate a more service- and audience-oriented mindset among those news media pursuing a bounce-forward or bounce-beyond strategy.

The observed changes in organisational structure, external partnerships, and audience co-creation also exemplify the impact of organisation and management on innovation – two key innovation building blocks – which led news media into uncharted territory and fostered new forms of collaboration, both within

and beyond the news organisation. Conversely, the analysis also demonstrated that in times of crisis, the organisational factor can serve to foster stability, as evidenced by the bounce-back strategy. This emphasis on stability may have generated considerable value for news workers operating under unprecedented pressure and uncertainty, with the crisis intensifying the demand for news and at the same time posing significant obstacles to regular news reporting.

Overall, this chapter demonstrated how the news media under study emerged stronger and different from the initial stages of the pandemic, with positive organisational learning outcomes even though the long-term sustainability of the changes identified, particularly among those following the bounce-forward strategy and the bounce-beyond strategy, remains uncertain.

### **News workers ability to reorganise to cope with the crisis**

In Chapter 3, “Positive renewal in newsrooms through crisis in crisis”, Gudrun Rudningen demonstrated how the Covid-19 crisis was experienced as meaningful by journalists and editors – as an opportunity for positive renewal and innovative ways of organising. However, the crisis also created frustration and exhaustion in the long run. By exploring sense-making through lived experiences among news workers, Rudningen highlighted how newsrooms navigated the challenges and opportunities presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, including the initial excitement and digital adaptation, followed by fatigue, loss of routines, decreased efficiency, and endurance. The chapter thus illustrated how a crisis like the pandemic tests an organisation’s resilience by exposing its ability to adapt and respond effectively to unforeseen challenges. In response to the challenges posed by the crisis, the news organisations under study reorganised and followed three practices of resilience: flexible working conditions; creativity and collaboration; and increased trust, autonomy, and solidarity.

In identifying these resilience practices, the study engaged with several of the innovation building blocks. For example, working remotely encouraged the newsrooms to explore new modes of organising news work and collaboration. This demonstrates the importance of culture, organisation, and technology for innovation. The study found that newsrooms were well-prepared for remote work, thanks to prior technological upgrades and digital communication tools. Furthermore, a strong sense of duty and motivation to provide the public with essential information amid the crisis helped the relative friction-free transition to new working modes. When access to the physical newsroom was severely restricted, the news workers implemented smaller, more intimate group discussions and outdoor meetings for idea generation and collaboration. This facilitated more informal and productive discussions, resulting in a reorganisation of meeting structures for better professional discussions. The insights regarding increased trust and autonomy among journalists also emphasise the combined importance of culture and

management in innovation. The news workers demonstrated their ability to work efficiently and independently from home, and their managers – the editors – recognised the responsibility and self-management skills of their teams. The crisis was found to foster a sense of solidarity among employees, bringing them together across disciplines and ranks and creating a stronger sense of community.

However, while innovative working practices like telework offered benefits like time-saving and increased efficiency, it also came with challenges, such as blurred boundaries between work and personal life. The news workers expressed how they missed in-person interactions to foster creativity and spontaneous collaboration. As such, the innovation of work practices and organisation, albeit more flexible, did not only create value for news workers, but also problems, particularly as time passed.

### **News media's ability to create economic value amid the crisis**

In Chapter 4, “The digital shift in news media’s revenue streams during the Covid-19 pandemic”, Jens Barland and I examined the pandemic’s impact on news media revenues, with an emphasis on the economic resilience of newspapers. We also made comparisons between the economic performance of these news outlets and other commercial news media. By focusing on revenues, we illuminated how the crisis impacted one of the innovation building blocks, namely resources, in the news media industry. While numerous commercial news organisations worldwide witnessed a substantial drop in revenues, this chapter, drawing from revenue statistics, industry reports, and interviews with industry experts, showcased how Norwegian newspapers were relatively well-prepared and positioned to navigate the crisis.

Although the news media sector bore a significant brunt from the decline in advertising revenues at the outset of the pandemic, Norwegian newspapers’ total advertising and user revenues grew from 11.1 billion Norwegian kroner in 2019 to 11.6 billion in 2021. The investigation of revenue streams found that the crisis had significant impact on the newspapers’ two-sided market model, increasing digital reader and advertising revenue and reducing revenues from print subscriptions and advertising. The pandemic thus accelerated the digital transformation of the Norwegian newspaper business and changed how news media create economic value. The upsurge in online shopping and digital news consumption during the pandemic proved advantageous for newspapers that were ready to adjust to these evolving market dynamics. In this context, many Norwegian newspapers held a favourable position, as they had initiated the transition of their print subscription base to digital formats well before the pandemic, boasting a well-established system for managing digital subscriptions. Moreover, the larger newspaper groups had developed sophisticated systems for online sales and customer management. Due to their robust connections with the digital infrastructure of advertising and audience

markets, these media organisations, particularly large and resourceful ones, came out of the pandemic as winners.

Contrasting this, small local news providers, including independent local newspapers and local radio stations, lacked the necessary infrastructure to connect them with digital markets. These smaller players faced significant challenges during the pandemic and were identified as Covid-19 crisis losers in this study. Notably, the chapter also underscored that the media industry did not fully utilise all the extra funds allocated by the state, offering further evidence of the sector's relatively robust economic resilience amid the crisis.

### **News media's ability to innovate in response to audiences' information needs**

In Chapter 5, "Crisis-driven newsroom innovation", Junai Mtchedlidze delved into the dynamic interplay of exogenous and internal factors that fuelled innovation during the pandemic. She highlighted the increased information demand among the populace as a critical exogenous force. Together with internal factors, such as bottom-up innovation initiatives within the news teams, collaborative efforts between editorial developers and journalists, and technological expertise within newsrooms, the population's critical information needs were pivotal to journalism innovation during the pandemic. Based on interviews in four news organisations, this study revealed how the high demand for information encouraged news workers to adapt their practices and develop new services that provided vital updates on the pandemic.

Newsroom workers were challenged to be creative and rapidly come up with new ideas. By demonstrating the importance of technological expertise in the newsroom, combined with an entrepreneurial mindset among news workers and organisational structures that facilitated collaboration across professional boundaries, Mtchedlidze engaged with the culture, technology, and organisation building blocks of innovation, which played a crucial role for news organisations' ability to create new and improved value for audiences.

The chapter highlighted the innovation potential of younger journalists with technological expertise, underlining the significance of technology and coding skills not only within developer teams but also among journalists. Collaborating on data collection, analysis, and visualisation, journalist-developer teams created entirely new services, exemplified by VG's Covid-19 live tracker. Creativity was depicted as a shared responsibility, with instances where journalists generated innovative concepts, while at other times, developers contributed their ideas. Through mutual engagement and collaboration, professional boundaries between journalists and developers became less distinct. Journalists with a computational mindset were better equipped to communicate with developers, while developers took on journalistic responsibilities, such as contacting sources during the information

gathering phase of the journalistic process. The chapter also stressed the importance of speed in the development phase and how having developers in the newsroom accelerated innovation. In contrast to other settings where innovation and IT product development may take weeks or months, the newsroom demands the emergence of innovation, new products, or services within days, and sometimes within hours. Recognising the importance of adapting to the rapid pace of innovation, especially during a crisis, was considered a crucial developer skill, while collaborations with developer teams unaccustomed to newsroom settings had proven unsuccessful.

### **News media's ability to create value for employees amid the crisis**

In Chapter 6, “Exploring telework innovation’s value for news workers”, Cecilie Asker, Maria Konow-Lund, and I explored whether and how the introduction of telework was perceived to create value for news workers. Introducing a structured framework to analyse the perceived benefits and challenges of this significant innovation of newsroom practices, the study revealed that working remotely through digital tools generated complex and ambiguous value experiences among news workers. This emphasis on how news workers perceived the value of a major innovation in the news organisation’s service system offers a nuanced understanding of innovation and value creation that is often overlooked in service innovation literature. A key premise for research in this tradition is that value creation, be it economic, social, or any other value, is the main objective of innovation during crises and otherwise. However, this study demonstrated that the rapid and comprehensive shift to telework, a critical innovation for news organisations to provide value to audiences during the crisis, was not universally perceived to create value for employees. The emotional, functional, and strategic challenges reported by the study’s participants illustrated the difficulty of achieving the idea that innovations should create value for all stakeholders involved. The research also revealed how negative challenges were intertwined with positive benefits in the participants’ experiences: new opportunities to connect with colleagues in digital spaces versus feelings of isolation and stress; increased efficiency and flexibility versus communication difficulties; and opportunities for saving and increasing productivity versus decreasing creativity. Such contradicting accounts of how the telework affected the news workers and newsroom operations demonstrate how the value of innovation could be highly individual and ambiguous.

This study highlighted the role of the physical newsroom as a hub for innovation and shed light on the interplay between the resource building block of innovation and other building blocks like technology, culture, and management. Restricting access to the physical newsroom necessitated the use of technology for news production, influencing the culture in various ways. For example, it enhanced cooperation and relationships for some news

workers while reducing hierarchical barriers. However, it also led to feelings of detachment and weakened the sense of community for others. The lack of physical interaction limited spontaneous creativity and strategic innovation processes. As an essential innovation during the crisis, the shift to telework had the potential to hinder future innovations, highlighting an innovation paradox in this study.

### **New managers' ability for "do-better" and "do-different" innovations**

Lastly, in Chapter 7, "The effects of an external crisis on the prioritisation of innovations", Arne H. Krumsvik and David L. Francis explored strategic decision-making in news media organisations from an organisational resilience perspective and examined the managerial challenges that arise after a period of crisis. By focusing specifically on innovation priorities among news media executives, Krumsvik and Francis shed light on the management building block of innovation.

The chapter offered a novel research typology – the  $8 \times 2$  model – to provide fine-grained insights into the dynamics of decision-making related to media innovations. Based on empirical insights from a survey among newspaper executives, this chapter presented a tentative hypothesis that, when confronted with the uncertainties of a crisis, leaders and managers are more likely to explore how they can reconfigure and leverage existing resources more effectively (e.g., to become more agile) rather than immediately commit to radical innovation initiatives. They might consider the latter only if their current business model is dysfunctional or if they strategically choose to use the crisis as an opportunity for reinvention. The pace and uncertainty of a crisis tend to favour "do-better" innovations over "do-different" ones. Improving market positions as well as products and services and already existing revenue streams were top managerial priorities. Thus, the immediate post-crisis period was not perceived as a time for redefining the very concept of a newspaper nor the genres of journalism. There were, however, some indications of willingness to experiment in more radical ways.

The study identified three distinct clusters of media executives. Cluster 1, "Keep calm and carry on", was identified as experienced, modest, and conservative in terms of innovation ambitions. Cluster 2, "Polish the product", had less experience as top executives and a strong focus on product improvement. Cluster 3, "Go get new revenue", prioritised developing new sources of revenue and showed higher willingness to change, but even in this group there was more focus on incremental innovation than radical shifts in operations. These managers were characterised by willingness to change, however neither thinking outside the newspaper-box, nor challenging established norms of journalism.

## The crisis as a catalyst for innovation

The empirical studies of this book synthesised above have demonstrated how an organisation's response to a crisis can be rooted in a sense of urgency as well as ambition. According to Buck and colleagues (2022: 29), "a sense of urgency is caused by the perception of the crisis as an immediate threat to the survival of the organisation, which leads to a focus on minimising the negative impacts of a crisis by using and adapting digital technologies". A sense of urgency compels an organisation to respond to a threat or emergency by realigning its weakened system. The organisation does not plan or necessarily want to change but is forced to do so due to the issues arising from the crisis. Conversely, a sense of ambition emerges when perceiving a crisis as an environment abundant in opportunities. Ambition-driven innovation is implemented when an organisation seeks to leverage its potential in times of crisis. In other words, it is characterised by more planning, deliberation, and strategy compared with urgency-driven innovation. To turn a crisis into an opportunity, an organisation must identify and exploit changes in technology, shifts in customer behaviour, emerging market trends, or alterations in government policy. The empirical studies in this book suggest that crisis-induced innovations among Norwegian news media were urgency- as well as ambition-driven. The crisis thus acted as a dual force – a catalyst that necessitated substantial changes in how news organisations operated and, concurrently, an encouraging factor to capitalise on emerging opportunities.

The rapid transformation of newsroom operations, whereby the entire news production was moved online and interaction between people in the physical newsroom was replaced by telework, is the most salient example of urgency-driven innovation. This shift, aimed at securing the stability of news production, was an unprecedented move for news organisations and was not part of their digital strategies. However, they were prepared and capable of making the change when the crisis compelled them, not least due to the availability and familiarity of digital tools. Somewhat surprisingly for the news organisations, this forced transition to telework yielded successful results and benefits. It encouraged autonomous, trusted, and cross-disciplinary teams, which created innovative service solutions, digital workplaces, and new roles for practitioners. The urgency-driven innovation thus served as an eye-opener by demonstrating the news organisations' innovation capabilities. It bolstered the confidence of news organisations, enhancing their ability to navigate unprecedented production challenges and arguably better preparing newsrooms to respond to future crises requiring similar adaptability. Furthermore, the sense of urgency propelled changes with significant implications for how news work can, and perhaps increasingly will, be organised in the years to come. Thus, the urgency to address an immediate problem may have had a profound influence on the operations of future news organisations.

The new and enhanced journalistic services developed during the Covid-19 pandemic in response to high information demand among the public can be considered the best example of ambition-driven innovation, indicating a purposeful exploitation of emerging opportunities. Despite not planning for new services, such as Covid-19 live trackers or the streaming of cultural events, news organisations implemented these initiatives by leveraging their technological resources, routines, and reputation as trustworthy providers of news and information. In many cases, these new initiatives served as extensions of existing services tailored for an increasingly digital audience. The pandemic significantly heightened the demand for such services, driven by the need for trustworthy information and the escalating risk of isolation and community loss among the population. This increased demand provided news organisations with a strengthened sense of purpose, which they capitalised on by introducing new services. A growing emphasis on meeting audience needs and expectations had already been recognised as a distinct shift in journalism practices well before the pandemic, as outlined by Costera Meijer (2020), aligning with the broader trend of news media operations becoming more service oriented. The pandemic, we find, accelerated this tendency, particularly among the news organisations which followed a bounce-forward strategy.

While these insights regarding urgency- and ambition-driven innovation highlight the accelerated digital transformation of Norwegian news media during the crisis, one should not overlook the often small and incremental nature of many changes made in their service provision. Such small-scale changes also dominate media managers' ambitions for the future, providing some much-needed nuance to the seemingly radical shifts happening in the industry because of the crisis. Moreover, a significant portion of the news provided adhered to the traditional track of conventional news reporting. For news reporters and editors working from home, facing limited access to sources, and taking extra precautions to ensure their safety, maintaining stability and security posed a major challenge. This challenge may have dampened enthusiasm for digital innovation. Furthermore, we observed signs of creativity drying up, with people unable to meet and generate new ideas in the physical newsroom, posing another obstacle to innovation. While the pandemic served as a catalyst for urgency- and ambition-driven innovation among Norwegian news organisations, paradoxically, it also potentially hindered innovation by constraining creative processes.

## **The crisis as an amplifier for value creation**

As observed in the synopsis of the empirical chapters, the Covid-19 pandemic provided opportunities for news media to enhance their value creation by innovating their service system, allowing them to sustain news production and introduce new services to audiences. This, in turn, resulted in economic



value for the news organisations, evident in increased reader revenue during the crisis. However, the challenges faced by news workers when teleworking also illustrate how innovation, while crucial for value creation for some stakeholders, could have negative implications for others. This demonstrates how value creation is embedded in a complex web of often contrasting value perceptions and interests among news operations' stakeholders (Picard, 2010).

Frequently, the profit-oriented logic of commercial news publishers is perceived to conflict with social responsibility ideals in news media's value creation. For instance, news media may be seen to prioritise content that is popular and cheap to produce but holds little information value for the public. In the context of the pandemic, reserving Covid-19 news for paying subscribers highlighted another side to this economic versus social value creation conflict, as news publishers were accused of capitalising on the public's information need by paywalling Covid-19-related content (Olsen, in press). This edited volume, while not delving into this conflict specifically, shows how news media experienced a significant increase in news interest, resulting in growth in subscriptions due to a well-established digital paywall system.

As demonstrated in other research, news media provided the most important pandemic news free of charge while paywalling exclusive and elaborate Covid-19 news reporting – a strategy which helped them navigate the conflict between business considerations and broader social interests with relative ease (Olsen & Furseth, 2023). Supplementing this, our research underscores how the pandemic heightened news media's economic value creation in their audience market, albeit diminishing its value creation in the advertising market. Furthermore, it illustrates how the pandemic amplified news media's value creation for individuals and society by delivering news with substantial information value, aiding individuals in staying informed about the virus and learning how to protect themselves and stay connected with their community. Nevertheless, the potential adverse effects of paywalls for non-subscribers in a crisis context should not be underestimated. In a situation where access to reliable information is pivotal for public health and security, adopting a thoughtful approach to paywalling – balancing economic interests against public service considerations – is arguably essential for news media to sustain their business, uphold popular support, and maintain legitimacy as knowledge-producing institutions in society.

The journalistic profession has a long-standing tradition of viewing “journalism as a service in the public interest, one that is shaped with an eye toward the needs of healthy citizenship” (Zelizer, 2005: 72). This book highlights how the pandemic prompted individual news workers to reassess their approach to work, fostering a newfound appreciation for their roles. We observe how presenting essential information to the public in innovative ways elevated the sense of purpose among news workers. The crisis unfolded as a pivotal moment for journalists and editors, prompting them to acknowledge

the intrinsic value of delivering vital news and information to the public. In this regard, the crisis also amplified news media's value creation for news workers by providing opportunities to do something meaningful and important during the crisis. For some, the rapid integration of new technology facilitating remote working practices also enhanced their competence, confidence, and flexibility. Nevertheless, the disruptive impact of the crisis on working routines and collegial cooperation, coupled with heightened stress, isolation, and frustration over encountered shortcomings in teleworking, adds important nuance to this overall picture. While working with news amid the crisis was initially exciting and meaningful, it became exhausting over time. In this sense, the crisis was not only an amplifier of value but also posed severe challenges to the well-being of news workers, varying from person to person and context to context.

## **The crisis as a test of resilience**

Throughout the chapters in this volume, a significant degree of preparedness for change among the Norwegian news media is observed. The empirical studies demonstrate how the Covid-19 pandemic represented a critical test of resilience, and, for the most part, Norwegian news media passed that test. This conclusion arises from insights into how the Norwegian news media handled challenges during the pandemic and prompts a discussion of the reasons behind this resilience in the Norwegian context.

Firstly, we observe that no news organisation in our material were forced out of business. Instead, we find that despite differences in economic performance, the overall revenue development of Norwegian newspapers, which constitutes the backbone of the Norwegian media system, was far more favourable than one would expect based on the bleak outlook reported during the early days of the crisis (e.g., Olsen et al., 2020). Most of the news organisations under study had the necessary organisational structures, financial resources, technology, culture, and management in place to cope with the negative consequences of the pandemic, at least in the short term. The pandemic, in a Norwegian context, was not an overwhelmingly disruptive event that pushed the news media beyond their limits. Instead, most of the organisations we studied demonstrated persistence as well as flexibility. While some bounced back and quickly returned to their pre-crisis activities, others bounced forward and beyond, emphasising learning and adaptability in response to the crisis. Resilience often encompassed a combination of incremental and radical innovations that paved a new pathway for the organisation while retaining its core function, structure, and identity. Paradoxically, these organisations were able to change, yet stay the same. Norwegian news media organisations also demonstrated their ability to sustain regular activities and societal roles despite a comprehensive transformation of working practices. The mature level of technological adoption within Norwegian news media might have helped in implementing remote working practices and virtual newsrooms.

One could also argue that the Norwegian news media's resilience to external shocks is a product of their enduring exposure to "business challenges such as the loss of audiences, the diminishing effectiveness of the mass media business model, the lingering effects of the economic crisis, and the impact of digital competitors" (Appelgren, 2022: 722). This extensive experience, coupled with a high resistance to other crisis factors, positions organisations for a faster recovery (Faggian et al., 2018).

For some news organisations, previous experience with crisis journalism could also have had a positive effect on readiness to change. For example, experiences with working under crisis conditions, such as the terror attacks in Norway on 22 July (e.g., Konow Lund & Olsson, 2016), may have somewhat prepared certain news organisations for the extraordinary and uncertain circumstances that characterised the pandemic. As Olsson (2009: 459) has noted, "constant preparedness" is a key aspect of journalism, and experience plays a pivotal role in newsrooms' abilities to act when ordinary structures and routines fall short.

Additional explanatory factors for the high level of resistance and resilience in Norwegian news media could be contextual, rooted in Norway's robust socioeconomic system. Norway is a small, stable welfare democracy among the world's wealthiest countries, primarily due to the country's oil and gas resources and its progressive national petroleum policy (Ihlebak et al., in press). The country's diversified economy, solid welfare state, and stable public sector contribute to its ability to handle economic challenges and crises. The oil and gas industry has fostered economic growth and stability, resulting in low unemployment and a high standard of living. The Norwegian media welfare state (Syvertsen et al., 2014), characterised by a mix of public service broadcasting, commercial television and radio, and a thriving newspaper sector, has a strong tradition of quality, independent journalism with high newspaper readership. The country's expansive media policies seeking to stimulate media diversity and digitalisation (Ihlebak et al., in press) have contributed to the sustainability of newspapers and their ability to navigate digital transitions and changing media consumption habits. The country's news media characterised by stable high trust play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and disseminating information.

Despite challenges posed by digitalisation, the Norwegian newspaper market has demonstrated adaptability by embracing digital platforms, offering online editions, multimedia content, and digital subscription models to maintain relevance and reach audiences in new ways (Ihlebak et al., in press). These structural factors, encompassing a commitment to quality and trustworthy journalism among legacy news media; a longstanding tradition of readership with a relatively high willingness to pay for news; government support through various forms of subsidies, regulations, and grants; well-developed digital infrastructure; and a readiness to adapt to changing consumer prefer-

ences, arguably create exceptionally favourable conditions for navigating the challenges posed by the Covid-19 crisis. Thus, the ability of Norwegian news media to withstand the resilience test posed by the Covid-19 pandemic not only underscores the inherent adaptability of news organisations but also reflects a convergence of factors that collectively establish conducive conditions for overcoming crisis – to build back better, recover, and thrive.

## **Concluding remarks and directions for further research**

In response to our main research question about how Norwegian news media responded to the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of innovation and value creation, the contributions to this edited volume have delved into the intricate interplay between innovation and crisis within the news media. The authors have explored a spectrum of interconnected innovation factors and uncovered innovation processes that evolved at varying paces and intensities, driven by both a sense of urgency and ambition. These processes involve diverse stakeholders and encompass multifaceted value creation pathways, which concern news media's role as businesses as well as social institutions.

In this last section, I would like to highlight some areas of future research that we consider important to develop and expand our research on innovation and crisis further. In doing so, the limitations of our own research, conducted in one national context, within a limited time frame, and with a specific pro-innovation lens, is acknowledged. Norway, as discussed in this section, represents a media system with characteristics that arguably provided extraordinary favourable conditions for the news media to cope with the Covid-19 pandemic. Extending our focus on innovation in times of crisis to other national contexts with different media systems could add important insights on how media respond to extraordinary uncertainty and threat. The world is witnessing an increasing number of crises, where significant global events have substantial local repercussions. As this book comes to press, heightened concerns persist regarding wars and conflicts in various regions, threatening the safety of journalists and the sustainability of news media, while simultaneously underscoring the crucial role of reliable news and information. We particularly encourage research that delves into journalism innovation within contexts of warfare and terror, where civic life faces threats and misinformation thrives.

Furthermore, the long-term implications of the specific crisis addressed in this book – the Covid-19 pandemic – continue to unfold. This crisis severely impacted local media in many countries, resulting in the closure of news outlets in numerous communities. We invite research that explores journalism innovation in the post-pandemic era, particularly the emergence of new digital initiatives in areas left devoid of local newspapers after the pandemic. It is

also important to underscore that even in a stable and peaceful country like Norway, news media face ongoing economic challenges. With the fading of the heightened news interest generated by the crisis and the rising cost of living, there might be a significant decline in the number of individuals willing or able to pay for news. This raises important questions about the sustainability of news media's business model, which is increasingly reliant on reader revenue. As demonstrated in this book, the acceleration toward a subscription-based revenue model was evident during the pandemic. Nevertheless, it is post-crisis when the true viability of this shift will become apparent.

Lastly, it is essential to underscore that innovation during crisis might have its downsides. As evidenced in this book, adopting new ideas, adapting to novel work methods, and seizing digital opportunities during a period of uncertainty can take a toll on news workers. Often, the "dark side" of journalism innovation concerning those involved in news production gets overlooked due to the prevailing pro-innovation bias in journalism research. Therefore, we strongly encourage further research that critically examines the value of innovation for news workers, both during crisis and in other contexts.

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This book provides insights into the interplay between crisis, resilience, and innovation within news media. Examining how Norwegian news media adapted and innovated during the Covid-19 pandemic, it offers new knowledge on news organisations' resilience strategies and their ability to create value for themselves, their audiences, and for the broader society during times of unprecedented uncertainty. Through a diverse array of qualitative and quantitative methods, the research presented uncovers how crises serve as both opportunities for innovation and threats to journalism practices and businesses.

Drawing on perspectives from journalism and media innovation studies, management and organisational research, and innovation theory, the empirical investigation identifies three overarching themes: the crisis as a catalyst for innovation, a critical test of resilience, and an amplifier of value creation. Through several empirical studies, we demonstrate how the Covid-19 pandemic prompted urgency- and ambition-driven innovation in Norwegian news media. This research showcases how organisations rapidly adapted to the crisis using digital tools, and how they introduced new services, amplifying economic and social value creation while navigating challenges to news workers' well-being.

In conclusion, the theoretical perspectives on crisis, resilience, and innovation shed light on the transformative journey of Norway's news media during the Covid-19 crisis, offering valuable insights for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers alike.

Mona K. Solvoll is associate professor at the School of Communication, Leadership and Marketing at Kristiania University College, Norway. Ragnhild Kr. Olsen is associate professor at the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway.

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