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CONTENTS

STUDIES

- 6-30** Turning Data into News:
Five Different Skill Sets of Journalists Working with Data
Liis Auväärt & Ragne Kõuts-Klemm
- 32-53** How Impartial Are Fact-Checking Platforms?
An Analysis of the Israel-Hamas Conflict
Özlem Delal Abanoz & Melek Tuğba Kocaman
- 54-77** Journalism Studies Courses in Post-Communist Countries
of Central Europe: An Analysis of Journalism Curricula
Ján Hacek
- 78-95** Immigrants' Integration Struggles with Misinformation
and Fraudulent Schemes in a Digital Space:
The Case Study of Russians from Kazakhstan Living in Czechia
Victoria Nainová
- 96-122** Mobile Mental Health Uptake Among Emerging Adults: Integrating
Health Communication and Technology Acceptance Perspectives
Marek Háša
- 124-145** News Sharing On Facebook:
Social Media Effects on News Selection in Sports Journalism
Miroslav Langer & Nina Ortová
- 146-174** Politika exportu české hudby: Institucionální analýza exportní
kanceláře Soundczech [The Export Policy of Czech Music: An Insti-
tutional Analysis of the Export Office Soundczech]
Miroslav Krša & Pavel Zahrádka

INTERVIEWS

- 176-183** Interview with Mohanad Yaqubi
Kristýna Kopřivová

TURNING DATA INTO NEWS: FIVE DIFFERENT SKILL SETS OF JOURNALISTS WORKING WITH DATA

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ABSTRACT

Since the 2010s, but even more so in the post-COVID era, numerous studies discuss new ways to do journalism using data. Yet little emphasis has been put on the crucial question: what skills are needed to work with different types of data? – the answer to which could assist journalism educators and media houses alike. Based on a content analysis of scientific research articles from 2008–2023 (n=51) we propose five profiles of data journalists based on their data skills: the specialised data journalist, the data analyst, the techie of a newsroom, the daily editor and the special beat editor. We argue, that looking at the issue of various data in journalism following a skill-based logic will contribute to updated journalism curriculums and more precise job requirements by the newsrooms.

KEYWORDS

data • journalism • journalistic skills • numeracy • statistics • Big Data

INTRODUCTION

The field of data journalism research has gained noticeable momentum since the 2010s, with numerous studies discussing new ways to do journalism using data (Ausserhofer et al., 2020; Beiler et al., 2020, Erkmen, 2024). Yet, as derived from a recent systematic review on data journalism, little emphasis has been put on what data skills journalists actually possess (Erk-

men, 2024). The main focus of studies has been on empirical evidence of how newsrooms integrate data journalism into their work (Erkmen, 2024, p. 63). The other popular research topic has focused on the outcomes of data journalism – e.g., how data are used to tell the stories (Auväärt, 2023; Chaparro-Domínguez & Díaz-Campo, 2021; Loosen et al., 2020; Ojo and Heravi, 2018; Young et al., 2018) or how the stories are made understandable for users through visualisation and data presentation techniques (Engbreetsen et al., 2018). The latest studies take the holistic view and discuss the epistemologies related to data (Morini, 2023; Ramsälv et al., 2023) or point to the innovation data journalism can bring with for media and societies (Wu, 2024).

The study at hand will attempt to contribute to the more systematized and complex understanding of skills needed by journalists to do different types of data journalistic work. The necessity for such an approach is backed in several ways by the ongoing development of data journalism. Firstly, the need to acquire skills to respond to datafication has only become more pressing in newsrooms (especially due to the years of data-heavy COVID-19 coverage worldwide). In light of the open data movement, data can be viewed as a prerequisite for generating knowledge and journalists as “data intermediaries”, who use their skills to refine it and thus create knowledge for the public (Baack, 2015). “Data-base analysis” has been argued superior over “observational expertise” in a variety of fields such as sports and finance (Kallinikos, 2009), while “observational expertise” is arguably as a traditional journalistic skill and the need for data-base analysis a result of changing times (Thurman et al., 2017). Hence although previous years saw a noticeable shift to downsizing newsrooms, shrinking budgets and advertising revenues, “data journalism has come into the spotlight as one of the few expanding areas in newsrooms” (Beiler et al., 2020, p. 1571).

Secondly, the relevance of data for journalistic work is highlighted by the diversification of journalism occupations. Some examples of this being “programmer/journalist”, “journalist/developer”, “hacker/journalist” (Royal, 2012), “news automation specialist” (Beiler et al., 2020) and “programmer-journalist” (Lewis & Usher, 2014; Parasie and Dagiral, 2013) in newsrooms. A popular distinction exists between “newshound” and “techie”: the former embodying a traditional journalistic way of handling and engaging with data and the latter an emergent journalistic approach to data based on more computational logics and mindsets (Borges-Rey, 2020). The best data journalism stories tend to involve a wide variety of data, and bringing it together takes a lot of time, diverse teams and excellent data skills, as the analysis of award-winning data journalism shows (Loosen, 2020). Yet in

“day-to-day” data journalism (Zamith, 2019), there is a strong reliance on data provided by official institutions and/or other non-commercial organisations (NGOs, research institutes, etc.), which is also accompanied by the agenda of the data providers (Beiler et al., 2020; Loosen et al., 2015; Loosen et al., 2020; Parasie & Dagiral, 2013; Van Witsen, 2020, Zamith, 2019).

While data is a complex phenomenon that can be extracted from physical and social reality based on various principles (e.g., inductive and deductive, qualitative and quantitative approach) and with different scientific tools (from computational sciences to social sciences and humanities), the multiple options to use data by journalists deserve attention. We argue that data usage for reporting is determined and limited by the character of the data – interpretation of sociological survey data requires different knowledge than usage of the data from weather forecasts or sports results. However, only few examples of more detailed data definitions exist in data journalism research. As an example, Steensberg (2021) researched the “quantitative claims” in news stories, but did not specify the type of data. He defined “quantitative claims” (Steensberg, 2021) as verbalised expressions about something being more or less, with references to numbers. Knight (2015) analysed “data elements” in UK newspapers and defined them as: numbers in text, timelines, static maps, dynamic maps, graphs, infographics, tables, figures, lists of numbers and numerical pull quotes (Knight, 2015, pg. 61). Moreover, the triumph of Big Data created numerous new possibilities for data journalism (Portilla, 2018; Ramsälv, 2023; Veglis & Bratsas, 2017), but also: the use of Big Data requires more advanced data processing and interpretation skills (Hammond, 2018), introducing the methods of data science in the newsrooms (Hermida & Young, 2019). Already in 2016, Stencel and Perry surveyed 31 news organizations’ hiring priorities, dividing core skills into foundational skills (e.g. editing and writing) and transformational skills (needed to adapt to ongoing changes in “news audience, distribution, editorial practices and presentation”). The top five skills listed by the organizations were transformational, with the top skill (a priority for 71% of news organizations) being “coding/development”; “user data and metrics” was near the top.

Research on human information processing suggests that numbers and statistics can have authority as facts about reality in a modern world (Porter, 1996; van der Bles et al., 2020). Mastering data can therefore be an opportunity to provide information that is trusted. We will take this claim a step further by inviting the data journalism enthusiasts to think more deeply about the characteristics of data and the skills needed to manage it. The two following subsections thus ask: 1) what are *data*? and 2) which skills are needed for data-related journalism?

1. WHAT ARE DATA?

Following the classifications in social sciences, one can distinguish between data in terms of form (qualitative or quantitative), structure (structured, semi-structured or unstructured), source (captured, derived, exhaustive or transient), producer (primary, secondary or tertiary) and type (indexical, attribute or metadata) (Kitchin, 2014, p. 4). Digitalization and the need to analyze digital human ‘traces’ also bring the computational sciences to the spotlight to develop a multidisciplinary data-centered approach. (Asamoah et al., 2015, Parti and Szigeti, 2021). Due of digital technology the human ability to get significant/interpretative units of information from their environment has been rising (Rowe, 2023) and thus the need to develop critical data literacy. However, current research shows the prevalence of naïve data optimism and uncritical approach towards datasets, dealing with them as passive and value-free elements (Bhaskaran et al., 2024).

Among data processors there are several specializations needed. Professionals who work with data have to combine expertise in computing, statistics, experiment design, interpretation and analytics with fundamental business knowledge and acumen in order to pose the right questions (Hopkins et al., 2010). Data science is multidisciplinary and include subjects of computer science, mathematics, and statistics, including specific competencies in data security, data ethics, data governance, data integration, and data visualization (Coners et al., 2025). Research shows that the work of investigative data journalists significantly resembles data science work practices (Showkat & Baumer, 2021).

As suggested by Fotopoulou (2020, p. 2): “making sense and meaning of data and big datasets, such as electoral data or health data, is not only a technical but also a sociocultural process,” thus creating a need for data literacies that move beyond enhancing quantitative analysis and technical skills. In trying to bring more clarity to data journalism research, one could start with classifying data based on the type of data collection, as the purpose of data collection is highly relevant to understanding the usability of and possible biases in data (boyd & Crawford, 2012; Gitelman, 2013). Following the historical development of social data use in social sciences (Raftery, 2001), one can classify the data as a) measured facts from the “physical” world and routinely given numbers derived from the real-life events – i.e. statistics, b) sociological and research data collected using carefully designed, but clearly limited methods, and c) data that are collected “by themselves”, i.e. Big Data derived from the use of digital technology, including the internet.

Starting with the first, research shows that societal issues, such as cen-

sus results, crime reports, health and science issues, and business and economics are common themes covered by journalists (Cushion et al., 2016; Loosen et al., 2020). This type of data are given in the form of particular numbers: economic growth, GDP, number of immigrants, weather forecasts etc. Numerical data are quantitative and structured. They can be derived from different sources and different producers and can be of different types in the classification described by Kitchin (2014). Journalism has developed routinised forms to present this kind of data: e.g., financial news constructed by algorithms following a pre-set format, algorithms for data mining etc (Diakopoulos, 2019; Miroshnichenko, 2018; Sirén-Heikel et al., 2023). Research shows complex ways in which automatic discovery can find newsworthy themes from sequenced data (e.g., *k*-Sketch query by Fan et al., 2017), which a human journalist can then work with, using journalist's specialist skills: interviewing, critical thinking and understanding newsworthiness (Ferrucci, 2018).

The second type of data that journalists encounter daily is pre-processed and interpreted by third parties (e.g., crime reports, health and science issues). These are collected by governments, public institutions or NGOs, or purchased by research institutions. These data can be in the form of different studies for specific research purposes or statistics collected by officials with the aim of better administration (Porter, 1995) and governance. Stalph (2017) has shown that “the everyday data journalism” depends mainly on “the pre-processed data drawn from domestic governmental bodies” (2018, p. 1332). Ongoing criticism states that journalists do not act as watchdogs in society because they replicate the official interpretation of events and processes or even empower the voices of those who already have power to determine discourses (Lugo-Ocando & Lawson, 2017).

The abandoning of the gatekeeper role by journalism in the case of data offered by official bodies is usually connected with the lack of the necessary skills (Brechman et al., 2009; Van Witsen, 2020) and work processes that limit the time for in-depth investigations (Reich & Godler, 2014). The lack of knowledge of data collection methods causes the spread of biased data interpretations (Garz, 2014).

Thirdly, journalists deal with Big Data, which are often in textual or audio-visual form. In both cases the “volume” of data makes it hard to handle without specialized data skills, yet the possibilities for journalistic projects fuelled by Big Data technologies are vast and rich: ranging from consumer choice to geographical position, web movement and behavioural information (Bolin & Andersson Schwarz, 2015). The availability of non-pre-interpreted data has been growing since the intervention of Big Data in economics and governance, and has been accompanied by the open data movement

(Baack, 2015). With the open data movement, more databases are open access: both a boon and misfortune for journalists. Rowe (2023, p. 4) touches on this saying: “Handling Big Data requires a wider and new digital skills set, largely based on machine learning, artificial intelligence and coding, in addition to greater knowledge of computing technology”.

Finally, sociological data are sometimes and in limited capacity collected by the newsrooms themselves (e.g., polls and questionnaires), but the quality of such datasets and how they are used needs further academic research.

2. WHICH SKILLS ARE NEEDED FOR DATA-RELATED JOURNALISM?

Skills are an important concept in occupational studies and economics (Green, 2011) because they can explain differences between individuals in the performance of different tasks. For example, numeracy has been shown to be one of the most powerful predictors of gender wage gap (Battisti et al., 2023; Hanushek et al., 2015). We hereby also propose to look at the issue of various data in journalism following a skill-based logic.

According to Fischer’s (1980) cognitive skill theory, “skills are ordered in levels of growing complexity, with a specific skill at one level built directly from specific skills at the preceding level, and a set on transformation rules that relate these levels to each other” (Fischer, 1980, p. 477). Skill studies conceptualise the hierarchical structure of skills, where the skills are organised similar to three with increasing sophistication (Fisher, 1980; Sharma, 2017). However, they can be analytically divided into foundational and specialist skills, as shown by Wolff et al. (2016). These foundational skills (e.g., general knowledge how to process data) can be used at different levels as specialist skills, such as the ability to convert data or to carry out a reliability analysis.

Data literacy is a cognitive skill, similar to mathematical proficiency, numeracy and statistical literacy (Kilpatrick, 2001; Sharma, 2017, Vahey et al., 2012). Cognitive skills have been empirically shown to be acquired over the life course (Lechner et al., 2021) and to be convergent, meaning that some skills underpin the performance of others (Lee et al., 2012). Skill theory suggests that skills require a compelling environment to develop, i.e. through increasing experience of operating in a complex environment, a person can develop their skills to the highest level they are capable of (Doppelt, 2019; Fischer, 1980; Lechner et al., 2021). In the context of journalism, this means that the more challenging the newsroom is to update skills, the more journalists will develop their skill profiles to the highest level required to do their jobs effectively.

Data journalism can be described as being closely tied to maths and tech-

nological expertise, yet with an emphasis on the classical “nose for news” (Royal, 2012, p. 22). Appelgren & Nygren (2014) mark, that when creating data journalistic projects, the journalistic angle comes first, not data or technology. Almost a decade ago it was noted in an analysis of the Chicago Tribune that data journalists found most stories from already released data, thus making it the reporter’s job to identify paths in this data (Parasie & Dagiral, 2013). Loosen et al. (2020), analysing international data journalism competition, noted this as a continuing and growing trend. Hence, one possible way to study data literacy through the workflow of journalists is to implement a five-step data-processing model (Köuts-Klemm, 2019): increasing the journalist’s ability 1) to find data, 2) to evaluate data quality, 3) to interpret data in context, 4) to present data through journalistic means, and 5) to consider the needs and capacities of reception of audiences. Returning to Wolff et al. (2016) the first three steps of this model would be foundational skills and the two remaining steps – specialist skills characteristic of journalistic work.

Concentrating on data literacy is key here – being overly perceived as „technical abilities like extracting data, making statistical analysis, creating visualizations, interpreting and reporting appropriately” (Raffaghelli & Stewart, 2020). Researchers agree almost by consensus, that data journalism requires certain computational skills, which are often compensated for by working in multi-skilled teams. While “ordinary” (De Maeyer et al., 2015) or “day-to-day” (Zamith 2019) data journalism “is manageable by one individual [and] can be done on a daily basis” (De Maeyer et al., 2015, p. 410–411), “thorough” (De Maeyer et al. 2015) data journalism relies on a team with skill sets complementing one another. For example, Borges-Rey (2020), researching the devolved nations of the United Kingdom, describes journalists teaming up with graphic designers and coders to compensate for “the absence of certain advanced computational skills and/or the restricted access to certain information” (Borges-Rey, 2020, p. 926). In environments such as North America a trend has been observed to specialize in two profiles: one responsible for collecting and analysing data, the other creating visualizations and apps (Bisiani et al. 2023, p. 3).

Yet most often in journalism research data journalists are discussed with no distinction between different roles and skills. Also, newsrooms often invest in a solitary data journalism hire, who works on full-time data production, but does not have a designated beat (Boyles & Meyer, 2017). This leads to modern data journalist being described as self-taught, resourceful and multi-skilled (Appelgren, 2017; Beckett & Deuze, 2016; Bisiani et al., 2023; Himma-Kadakas & Palmiste, 2019; Larrondo et al., 2016; Örnebring, 2010; Örnebring & Mellado, 2018).

We argue that a *skill-based differentiation* of data journalists – a step further from “ordinary”/ “day-to-day” vs “thorough”, looking at specific roles carried out in newsroom – is in better accordance with professional roles in modern newsrooms. Although there are some handbooks and textbooks that thematize the variety of data in journalism (e.g., Gray et al., 2012; Livingston & Voakes, 2005), this study is designed to view how the nature of data can influence the complexity of the skills journalists need to work with it.

Thus, the following questions are posed:

- *RQ1: What kind of skills related to journalistic information processing are revealed as necessary for a data journalist and how do these skills relate to different types of data?*
- *RQ2: Are there associations between how data is defined by the academic literature and what journalistic skills are discussed?*

3. METHODOLOGY

The following research is based on an analysis of academic literature, focusing on data skills of journalists and/or journalism students mentioned/analysed in scientific articles published during last 15 years. The same time frame – 2008–2023 – was used in a systematic literature review by Erkmen (2024), noting that in the year 2008 the term “data journalism” was first used in Web of Science, the oldest international bibliometric database. Although for Erkmen (2024) the earliest manuscript meeting the inclusion criteria was not published before 2013, we decided to keep 2008 as a starting point, as this range would encapsulate a full body of studies published on the topic and the search string of this study could return hits before the year 2013.

The decision to include articles addressing data in terms of journalism education was based on the fact that these articles reflect on the current state of teaching data skills to future journalists and propose changes in curricula to match the hiring needs of the changing media market.

As a scientific tool, the literature review presented here has several purposes. It can be viewed as a way to “examine old theories and propose new ones, consider where the balance of evidence lies in relation to a particular topic” (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006, p. xiii), and offer guidance to researchers planning future studies. Although a fundamental component of academic research, literacy review as a method comes with several potential limitations, such as possible lack of transparency and/or reproducibility if the stages and phases of the study have not been explained with necessary clarity (Kraus et al., 2022) – furthermore, literature reviews

may self-sustain biases in the field’s boundaries and priorities (Gond et al., 2023). One might claim, that human-collected literature review as a method for knowledge extraction will be even more questionable in the development of artificial intelligence, where AI can substantially contribute to knowledge and theory development (Wagner et al., 2022). However, AI tools still lack crucial abilities (Bolanos et al., 2024); thus, human contribution has value.

Keeping all of the above in mind, we 1) aim to examine the research done so far, 2) group the information presented in the articles and 3) discuss potential applications of this knowledge in future research. We describe the stages and phases of the review in detail, to allow transparency and replicability.

To form a corpus of literature, the following steps were taken. First the decision was made to gather scholarly works from the major online research databases Scopus and EBSCO, as these have become international platforms for scholars to publish research. We focused our research to last 15 years (2008–9/2023), a time frame also used by Erkmen (2024).

In an electronic search strategy relevant key words and appropriate subject headings are important elements (Spry & Mierzwinski-Urban, 2018). To gather the corpus of literature, a preliminary table of search terms was constructed. The table included relevant key words, synonyms or related phrases. The most general key term was “datafication”, which can be seen as the “quantification of aspects of life previously experienced in qualitative, non-numeric forms, which are then tabulated, analysed and visualized” (Engebretsen et al., 2018, p. 1). This was followed by the term “journalism” and “data skills” to sharpen the focus. The preliminary search string was complemented by adding new search words found in the titles and abstracts of articles identified as potentially relevant to the study at hand and the searches repeated, until no new hits identified as relevant were added (Gehanno et al. 2009. Using Boolean operators, a search string was finally composed as follows: *(Data*) AND (journalist OR reporter OR (data journalist) OR journalism OR (data journalism)) AND ((data skill*) OR (data competence) OR competence OR skill* OR (professional skill*))* (see Table 1).

Table 1: The search terms (relevant key words, synonyms or related phrases) used to create a search string for online databases. Source: Authors

Search terms	Datafication	Journalism	Data skills
Related key words	Data	Data journalism	Data literacy
		Journalist	Data competence
		Data journalist	Professional skills
		Reporter	Skills

This search was conducted in Scopus, searching article titles, abstracts and keywords, and ended up with 447 results. Additional filters were set to 1) focus on the subject area of social sciences. This was done because after reviewing the total list of articles it was evident, that the vast majority of research related to journalistic skills comes from this field: 250+ articles, followed by the field of medicine (80+ articles) and thirdly computer science (60+ articles). The interest in data journalism also differs by field: computer sciences, for example, concentrate more on potential tools used for data journalism, while social sciences take an interest in which attributes and skills are required to work in newsrooms. As such, the focus on literature from the social sciences seemed appropriate and justified. Additional filters were set for 2) the type of text to articles/conference papers published in English, leaving 180 results, and 3) all key words matching journalism/journalists were selected, leaving 116 results.

A second search was conducted in EBSCO Discovery with the same search string. Applying the filter of key words matching journalism/journalists, the results were compared with those from Scopus. Four additional texts were added to the selection.

The 120 texts were collected from listed databases and abstracts reviewed. Those texts that a) did not somehow reflect upon the data skills of journalists/ journalism students, b) were unavailable as a whole, or c) were not written in English were excluded. As a result, a selection of 51 articles was formed (for reviewing purposes: you can see the list of articles in the appendix. This can be made available to fellow researchers as a request from the author(s), should it be lengthy to add to the article). The number of articles found is in line with a literature review by Erkmén (2024) covering the same period, who found that only less than half of the articles (97 in total) dealt with journalists' perceptions and practices – topics under which skills have been researched.

To answer the research questions, we started by coding the parts of the texts (sentences or sections consisting of several sentences) that 1) indicated some form of data, 2) referred to the journalist doing something with data, or 3) mentioned journalistic skills needed to work with data. The initial coding scheme was created inductively following the previous studies – it is further discussed below – and tested by pilot coding. During the pilot coding sub-categories for the main categories were created (see Table 2).

Both for coding and analysis MaxQda software – MaxQda 2022 – was used. While software-based qualitative analysis has been criticised for its “code-and-retrieve” approach (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013), we followed Mitchell & Schmitz's (2023) suggestions on how not to “reduce complex

qualitative data to mere lists of codes and frequency counts” (Mitchell & Schmitz, 2023, p. 167). Four steps were followed: 1) we created a sample of articles that was as coherent as possible (only peer-reviewed articles addressed journalists’ data skills), 2) we selected a sample of medium size, i.e. small enough for manual coding, 3) we read all documents carefully before coding and further processing, and 4) we followed the skills theory in interpreting the patterns illuminated by the software.

In detail, the references to data were categorized based on common sociological classifications: 1) directly mentioning data in terms of numbers, 2) sociological research data (gathered with the specific aim and with the help of social scientific methods: polls, surveys, census data etc.), 3) statistics (data gathered regularly for administrative purposes: different state registries etc.), and 4) Big Data (data gathered “by themselves” as a result of the usage of digital technology). The last category was divided into structured (geolocation, weather, financial transactions etc.) and unstructured (textual data from social media, collections of speeches, documents etc.) data. The term was given a code, if it had been put into context by the author(s) of the article being coded. For example, the code “2. data = numbers” was given, if the term was accompanied by clarification like *measured knowledge, expressed in numbers*.

The coding of type of data was relevant for two purposes: 1) to show the variety of treatment and 2) to relate the data definitions to the skills of journalists mentioned in the texts.

The pure mentioning of data was subject of mixed-methods approach – by analysing the mentioning of the word in relation to other words there is possibility to reveal the connotations of the concept, e.g., “data scraping” is activity characteristic to internet data that can be in different forms, whereas “dataset” already means that there is an inner organization of input provided.

The other part of the coding scheme, skills, was based on the previously presented overview of journalism theoretical literature (e.g., Attfield et al., 2009; Bradshaw, 2011; Kõuts-Klemm, 2019) and followed the stages of journalistic work process. The skills were organized in a linear manner: 1) establishing an initial idea, 2) preparations for info gathering, 3) obtaining information, 4) analysing the gathered material, 5) composing articles, and 6) distributing finished work. These categories were coded if a clear connection with data was made in the text. The coding of texts was carried out by both authors. After a test sample of five articles, the coding scheme was discussed between authors and specified even further. Inter-coder reliability was calculated based on three articles and was 82%. Using software for coding meant that the coders marked parts of the text,

e.g., a single word, a few words, sentences, or even longer parts of the text, as a code. The scope of a code in the text was also a topic of coding agreements. Later, the software relates not only the codes as such to each other but includes the particular parts of the texts also.

To further analyse the connections between the findings, hierarchical cluster analysis was used (MaxQda, 2022). This technique helps visualize group affiliations as codes are grouped based on similarity. The basis for this calculation is a distance matrix showing how closely connected the assigned codes are in texts and how tightly tied to another. In our case it visualizes which types of data and which journalistic skills were most often related in the papers and how strongly these were linked. For example, if *sociological data* is mentioned as being used by a journalist, is *quantitative literacy* also discussed in this academic paper.

Relating data and skills in scientific articles enabled to assess the sophistication of the data journalism research: if researchers had created a clear link between different types of data and different skills or not.

4. RESULTS

Since the articles represented a variety of topics related to data (in) journalism, from academic education (e.g., Davies & Cullen, 2016; Kashyap & Bhaskaran, 2020) to overviews of data journalistic practices in different countries/regions (e.g., Fink & Anderson, 2015; N P Lewis & Nashmi, 2019) or discussing journalistic skills (e.g. Rodríguez & Clark, 2021; Thurman et al., 2017) the amount of effort given to defining “data” or “skills” also varied greatly. But because all of the collected articles were derived from academic databases via the same search string, how deeply the base terms “data” and/or “skills” were discussed in the texts helped to illustrate how “obvious” or “self-evident” these concepts seemed to be related to data journalism.

In some articles the term “data” was left vague and tied to journalistic skills only in a paragraph or two, while in others they were discussed as very much linked. Creating an Excel “heat map” revealed that most connections were in articles dealing with teaching data journalism (e.g., Kashyap & Bhaskaran, 2020; Treadwell et al., 2016).

4.1. Modern skill-set: story-telling plus technical skills

The frequent occurrence of the concept of Big Data explains the most prominent category concerning journalistic skills, “establishing initial idea”, which included the attributes passionately discussed in data journalism research, i.e. “technical skills”. Throughout the coding, we differentiated between “basic technical skills” and “advanced technical skills”: the first indicated that a journalist was able to use technical tools to perform data-re-

lated journalistic tasks (e.g., spreadsheets), but did not have the know-how to create such tools from scratch. The second indicated that a journalist had to be at least somewhat skilled in coding, programming, creating templates etc. Judging from the sample of texts, “advanced technical skills” were most frequently discussed in addressing journalistic work related to data.

As for traditional skills, “narrating, storifying” was named notably often, as was “nose for news”. For example, phrases such as the journalist had to “find and extract stories from big data” (Green, 2018), “produce stories through a combination of software programming and storytelling skills” (Kosterich & Weber, 2019) or that “data journalists must engage their publics through more emotive reporting, without losing sight of its factual strength” (Stalph & Borges-Rey, 2018) were used. These findings emphasize that the need for story-telling skills had not been lost in the wave of datafication. Presenting data in a clear and compact way was a journalistic challenge, echoed by the frequency with which “visualizing” (e.g., creating maps, timelines and other infographics) was mentioned in the sample (see Table 2).

Table 2: Frequency of the codes and categories in the sample of articles.
Source: Authors

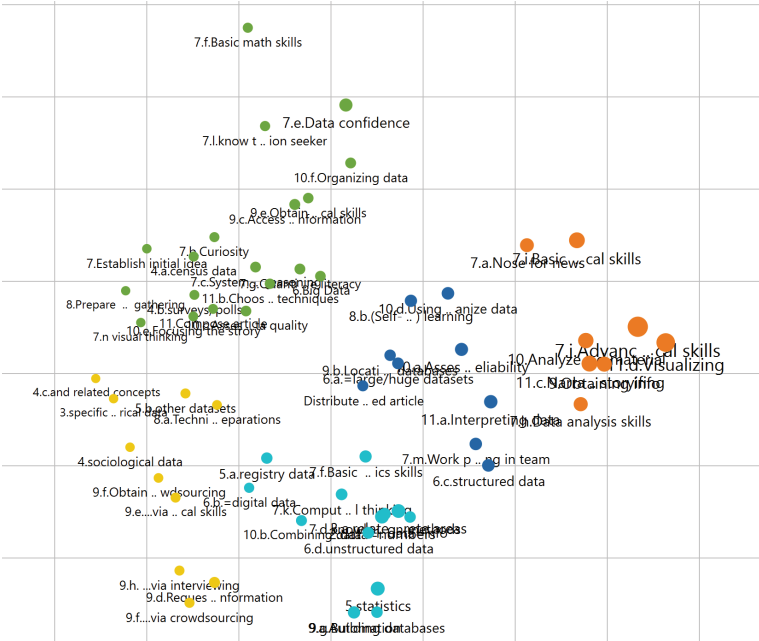
Category/code	Frequency of a code	Frequency of a category
1. data = information	23	23
2. data = numbers	45	45
3. Specific numerical data	3	48
3.a related to concrete areas	45	
4. Sociological data	4	22
4.a census data	9	
4.b surveys, polling data	8	
4.c related concepts	1	
5. Statistics	47	78
5.a registry data	22	
5.b other datasets	9	
6. Big Data	15	112
6.a =large/ huge datasets	26	
6.b =digital data	11	
6.c structured data	34	
6.d unstructured data	26	

7. Establishing initial idea	4	
7.a Nose for news	46	
7.b Curiosity	9	
7.c Systematic thinking/reasoning	16	
7.d Knowledge of different data collection methods	30	
7.e Data confidence/literacy	39	
7.f Basic maths skills	10	
7.f. Basic maths and statistical skills	30	
7.g Quantitative literacy	17	495
7.h Data analysis	49	
7.i Basic technical skills	65	
7.j Advanced technical skills	108	
7.k Computational thinking	25	
7.l Knowing legal rights as a seeker of information	11	
7.m Work planning in teams	33	
7.n Visual thinking	3	
8. Preparing for info gathering	2	
8.a Technical preparations	7	40
8.b (Self-directed) learning	31	
9. Obtaining info	58	
9.a Automation	31	
9.b Locating information, navigating databases	23	
9.c Accessing information	18	
9.d Requesting information	19	220
9.e Obtaining information via technical skills	23	
9.f Obtaining information via crowd-sourcing methods	16	
9.g Building databases	23	
9.h Obtaining information via interviewing	9	
10. Analysing gathered material	61	
10.a Assessing data reliability	39	
10.b Combining data	18	
10.c Assessing data quality	15	191
10.f Organising data	17	
10.d Organising data using technological tools	34	
10.e Deciding on the final focus of the story	7	
11. Composing articles	8	
11.a Interpreting data	42	
11.b Choosing the techniques	12	220
11.c Narrating, storifying	66	
11.d Visualising	92	
12. Distributing	19	19

4.2. Distinguishing data journalists via skill-sets: 5 types

As the next step in the analysis, the co-occurrence of the different codes and categories was observed. Creating a proximity matrix allowed visualize how closely connected these codes were in the texts (see Figure 1). To clarify, clusters are sets of objects that are grouped based on similarities (Keller & Achatz, 2019, p. 425), in our case based on the co-occurrence of the coded phrases in two main categories: 1) characteristics of the data, and 2) journalistic information processing and related skills. If the same codes occur repeatedly in a number of documents together, the clustering method classifies them into the same cluster. In the graph, five distinct clusters emerge.

Figure 1: Proximity matrix: five clusters of articles (occurrence of codes in the same document) (colours of codes). Source: Authors own processing and software.



Type 1: the specialised data journalist. Cluster 1 (marked with the colour green on Figure 1) represents the type of journalist with the widest skill-set for working with data. Such person is data confident and knows the legal rights of an information seeker. Such journalist has basic technical skills to combine and interpret societal data (both sociological data and statistics) created by a third party. Clearly concepts dealing with sociological data are

closely tied to the first stage of the journalistic work process: being curious about a matter and establishing the initial idea. A part of the same process is the ability to think visually and focus the story, which can be summarized as seeing the story behind the (numerical) data. The mid-section of the cluster visualizes the journalist's preparations to access and obtain the data, leading to requests for data (via surveys and polls, using census data, Big Data) and tied to organizing the data. Knowledge of data collection methods help journalists interpret their data independently from the frames presented by data holders. Note, that focusing the story and visual thinking are closely linked. We propose that this kind of skill-set would be required by a specialised data journalist, someone who could complete a data-based story from start to finish: from the initial idea to writing and visualising. Since teamwork skills are not present in this cluster, this journalist could presumably work alone (e.g., in a small local paper which does not have the resources to equip a big data team) or a freelancer.

Type 2: the data analyst. Cluster 2 (marked with dark blue) implies the profile of a team player, someone who works together with others to complete a project. They are skilled to locate, assess, organize and interpret various types of data using technological tools. Using these tools is closely linked to self-learning. Yet visual thinking or focusing the story are not necessarily linked to their profile. We propose this skill-set would describe a data analyst teaming up with journalists to work on a data-based story. The profile created here is very similar to the profile of German data journalists as described by Haim (2022), who also names self-learning as a notable feature. Yet what is missing compared to Haim is the visualisation side: web or graphics design. Stencel & Perry (2016) also describe a similar type: the newsroom-friendly coder.

Type 3: the “techie” of a newsroom. Cluster 3 (marked with orange) represents a journalist with advanced technical and data analysis skills. These are also linked to storytelling and a nose for news, knowing how to turn data into journalistic narratives for their audiences. Some crucial steps for gathering the data for a journalistic story are missing in this cluster: focusing the story, preparations for data gathering, choosing techniques etc. We propose that this could point to a division of tasks: while working in a data team not everyone needs to have the exact same skill-set, some jobs are done by one person, some by another. The strength of the “techie” would be visualising; not only does this journalist have visual thinking, but knows also the tools to create the graphs, charts etc. In the newsroom this person would be seen as a “techie” (Borges-Rey, 2020).

Type 4: the daily editor. Cluster 4 (marked with yellow) represents a journalist feeling comfortable working with sociological data and numer-

ical data related to concrete areas. In this cluster crowdsourcing and interviewing stand out as the means to obtain data. Also requesting information is a skill mastered by this type of journalist, but various levels of data analysis skills are not present in this cluster. The same applies to advanced technical skills. Such journalist is not necessarily a storyteller, but rather a distributor of pre-interpreted data. In modern newsrooms such a skill-set would be required from a daily (web) editor, who needs to make quick alterations to (their own and colleague's) stories based on the growing or declining importance of a story, the developments of the events covered in a story, the spotted possibility of further audience engagement connected to the story and so on.

Type 5: the special beat editor. Cluster 5 (marked with light blue) differs from cluster 4 in the sense that this type of journalist would also be equipped with the knowledge of different data collecting methods, basic math and statistical skills, also computational thinking. This can be linked to their use of more complex data – unstructured data –, but registry data and statistics are also present in this cluster. Compared to cluster 4 a significant distinction is the skill to combine data, making it possible to come up with their own interpretations of the data. As storytelling skills are not present in this cluster, this can be interpreted as the skill-set of someone dealing with the stories of colleagues. We propose this type of skill-set would be valuable to a special beat editor, the beat being data heavy like health or economy.

Since previous studies have noted that journalists pay little attention to verifying information provided as data (Cushion et al., 2016), this skill was also coded if present in the articles (coded as *10.a Assessing data reliability*). Cluster analysis shows that the need to assess data reliability or quality was mostly discussed in terms of huge datasets. However, the need to assess the quality or reliability of data relates to other types of data too. Critical data studies show that even data collected for administrative purposes in different registers or by researchers to analyse specific social phenomena are not without bias (Gitelman, 2013; Porter, 1995). The relatively moderate frequency of this code indicates high “trust in numbers”.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to approach data journalism in a sparsely studied way: *a skill-based differentiation* of data journalists. Existing academic literature was analysed and synthesised with two questions in mind: first, what kind of skills related to journalistic information processing are revealed as necessary for a data journalist and how do these skills relate to different types of data (RQ1)? And – are there associations between how data is de-

finied by the academic literature and what journalistic skills are discussed (RQ2)? The findings aim to illustrate how academic literature (namely social sciences) has been discussing data journalistic skills but also offer a way to connect this discussion to the practical field of journalism – offering a possible match between certain data skill-sets and type of journalists using them. As a theoretical foundation, we have been building on the data concept in social sciences and data sciences (Kitchin, 2014; Raftery, 2001) in addition to the cognitive skill theory.

The corpus of literature for this study was formed searching online research databases for peer-reviewed articles: 1) on the topic of data journalism, and 2) in which the skills of producing data journalistic work were marked as key words. In total 51 relevant articles from 2008–2023 were analysed.

Five types of data-skill relations emerged from the proximity matrix created. Arguably there are factors to consider while interpreting the clusters. As limitations for this approach it has been underlined that 1) qualitative data analysis needs to be theory-driven (Keller & Achatz, 2019; Mitchell & Schmitz, 2023); 2) clustering results provide guidance for interpretation (Keller & Achatz, 2019, p. 432). That being said, based on the clusters made visible by the proximity matrix of this study, we feel confident to propose five types of media workers, each described by a slightly different skill-set, when it comes to working with various types of data. One possible way to typify them would be: *the specialised data journalist, the data analyst, the “techie” of a newsroom, the daily editor and the special beat editor* (RQ2).

Looking at these types through the prism of foundational vs specialist skills (Wolff et al., 2016), the balance for each type is different. For example, the daily editor has a variety of data-related foundational journalism skills, yet not so many named data specialist skills. In contrast the “techie” would also need a variety of data specialist skills. And the data analyst could lack journalistic specialist skills such as focusing a story.

Differentiating between data journalism skill-sets – and, furthermore, their foundational vs specialist skills – can prove helpful: from the viewpoint of both academia and media houses. A journalist with data-skills is sought after by employers (Stencel & Perry, 2016; Mattsson, 2020 etc), but according to Fischer’s cognitive skill theory “a specific skill at one level built directly from specific skills at the preceding level” – in other words, skills must be hierarchically developed. This stresses the need for universities to rethink their “traditional trade school focus on interviewing and storytelling skills” (Nisbet & Fahy, 2015; p. 232), as journalism students would benefit from obtaining at least data confidence. At the same time, the find-

ings of the study at hand directly address broader developments in the field of journalism: specifically, the potential for restructuring the newsrooms based on if and which data journalists are skilled to work with. While media houses worldwide are downsizing, a better understanding of which data-related skills would actually be used by journalists taking on the job of a *daily editor* compared to a *special beat editor* or *specialized data journalist*, would arguably lead to more precise job requirements on their part.

In addition, the proximity matrix presented by this study allows to conclude, that academic literature tends to define data journalism through the usage of Big Data, and in relation to skills this kind of work is not as much tied to being good at maths or statistics as to developing advanced technical skills that make it possible to perform data mining and scraping (RQ1). Yet it is evident that data journalists also need such traditional skills as having a “nose for news” and “narrating” in order to find meaningful information from Big Data and present it to the public. In conclusion, such a journalist would need to master several specialised skill-sets: those of a story-telling journalist plus those of a programmer/hacker.

Our analysis shows that the most prominent cluster of articles dealt with a broad palette of data journalism skills. Evidently, multi-skilling seems to still be expected of a journalist, making this analysis a further piece in a long line of research (e.g., Beckett & Deuze, 2016; Himma-Kadakas & Palmiste, 2019; Larrondo et al., 2016; Örnebring, 2010; Örnebring & Mella-do, 2018). One way to look at innovation in journalism is through the prism of collaboration: journalists “working with data scientists, engineers, product managers to build content that is hard to replicate by other media brands” (Chew & Tandoc, 2022).

It can be summarized, that a data journalist, as most often pictured in the academic literature, is a data analyst, able to work with data in any form, a skilled narrator and a visual thinker. Although a person can acquire several specialist skills (*the “techie”*), as several of these skill-sets can indeed exist in a vertical structure, is it realistic to expect that each journalist working with data acquires multiple specialist skill-sets? This is a topic for debate: both for media houses and academia.

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HOW IMPARTIAL ARE FACT-CHECKING PLATFORMS? AN ANALYSIS OF THE ISRAEL-HAMAS CONFLICT

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ABSTRACT

As fake news spreads rapidly in conflict and crisis, fact-checking platforms are critical in accessing reliable information. Although these platforms aim to provide accurate and unbiased information, they are often criticized, and their impartiality is questioned. Although studies evaluating such criticisms on a scientific basis are limited, they can help to analyze the effectiveness of fact-checking platforms in combating misinformation and ensuring societies' access to reliable information. Analyzing their impartiality, especially in sensitive crisis moments such as conflict, sheds a critical light on the credibility of these platforms. Through comparative qualitative content analysis, this study analyzes IFCN-certified fact-checking platforms operating in five countries (France, Germany, Iraq, USA, Türkiye) during the first month of the Israel-Hamas conflict. The findings show that fact-checking platforms are shaped not only by their accuracy criteria but also by how they are positioned within the political and social frameworks of the country in which they are located.

KEYWORDS

fact-checking • fake news • journalism • impartiality • conflict

INTRODUCTION

Misinformation or fake news has become a significant issue, especially with the rise of new communication technologies and social media. Detecting fake news has become more challenging in digital media, where millions of data circulate, compared to traditional media (Collins et al., 2021; Kalsnes, 2018; Van Heekeren, 2020). Historically, fake news has always been a problem, but today it has evolved into a global issue with the potential to cause serious harm. It negatively impacts various areas of life, including politics, health, and the economy (Bastick, 2021; Hoy & Koulouri, 2022; Vo & Lee, 2018).

Fake news is defined as information presented as accurate but lacking a factual basis, often bypassing the news media's editorial norms. It overlaps with other forms of information disorder, including misinformation (unintentional false information), disinformation (deliberately misleading information), and malinformation (genuine information used to cause harm) (Lazer et al., 2018; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). The spread of all these disorders of information on the internet poses a significant threat to society. Organizations and researchers are actively working to combat this epidemic. Fact-checkers play a crucial role in verifying, evaluating, and correcting the accuracy of dubious claims and news from both traditional and social media (Graves, 2017; Kyriakidou et al., 2022; Soprano et al., 2024).

In situations such as pandemics (Alam et al., 2021; Rocha et al., 2023; Ünal & Çiçeklioğlu, 2022), wars (Abu Salem et al., 2019; Kornieiev et al., 2023; Monsees, 2020), and natural disasters (Kwanda & Lin, 2020; Safitri et al., 2021) the dissemination of fake news accelerates. Fact-checking platforms aim to reduce the spread and impact of misinformation that undermines citizens' ability to think critically and make informed decisions, especially during these times (Kumar, 2022).

While fact-checking platforms are an effective weapon in the fight against fake news, they have their critics. A prevalent concern is their perceived ineffectiveness in eliminating false and misleading claims. Additionally, there are worries about potential bias in fact-checking efforts (Amazeen, 2013). These issues raise questions about the impartiality of fact-checkers.

In journalism, impartiality is judged by factors such as news selection, sourcing, and language. This principle also applies to fact-checking platforms, which affect every stage of a journalist's work. The debate about impartiality as a fundamental journalistic norm extends to fact-checking journalism. Basic practices such as fact-checking, cross-fact-checking,

systematic questioning, and impartial reporting form the basis of journalism (Kumar, 2022). As a result, the effectiveness of fact-checking platforms in combating fake news depends on their commitment to impartiality (Amazeen, 2015).

During the conflict between Israel and Hamas in October 2023, numerous fake news stories spread rapidly on social media, with various claims and images circulating globally in different languages (Shahi, 2024). Fact-checking platforms, vital in combating this information pollution, have been actively fighting fake news since the beginning of the conflict. In order to assess the impartiality of fact-checking platforms, this study analyses the fact-checking platforms operating in France, Germany, Iraq, the USA, and Türkiye during the first six months of the Israel-Hamas conflict. In this context, one IFCN (International Fact-Checking Network) member platform was selected from each country, and 231 fact-checks published in the specified period were analyzed through content analysis.

1. CRITICISM OF THE IMPARTIALITY OF FACT-CHECKING

The internet has significantly changed the information landscape by removing traditional media gatekeepers and allowing anyone to create and share content, democratizing information and increasing misinformation (Amazeen, 2020). While social media encourages open participation and is an important channel for the free dissemination of information, it raises concerns about the quality and accuracy of the shared content (Alam et al., 2021; Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Wu et al., 2019).

Fact-checking initiatives that have emerged as a solution to this problem are vital in helping the public resist fake news, often reconstructing original news to expose manipulation (Luengo & García-Marín, 2020; Sundriyal et al., 2023). Research shows that these platforms effectively reduce false beliefs (Flynn et al., 2017; Gottfried et al., 2013; Van Erkel et al., 2024; Wasike, 2023; Wood & Porter, 2019) and have a positive impact on political beliefs (Nyhan et al., 2020; Walter et al., 2020; Wintersieck, 2017), especially about non-political misinformation (Liu et al., 2023).

Despite the increase in fact-checking worldwide, platforms occasionally face criticism (Dierickx & Lindén, 2023). Some of these criticisms are directed at users' perceptions of these platforms. They often focus on cognitive biases, motivated reasoning, and their effects, as defined by fact-checking bias and selective exposure. Cognitive biases, such as confirmation bias, reduce the impact of fact-checking by leading people to seek out content that supports their views (Mena, 2019; Soprano et al., 2024). Selective exposure, where people select information consistent with their prior beliefs,

also limits the impact of fact-checking because viewers may prefer content that confirms their views (Hameleers & Van Der Meer, 2020). Motivated reasoning suggests that people uncritically accept and resist congruent information (Taber & Lodge, 2006; Thaler, 2024). This is evident in US political studies, where people accept ideologically congruent claims regardless of their veracity (Hameleers & Van Der Meer, 2020). The “rebound effect” emphasizes that exposure to contradictory fact-checks can reinforce false beliefs and make misinformation appear more credible to those exposed to it (Hameleers, 2019; Nyhan & Reifler, 2010). As a result, fact-checking may not reach those most vulnerable to misinformation (Aruguete et al., 2023; Nyhan & Reifler, 2012).

2. IMPARTIALITY OF FACT-CHECKER

Beyond concerns about the effectiveness of fact-checking, there are also criticisms of the process and the fact-checkers, which is the primary concern of this study (Draws et al., 2021, 2022). These criticisms, which raise concerns about the impartiality of the fact-checking, are related to the selection of news to be verified and the frameworks used in the fact-checking process.

The fact-checking process is a four-stage process: selecting the claim, selecting the source of evidence, checking the accuracy of the claim, and publishing it. The transparency of these processes demonstrates the impartiality of fact-checking (Kumar, 2022). IFCN analyzed fact-checking platforms worldwide, assessed their objectivity and impartiality, published a principles guide for this process, and explained the steps required for objective fact-checking. These principles will promote consistency and impartiality in fact-checking and leave no room for bias (Fernández-Roldán et al., 2023). The IFCN Code of Principles emphasizes that signatory fact-checking organizations should transparently publish impartial reports on viral claims (Kumar, 2022). IFCN member fact-checking platforms state that when selecting claims to verify, they choose newsworthy ones, making viewers wonder whether these claims are valid (Graves, 2016). However, some fact-checking organizations are still often accused of not being impartial in both news selection and news presentation (Stencel, 2015).

Criticisms of the impartiality of fact-checking platforms are based on cognitive biases. Research has shown that cognitive biases affect fact-checking journalists as much as they affect readers, and that fact-checking journalists may also be vulnerable to such biases (Charman et al., 2017). Cognitive biases stem from mental shortcuts and heuristics that lead to systematic thinking errors in people’s decision-making pro-

cesses. Stages such as news selection, evidence search, and rating may be subject to cognitive biases influenced by external factors such as time pressure and lack of information (Masotina et al., 2023).

Azzopardi (2021), who examines cognitive biases that may jeopardize the fact-checking process in his studies, has categorized the causes of factors that may trigger cognitive biases in the information fact-checking process under four headings by reviewing the literature, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Cognitive biases that may jeopardize the fact-checking process.
Source: Authors

1.	Too Much Information	Confirmation bias, anchoring, availability, framing effects
2.	No Meaning	Bandwagon effects, exposure effects, reinforcement effects
3.	Act Fast	Decoy effects, ambiguity effects, less is more, Dunning-Kruger effects
4.	Remember	Priming effects, order effects, peak-end rule

Masotina et al. (2023) categorized the cognitive biases that may affect fact-checking under 10 headings: Availability bias leads us to overestimate the likelihood of something based on how easily we recall it. Confirmation bias makes us favor information that supports our beliefs while ignoring contradictory evidence. Anchoring bias causes us to rely too much on the first information we encounter. The ambiguity effect makes us avoid uncertain options, even if they are beneficial. The bandwagon effect pushes us to adopt popular opinions without critical thinking. Framing bias influences decisions based on how information is presented. The less-is-more effect makes too many options overwhelming, leading to inaction. The reinforcement effect makes repeated exposure to a claim more believable. Selection bias results in only certain events being reported while others are ignored. Source bias makes us trust information based on its origin rather than its actual credibility.

Soprano et al. (2024) identified 39 cognitive biases on this issue by reviewing the literature. These issues centred on the selection of the news to be verified (Colicchio, 2023; Draws et al., 2022) and the frameworks used in fact-checking (Farnsworth & Lichter, 2019). Along with these biases, the fact-checking process also requires the construction of a narrative. Verifying a suspicious claim and its presentation is also a form of journalism; in journalism, it is essential that the news text is the closest to the truth. Therefore, this feature is sought in fact-checking, which is a new journalistic practice.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study examines fact-checking platforms in the context of impartiality in the Israel-Hamas conflict, focusing on five platforms certified by the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN).

Criticisms of impartiality in claim selection concentrate on two main points: First, whether one side's claims are more substantiated than the other's, i.e., whether different views are equally represented. Secondly, whether substantiated claims are more negatively biased against one side, which is associated with the negative presentation of the statements used (Birks 2019:23). In this context, the study will examine two main points: whether the parties are given equal coverage in news selection and the statements used about the parties.

The following research questions (RQ) will be addressed in this study:

- *RQ1. Are there ideological tendencies in selecting news to be verified?*
- *RQ2. Is there a difference in news language in the fact-checking on the subject?*

The most appropriate analysis method for the research is qualitative content analysis. Content analysis is a method used to analyze visual and verbal data content and reduce facts or events into categories for better analysis and interpretation (Harwood & Garry, 2003, p. 479). Qualitative content analysis is a method used to systematically identify the meanings of qualitative data that may not be obvious and allows focusing on aspects of meaning related to the overall research question (Kracauer, 1952; Mayring, 2014; Richards et al., 2024; Schreier, 2012).

This study examines fact-checks related to the 2023 Israel-Hamas conflict by collecting fact-checks between 7 October and 6 November 2023. The conflict, which began when Hamas attacked and Israel responded, has led to widespread misinformation, particularly on social media. Globally, fact-checking platforms have worked to address this issue (Oguejiofor, 2024; Yakubu & Oyigebe, 2024).

Platforms were selected considering the ideological stances of their respective countries on the conflict. The U.S. (a strong ally of Israel), along with France and Germany, generally support Israel (Emir, 2024; Wade, 2023), while countries like Türkiye and Iraq support Palestine (Göksedef, 2024).

The study includes five platforms from IFCN-member organizations: AFP Fact Check, Correctiv, PolitiFact, Teyit, and Tech4Peace (T4P), all adhering to IFCN's transparency standards. Transparency, a fundamental principle

to ensure the press’s objectivity and correct misinformation, is a requirement for IFCN membership (Ye, 2023, p. 2265). All claims investigated by IFCN member platforms describe the fact-checking process and provide source links. Therefore, the five platforms examined in this study maintain transparency and document their fact-checking methods.

Each platform’s language varied, with AFP and PolitiFact offering English content, Correctiv in German, T4P in English and Arabic, and Teyit in Turkish, Azerbaijani, and English. Translations were done using Google Translate to ensure consistent English-language analysis. Data collection employed web scraping, focusing on fact-checking reports containing the terms “Israel,” “Palestine,” and “ Hamas” and excluding general news. The final dataset comprised 231 fact-checks. In the 6-month period analysed, Corrective 23, AFP 67, Politifact 52, T4P 27, and Teyit 62 suspicious allegations regarding the Israel-Hamas conflict were investigated.

The fact-checking content examined in the study was obtained by web scraping from the archives of the fact-checking platforms’ web pages. Web scraping is a technique used to collect data on the web (Diakopoulos, 2019). This technique allows the automatic collection of almost unlimited Google search results for various predefined search queries (Schwab et al., 2023). The R programming language was used for collecting and batch-processing the data sources.

After the data was collected, the fact-checking was systematically examined, and a coding table was created within the framework of the questions created according to the purpose of the study. This coding table also included questions regarding suspicious claims during this period. The coding table was shaped according to the headings in Table 2.

Table 2: Dimensions and levels of coding. Source: Authors

Dimensions	Levels
Name of the fact-checking platform	Correctiv, AFP, PolitiFact, T4P, Teyit
Subject of the fact-check	Support for Hamas, support for Israel, attack by Israel, attack by Hamas, positive claim about Hamas, negative claim about Hamas, positive claim about Israel, negative claim about Israel, condemnation or non-support for Israel, condemnation or non-support for Hamas, other
Confirmation result	True, false, mixed, inconclusive
Misleading aspect of the suspicious claim	Incorrect attribution, taking it out of context, distortion, manipulation, parody, imitation, fabrication, unclear, accurate news
Type of suspicious claim	Text/video/photo/Livestream

Where the suspicious claim originated	X, Meta, Instagram, YouTube, Telegram or WhatsApp, Tiktok, TV, newspaper, multiple social media, both traditional media and social media, webpage, unclear
Fact-checking method	Reverse image or video search, keyword search, refer to social media, refer to experts, refer to journalists, refer to official sources, refer to another fact-checking platform, refer to the parties to the claim, unclear

The fact-checking texts were re-analyzed using a coding table, and coders discussed any discrepancies in their coding decisions to reach a consensus on valid choices. Inter-rater reliability was assessed using Krippendorff’s Alpha (α) to quantify the agreement between two independent coders across ten nominal coding dimensions. The dataset comprised 231 entities per dimension, with coders assigning nominal values numerically encoded for analysis. Krippendorff’s Alpha was computed using the nominal method in R, which is appropriate for categorical data. The analysis was conducted dimension-wise and for the aggregated dataset (2,079 total observations).

Table 3 summarizes the reliability coefficients for each dimension and the overall dataset. Krippendorff’s Alpha values ranged from $\alpha = 0.887$ to $\alpha = 1.000$, indicating strong to perfect inter-rater agreement. The overall reliability for the aggregated data was excellent ($\alpha = 0.961$).

Table 3: Krippendorff’s Alpha Coefficients by Coding Dimension.

Source: Authors

Coding Dimension	Fact-Checking	α
Subject	231	0.935
Verification Result	231	1.000
Misleading Aspect	231	0.925
Type of Suspicious Allegation	231	0.954
Place	231	0.903
Verification Method	231	0.942
Proof	231	0.887
Header Structure	231	0.908
Background Info	231	0.909
Overall	2079	0.961

Notably, *Verification Result* achieved perfect agreement ($\alpha = 1.000$), suggesting unambiguous coding criteria for this dimension. The lowest agreement occurred for *Proof* ($\alpha = 0.887$), though this still exceeds the conventional threshold of $\alpha \geq 0.800$ for acceptable reliability (Krippendorff, 2011). All other dimensions demonstrated robust agreement ($\alpha \geq 0.903$).

To answer the research questions, the first step involved counting each topic's frequency across platforms and calculating the percentage distribution based on these frequencies, revealing which topics were more prominently covered. For instance, topics like "Support for Hamas" and "Attack by Israel" were noted to have higher coverage on specific platforms. A heat map was then created to visualize the frequency of these topics, facilitating comparisons among platforms.

Another analysis examined the words following specific word pairs, focusing on the target words "Israel" and "Hamas." This process involved several stages: preprocessing the data, creating binary word groups (bigrams), and calculating word ratios. The raw text data underwent preprocessing, including converting to lowercase, removing punctuation and numbers, cleaning spaces, and eliminating common stop words, with lemmatization applied to reduce words to their grammatical roots.

The proportions of words following the target words were calculated to highlight usage differences. Only bigrams that appeared more than ten times were considered to enhance the analysis's reliability. Finally, a logarithmic ratio was computed to clarify the differences in word usage following "Israel" and "Hamas," providing an in-depth understanding of language patterns in the texts.

4. FINDINGS

When accepting members, IFCN requires fact-checking platforms to regularly publish reports. For this reason, the examined platforms regularly examine and share suspicious claims. The fact-checking platform that made the most fact-checks on this issue during this period was AFP fact-checking. AFP, which made up 29% of the total fact-checks with 67 fact-checks, was followed by Politifact operating in the United States with 52 fact-checks (22.5%), Teyit, a Türkiye-based fact-checking platform, with 62 (26.8%) fact-checks, and T4P, an Iraq-based fact-checking platform, with 27 (11.7%) fact-checks. The platform that made the least fact-checking during the one month examined was Correctiv, a Germany-based fact-checking organization, with 23 (10%) fact-checks. Verify, a Syria-based fact-checking platform, did not include any fact-checks related to the conflict on its website during this period. Therefore, this platform could not be examined.

Fact-checking platforms present the claims they examine with various labels according to their results. Each fact-checking platform has its labels. However, a standard label system was created in this study. The study used a fact-checking system with four labels according to the result of the verified claim: *true*, *false*, *mixed*, and *unconcluded*. As a result of this analysis, it was found that most of the examined claims, i.e., 227 out of 231 fact-

checks, were false. This analysis revealed that only one of the examined claims published on T4P was true.

Another aspect of the study is the content of suspicious claims examined. In this aspect, which examined whether the suspicious claims were text, photo, video, or document, it was found that there were more suspicious claims in the “video” content. In this context, it was found that 180 of the 231 suspicious claims were in the video content. 82.3% of the claims in Teyit, 82.1% in AFP, 77.8% in T4P, 71.2% in PolitiFact, and 69.6% in Correctiv were in the video content. The other prominent content was determined to be photos (26).

Fact-checking platforms usually indicate where the suspicious claims they examine originated in the fact-checking text. The place where the claim arose is significant, as it can indicate where suspicious content and fake news spread most quickly. The areas where suspicious claims were seen on fact-checking platforms examined in the first month of the Israel-Hamas conflict were grouped under 13 categories. X stood out as the place where 95 of the 231 fact-checking occurred. It was followed by Instagram (32), Meta (31), and TikTok (21).

When evaluated on a platform basis, it was found that 75.8% of the allegations examined in Teyit were sourced from X. A significant portion of the accusations in AFP and Correctiv were also sourced from X. This may lead to the conclusion that the circulation of fake news content that emerged in Türkiye, France, and Germany during the period examined was most commonly through X.

When looking at the source of PolitiFact’s claims, it was found that Instagram (46.2%) stood out. When looking at T4P, it was analyzed that 85.2% of fake news content appeared on multiple social media platforms.

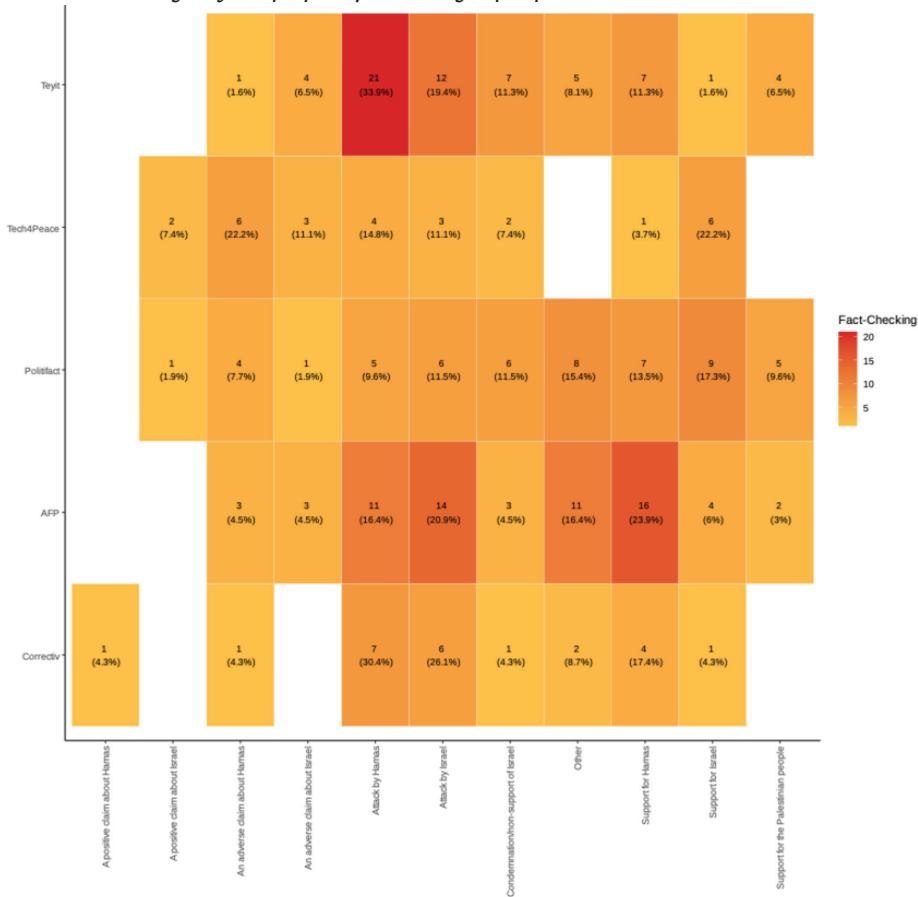
Several methods are used to produce fake news, and IFCN member fact-checking organizations clearly state what these methods are in the text of the suspect allegation investigation. 39.1% of the claims in Correctiv, 74.6% in AFP, 55.8% in PolitiFact, 7.4% in T4P, and 79% in Teyit are misleading due to false attribution. False attribution constitutes 139 of the 231 total fact-checking, followed by fabrication with 41 fact-checking. In this regard, 16 fact-checks were detected as manipulation, 14 fact-checks as decontextualization, two fact-checks as distortion, and one fact-check as an imitation. The number of news articles whose misleading aspects are unclear is 9.

4.1. Impartiality in the selection of suspicious claims

The study also analyzed the context in which fact-checking platforms examined suspicious claims in the Israel-Hamas conflict more. In this comparison made on a platform basis, 11 topics were determined to evaluate the

impartiality of the fact-checking. The issues of the fact-checks included Israeli attacks, Hamas attacks, support for Israel or Palestine, and positive or negative statements about Israel or Hamas/Palestine, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Fact-checking subject's frequency according to platforms. Source: Authors



The study found that Teyit, which operates in Türkiye, mostly confirmed claims related to Hamas attacks. Fake news was produced on social media about attacks carried out by both Israel and Palestine regarding the Israel-Hamas conflict, especially by using images from old or other conflicts. Claims such as the consequences of violence by either side, the ruthlessness of the violent side, and the helplessness of people subjected to violence have caused quite a stir on social media. Hamas was the subject of

these attack claims, which constituted a significant portion of the allegations examined by Teyit. The second topic that Teyit examined the most in this analysis was attacks carried out by Israel. However, among Teyit's fact-checks, Hamas attacks accounted for 33.9%, while fact-checking related to attacks carried out by Israel were found to be 19.4%.

23.9% of the claims verified by AFP are fake news related to support for Hamas. In the previous analysis, all the allegations examined by AFP were analyzed as false. In other words, this fact-checking platform operating in France has debunked many claims related to support for Hamas. Another issue that stands out in terms of fact-checking in AFP is the attacks carried out by Israel. Fourteen fact-checks, which constitute 20.9% of the claims examined by this platform in the one month, are about the attacks alleged to have been carried out by Israel not being true to reality.

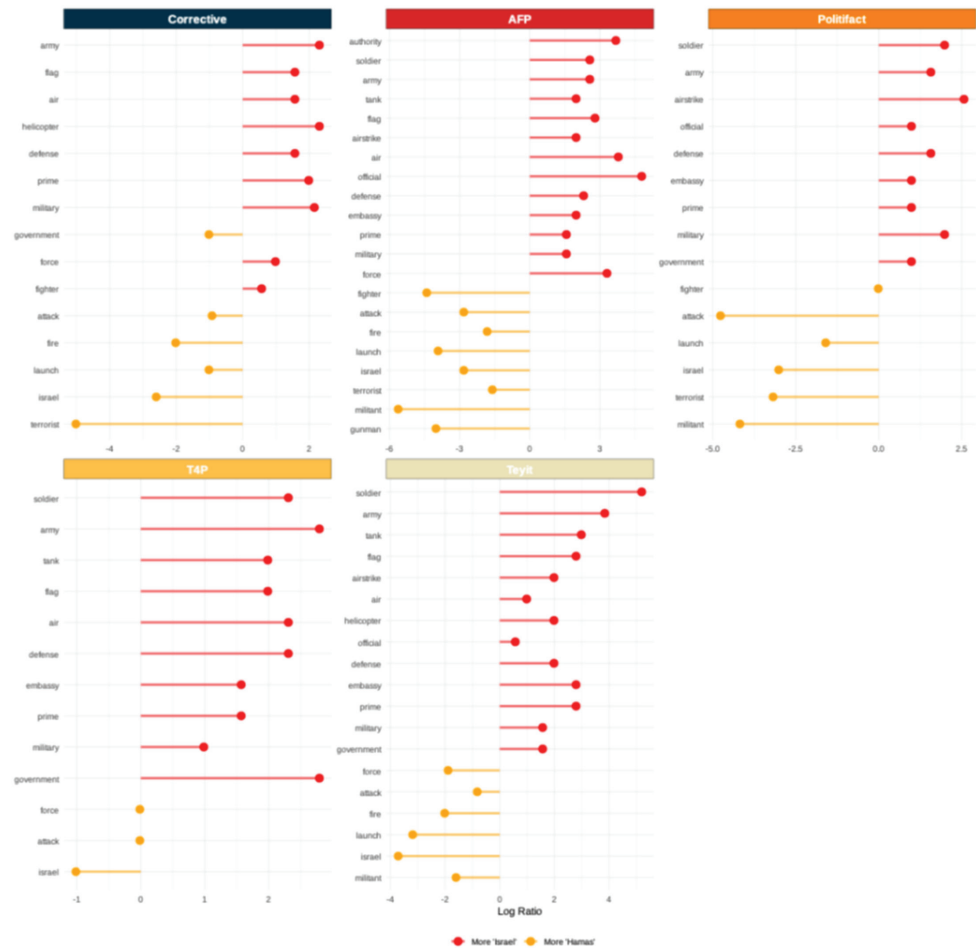
This analysis, which was conducted to answer RQ1, "Are there ideological tendencies in the selection of news to be verified?" shows that there are ideological tendencies. In short, the study analyses the ideological tendencies of verification platforms in news selection in the context of the Israel-Hamas conflict. Analyzing 11 topics, it was determined that most of the news verified by Teyit was about Hamas attacks (33.9%), while the rate of verification about Israeli attacks was 19.4%. AFP, on the other hand, most frequently debunked false reports about support for Hamas (23.9%) and also frequently investigated allegations about Israeli attacks (20.9%). In general, it was concluded that there are ideological tendencies in the selection of news to be verified. This result can be evaluated in the context of "selection bias," which is one of the cognitive processes affecting fact-checking journalists in selecting the claim to be verified. Selection bias, which refers to how events are or are not covered by the media, refers to the bias in selecting the news topic. While some issues may be covered in the media, others are ignored (Masotina et al., 2023).

4.2. Impartiality in news language

When we look at the words Israel and Hamas are most frequently used together across fact-checking platforms (Figure 2), we find that Correctiv's most commonly used words along with the word Israel are "army," "helicopter," and "military." This shows that the platform focuses on military activities and operations in its fact-checks about Israel. These words are generally used in news about military operations, conflicts, and military presence. Correctiv emphasizes Israel's military power and activities. The word most frequently used by this platform with Hamas is "terrorist." The fact that the word most commonly used with Hamas is "terrorist" shows that Correctiv defines Hamas as a terrorist organization and expresses it

this way in its news. This usage reveals that Hamas’ activities and identity are discussed within this framework and that the platform adopts this approach in its news.

Figure 2: Relative word appearance after “Israel” compared to “Hamas”. Source: Authors.



The words most frequently used by AFP together with Israel were found to be “official,” “air,” “force,” and “authority.” These words show that expressions related to Israel’s state structure, official authorities, and military power are at the forefront. Israel has experienced various wars and conflicts since its founding in 1948 and has established a strong state and military structure in the process. For this reason, topics such as official

statements, government officials, and military operations are frequently included in news about Israel.

On the other hand, the words most frequently used by the AFP regarding Hamas were “militant,” “fighter,” and “gunman.” These words show that Hamas members are characterized as individuals participating in the armed struggle and that this aspect is emphasized. In the AFP’s fact-checks, Israel’s state structure and military power are expressed in official and military terms in the news. In contrast, Hamas’ armed struggle as a resistance movement is mainly described as militant and warrior. This use of language aligns with both sides’ historical backgrounds and international perceptions.

PolitiFact’s most frequently used Israel-related words were “airstrike,” “military,” and “soldier,” indicating that PolitiFact’s fact-checking texts prioritize news about Israel’s military operations, airstrikes, and soldiers.

Contrarily, PolitiFact’s most frequently used words regarding Hamas were “attack,” “militant,” and “terrorist.” These words, along with Hamas’ attacks, militants, and terrorist characterizations, highlight its armed attacks and terrorist activities. While Israel’s military power and operations are expressed in military terms in news stories on this platform, Hamas’ attacks and armed resistance are more often covered with the terms militant and terrorist. In this regard, T4P used words such as “government,” “army,” and “air” defense more frequently with the word Israel, while with Hamas, it used the words “Israel,” “attack,” and “and force” the most.

The most frequently used words related to Israel by T4P show that expressions associated with Israel’s state structure, military power, and defense policies are highlighted. The most used words associated with Hamas show that expressions related to Hamas’ attacks on Israel and the use of armed force are highlighted.

Teyit’s most frequently used words regarding Israel were “soldier,” “army,” and “tank.” These words indicate that news about Israel’s military power and ground forces is prominent. The most frequently used words regarding Hamas were “Israel,” “launch,” and “militant.” These words indicate that news about Hamas’ rocket attacks on Israel and militant activities are prominent.

This analysis, which was conducted to answer the second research question, “Is there a difference in the language of the news in the fact-checking related to the issue?”, tried to reveal the difference in the language of the news with the expressions used with the parties to the conflict. This difference shows the importance of framing the news. The framing effect, one of the cognitive processes that will affect the fact-checking process (Soprano et al., 2024), is defined as drawing different conclusions from logically

equivalent information items based on context, alternatives, and presentation methods (Lindgren et al., 2024). The fact that some fact-checking platforms use negative and positive characterizations of the same concepts indicates framing in the new language. This makes the fact-checking process, which should be impartial, suspicious.

The analysis shows that the language used by fact-checking platforms such as AFP, Corrective, PolitiFact, T4P, and Teyit in their coverage of Israel and Hamas offers different framings. While the state structure, official authorities, and military power are generally emphasized in the news about Israel, militancy and attacks are emphasized in the news about Hamas. These word choices raise questions about objectivity in fact-checking processes and reveal the impact of news framing on fact-checking.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Objectivity, one of the most important ethical principles in journalism, is also related to the principle of impartiality. This principle requires the journalist not to include personal comments and opinions in the news, to present news information based on the reality of the event, and to avoid tendencies that may cause sudden emotional changes in the reader (Daştan, 2021, p. 41). Impartiality is more critical on fact-checking platforms that aim to prevent the spread of fake news. Impartiality, which forms the basis of these activities to correct misinformation, starts with choosing which news story or suspicious claim to verify. Objectivity and impartiality influence news production by guiding journalists as they select, gather, and present news (Skovsgaard et al., 2013). Therefore, an impartiality assessment can be made through news selection in this study.

The analysis revealed that most allegations were false, with only one verified claim during the Israel-Hamas conflict. This indicates that nearly all suspicious claims consisted of fake content. Most of the suspicious content analyzed was in video format. A vital issue was false attribution, where images from previous wars or conflicts were misrepresented as related to the current situation. As multimedia technology develops, fake news increasingly uses visual content, including pictures or videos, to mislead consumers (Cao et al., 2020). In this conflict, the credibility of visuals was exploited, with old videos used to portray damage caused by one of the parties. Another study finding is related to the platform where fake news emerged. Most of the news analyzed by the fact-checking platforms appeared on X.

The study analyzed the topics on which fact-checking platforms focus on the Israel-Hamas conflict. Selection bias occurs when news is selected or excluded by the media. Selecting some topics for verification and excluding others affects impartiality (Masotina et al., 2023). These findings in the

study, which seeks to answer RQ1, show that fact-checking platforms can exhibit certain tendencies in the news selection phase despite their claim of impartiality. While Teyit's increased focus on Hamas attacks may be related to the media and political atmosphere in Türkiye, AFP's intense refutation of Hamas support claims may have been influenced by France's domestic and foreign political dynamics. This suggests that fact-checking platforms are shaped not only by the principles of truth but also by the media and political ecosystems in which they operate. Therefore, when evaluating fact-checking processes, it is necessary to question the methods, which claims are deemed worthy of fact-checking, and how this selection is made. This result supports the findings of Ostermeier's research, which shows that news selection, i.e., election bias, affects impartiality. Ostermeier (2011) investigated whether Politifact, which operates in the United States, gave more coverage to Democratic or Republican claims in its analyses and found that there may be problems of impartiality in news selection.

An analysis of the most frequent words used by the five fact-checking platforms about Israel and Hamas provides insight into their impartiality in fact-checking. In response to RQ2, the analysis findings suggest that the language used by these platforms tends to promote an ideological divide between the parties, raising important questions about journalistic impartiality. This is defined as the framing effect, which refers to presenting the same issue through different frames (Masotina et al., 2023). Many journalistic studies have been conducted on the news about the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These studies have also addressed the problems of impartiality in framing the news on this issue, and different frames have been found in different countries (Friedman & Herfroy-Mischler, 2020; Neureiter, 2017). The findings of this study, which overlap with the results of the studies (Al-Sarraj & Lubbad, 2018; Kareem & Najm, 2024; Shahzad et al., 2023; Thomas, 2011) that identified the presence of biases in news texts and choices about the parties to the conflict, showed that this time, concerns about impartiality also emerged in the fact-checking platforms. Correctiv and PolitiFact adopt a harsher terminology, labeling Hamas as terrorists, while AFP and Teyit use more neutral descriptions of Hamas. In contrast, T4P emphasizes the military actions and power of both sides. These inconsistencies are crucial for assessing the impartiality of fact-checking platforms, as the language and terminology used can shape readers' perceptions and portray one side in a more favorable or unfavorable light.

These analyses show that fact-checking platforms are shaped not only by accuracy criteria but also by the political contexts, media ecosystems, and ideological tendencies of the countries in which they are located. Factors ranging from news selection to the language used reveal that impartial-

ity in fact-checking processes is not an absolute principle but a practice that changes depending on environmental and political factors. This factor questions the reliability of fact-checking platforms and proves that impartiality is a claim and a process that needs to be constantly reviewed. This study overlaps with discussions in the literature (Birks, 2019) on the impartiality of fact-checking platforms. Birks's study analyses UK fact-checking platforms' activities in electoral processes. In the study, a comparative analysis of the fact-checking content of different platforms is made, and the differences in the fact-checking approach of these organizations, the distribution of fact-checked political claims, and ideological neutrality are discussed. As a result, this study and Birks' study on fact-checking platforms and impartiality found that fact-checking platforms adopt different approaches to the same issue.

However, the impartiality of fact-checking is not limited to the words used; the context of the news, accuracy, and presentation of a balanced perspective is also critical. Therefore, future studies should conduct a more in-depth analysis of the platforms' general editorial policies and news presentations. Another limitation of this study is the number of countries selected. In future studies, a more comprehensive analysis can be conducted by increasing the number of countries. In addition, expanding the specified period and increasing the number of fact-checks analyzed would also make the analysis more valuable.

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JOURNALISM STUDIES COURSES IN POST-COMMUNIST COUNTRIES OF CENTRAL EUROPE: AN ANALYSIS OF JOURNALISM CURRICULA

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ABSTRACT

The transformation of journalism education after the fall of the communist regimes in Central Europe brought freedom to the academic environment and enabled the establishment of degree programs at universities. This article examines the courses in the curricula of twelve journalism schools in Central European universities. The analysis of the courses (N = 774) offered in bachelor's programs describes how journalism institutions have developed their journalism education since the fall of the Iron Curtain. The study programs show a high degree of similarity in terms of courses aimed at praxis, teaching foreign and official languages, bachelor's final theses, and media law. We also identified common academic disciplines in which journalists are educated. The research found that students are required to enrol in both compulsory and elective courses, with some institutions also offering compulsory elective courses. A strong emphasis is placed on theoretical courses without relation to everyday work in media outlets. The study concludes that the academic environment is not sufficiently responsive to contemporary society and that new topics which reflect the needs of media practice are slow to emerge. This analysis of the courses highlights the differences in curricula among the countries of Central Europe.

KEYWORDS

journalism education • bachelor's degree • courses • praxis • universities • Central Europe

1. INTRODUCTION AND THEORY

In recent years, social changes, digitalisation and the commercial media ecosystem have transformed journalism education across the globe and redefined job position workflows in newsrooms. The free commercial media market and social networks have changed the media environment; the profit motive has replaced the essential principles of the media landscape, forcing news organisations around the world to restructure their operations and workflows, redefine tasks and responsibilities, and restructure the culture and values of journalists (Guo and Volz, 2021). These changes should ideally be integrated into journalism education across the globe and point to important competencies in journalism teaching. The European Journalism Training Association (EJTA) in the Tartu Declaration (2020) (established in Brussels in 1990) has reflected the competences by which journalists should serve the public. They are also integrated into programmatic papers such as the UNESCO Model Curriculum for Journalism Education (UNESCO, 2013). Modern journalism education needs to identify ways of preparing students for their future careers in the media. The dual pillars of teaching journalism and teaching about journalism have long been characterized by journalism education. While journalism training includes developing the skills required for news production, journalism education contextualises those skills and gives them meaning (Kirchhoff, 2022). As Guo and Volz (2021) have argued, recent years have seen efforts by researchers, educators and practitioners to rethink journalistic competences and implement new concepts into curriculum design, professional development, and programme accreditation (Unesco, 2013; Donsbach, 2014; Drok, 2019; Hovden, Nygren and Zilliacus-Tikkanen, 2016). Journalist educators have long been discussing how to teach and prepare students for the media profession and how to deal with the accreditation system in universities (Jaakkola and Uotila, 2022; Nowak, 2019). Most professionals consider the relevance of quality journalistic education and journalistic practical competencies as adequately mirroring the demands of the media landscape (Jaakkola, 2018; Jaakkola and Uotila, 2020; Kirchhoff, 2022) and recognising the enormous diversity of this field (Deuze, 2019).

The profound changes in the media environment, the crisis of traditional journalism and increasing attacks on journalists call for qualified professional journalism and for an education that reflects social changes, and which can enhance students' ability to distinguish between journalism and pseudo-journalism. After the end of the communist regimes, educators and practitioners in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia have responded to the challenges of establishing modern and non-ideo-

logical journalism training and academic education. These programs were inspired primarily by Western institutions and universities, and this influence is apparent in several areas. Firstly, there was a need to educate journalists in media law and journalism ethics. After decades of state censorship with a single official state media outlet, journalists and students had to learn the basic principles of objectivity and impartiality and gain an understanding of the workings of a commercial-free media market. It was essential to follow contemporary trends from the editorial offices of the international media and to collaborate with educational institutions. The intermediaries of that communication between the post-communist countries and the Western world were often non-profit organisations, with these institutions helping to organise exchange visits for teachers and students and to facilitate visits to universities by award-winning journalists. Secondly, we can see the impact of this influence on a technological level in terms of equipping journalism training labs and providing software for editing audio and video material. However, the new challenges have raised questions concerning the adequacy of the reforms introduced by academic institutions in the post-communist countries of Central Europe in response to contemporary demands.

No study to date has examined those changes and compared journalism education across different Central European countries. Our study investigates the current situation in the management of courses in academic journalism programs, including their main orientation and specialisation. Despite the potential for academic cooperation among the above-mentioned countries due to their geographical proximity and shared cultural environment, journalism education can differ significantly in terms of the variety of courses offered and the general structure of the journalism curricula.

1.1. The current situation in journalism education research

The issues of what journalism is, what it should be, and how it should be taught are the subject of ongoing discussion in journalism education institutions, a discourse which is fuelled by various changes in the media and the higher education landscape (Jaakkola and Uotila, 2020). Journalism education traditionally holds a position between academic and professional approaches to the training of future journalists. There is an ongoing debate about the role of journalism educators in the academic environment (Morris and Yeoman, 2021) and about the correspondence between journalism education and professional practice (Oppenhaffen et al., 2013; Kirchhoff, 2022) that also includes work-integrated learning (Valencia-Forrester, 2020) together with the idea of teaching students' digital citizenship as a concept that emphasises the importance of both skills and knowledge

(Tkáčová et al., 2023). By studying these approaches, we can see that the majority of journalistic educational institutions are still universities or higher education bodies along with media practitioners. In contrast, we can also see the ongoing efforts of non-government organisations or journalists in supporting the academic environment in the education of future journalists, primarily through the provision of workshops, training and lectures which often comprise practical know-how from everyday journalistic practice. As Kirchhoff (2022) argues, both journalistic educators and practitioners demand innovative methods of teaching in order to meet the growing needs of young journalists and to maintain societal relevance and respond to the practical demands of professional journalism in the digital age, in which skills and knowledge are considered as the core of journalism education.

As a starting point, studies focusing on journalism education include those concentrated on practical (Henkel et al., 2020; Heravi, 2018; Noain-Sánchez, 2022; Porlezza, C. and Splendore, 2019; Steel, 2007; Reyna, 2021; Valencia-Forrester, 2020) and theoretical bases (Aujla-Sidhu, 2022; Bjørnsen, Hovden and Ottosen, 2009; Deuze, 2002; Morris and Yeoman, 2021), and education mostly at academic institutions (Deuze, 2006; Henkel, 2020; Hovden, 2016; Hovden et al., 2016; Jaakkola and Uotila, 2020; Opgenhaffen et al., 2013; Kirchhoff, 2022). Related to this, other studies and research papers have focused on specific aspects of journalism education, such as global perspectives (Deuze, 2006), literary construction (Jaakkola and Uotila, 2022), the challenges of digital transformation (Kirchhoff, 2022), journalism training in the classroom (Jaakkola, 2018) or the conceptualisation of journalistic competence (Guo and Volz, 2021) and the future sustainability of journalism (Vukić, 2019). On the other hand, an examination of the approaches to journalism education can draw upon some literary sources and extensive studies dealing with journalistic theoretical and practical competencies (Drok, 2019; Hovden et al., 2016; Quinn, 2018; Stanková, 2022; Terzis, 2009). Working within the framework of this basic literature, various research proposals have been developed and researched, including studies that compare journalism education systems in Nordic countries (Gardeström, 2016), describe Norwegian journalism education (Bjørnsen et al., 2009) or examine the Nordic academic journalism training landscape (Jaakkola, 2018) and course literature in the Nordic academic journalism programmes (Jaakkola and Uotila, 2022). In addition to studies of the Nordic countries, other papers examine journalism education and online journalists in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands (Deuze et al., 2007) and responsibility and pedagogy in journalism education in the West (Aujla-Sidhu, 2022) or in Southeast Europe (Jusic and De-

dovic, 2002). Ibold and Deuze (2012) have compared journalism education in the Netherlands and in the United States, and Deuze (2002) produced a comparison of Dutch, German, British, Australian and US journalists.

1.2. Journalism study programs in post-communist countries in Central Europe

The issue of journalism education in Central European countries has not been explored in depth. In the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, no comparative studies of journalism study programs or course curricula have been published to date, and there is therefore a gap in research examining what future journalists and journalism students are currently required to study and achieve at Central European universities.

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, the political boundary that divided Europe, journalism in a free environment gradually took a more professional form with the establishment of press freedom. The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia have all developed established journalism education programs, mainly at the university level, which place a strong emphasis on the granting of academic degrees in journalism and media communication study programmes.

During the communist era, the training of journalists focused on the role of socialist journalists as disseminators of the will and ideology of the ruling parties (Jirák and Köpplová, 2009). As Jirák and Köpplová (2009) have described, the general structure of journalism training in Central and Eastern Europe was based on curricula focusing on the history of journalism and linguistics, with obligatory courses in Marxist-Leninist philosophy and related subjects. Topics such as the checking of sources, the importance of balanced coverage, independence, professional ethics and law were unknown concepts in journalism curricula in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. Journalism education in Hungary was also strongly subject to the state-socialist regime, and journalists were selected according to political rather than professional criteria, with loyalty to the party and its official ideology of Marxism-Leninism serving as an important criterion for determining the suitability of candidates for key positions in the state media (Bajomi-Lázár, 2009, p. 425). In Poland, the journalist profession was politically motivated, and many of the fraternities belonged to the Polish Communist Party (PZPR) or other political parties. In the seventies, almost every journalist was a party member, and journalists as a professional body held top positions in the state (Szot, 2009).

A study paper focusing on the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland has confirmed that printed media played a major political role in the fulfillment of propaganda and educational functions in the communist era (Gulyas

2003). As Gulyas (2003) reminds us, state control of the media was extensive, determining the content, production, and distribution of print media products, enforcing formal and informal control mechanisms, and ensuring an absence of diversity and press freedom.

There is currently no detailed understanding of the extent to which journalism education differs among the post-communist countries of Central Europe. Bachelor's and master's study programs in these countries are largely the result of political processes enacted in the wake of the radical changes brought about by the end of the communist regimes. After 1999, many European countries implemented reforms and transformed their educational systems in order to ensure greater compatibility with European norms to increase international mobility and facilitate transnational employability (Jaakkola and Uotila, 2022). Both bachelor's and master's degrees are defined by the EHEA qualification framework (European Higher Education Area 2009), with a bachelor's degree with 180 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) and requiring 3–4 years of full-time study, although journalism programs require only three years. Master's degree programs with 120 ECTS generally take two years. Bachelor's journalism programmes should offer the essentials for journalism students, whereas master's programmes involve more specialized courses that encourage them to study in a specific field of journalism, and common practice shows that after completing a bachelor's degree, students generally continue to master's study programs. According to *The Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area*, students awarded a bachelor's degree can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences (Bologna Working Group, 2005), while the master's degree requires students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding that is founded on and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with the first cycle and that provides an opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context (Bologna Working Group, 2005).

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of this study is to answer the overall research question that focuses on journalism education in Central Europe:

How developed is journalism education in the four studied post-communist countries in Central Europe (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia)?

We are primarily interested in those aspects that reflect journalism education in terms of the courses to which students are required to enrol at

universities in these countries. The study examines compulsory courses, compulsory elective courses, elective courses and their syllabi in academic institutions offering bachelor's study programs in journalism in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. As was mentioned above, these countries previously had long-term experience of training journalists under communist regimes, and this article explores how universities in Central Europe have developed their journalism study programs since the fall of the Iron Curtain. An analysis of the academic courses and their curricula provided by different universities can enable comparisons of journalism educational programmes in bachelor's degree programmes. The potential discrepancies in our findings among the countries analysed show the main differences in journalism study programmes, and the study should allow us to identify the main characteristics of a graduate journalist after completing a bachelor's degree at the institutions in the studied countries.

The aim of this study is to determine how journalism study programmes are designed by examining the courses offered to students. The first research question consists of three parts because it reflects the three types of available courses. The first part examines the compulsory courses to which students are required to enrol; these compulsory courses also include courses for state exams. Students can select specialisations during their journalism studies through compulsory elective courses, which offer a degree of freedom in their enrolment. This is also the case with elective courses that allow a more in-depth specialisation in journalism studies and training.

- *RQ1a: What compulsory courses feature in bachelor's study programs in journalism?*
- *RQ1b: What compulsory elective courses feature in bachelor's study programs in journalism?*
- *RQ1c: What elective courses feature in bachelor's study programs in journalism?*

Because journalism education is closely related to media practice and training, educators face the challenge of achieving a balance between industry needs and the demands of an academic education. Deuze (2006) describes analytical categories in journalism education such as curricula and the balance between practical and contextual knowledge, while Guo and Volz (2021) note that recent years have seen efforts by researchers, educators and practitioners to rethink the range of journalistic skills and apply new concepts to curriculum design, professional development and program accreditation, with processes integrating practical courses and direct co-

operation which reflect requirements in the industry. Employers nominate their representatives to Study Program Committees which guarantee the practical aspects of journalism education. Journalistic professional competencies call for practical training and participation in the everyday activities of the editorial office. Some journalism departments hire journalists from media outlets to participate in the study process and to become involved in internal academic education and training, primarily by teaching practical courses and providing students with contact with media outlets, but also by offering the opportunity to gain professional experience in newsrooms.

The ratio of practical to theoretical courses is the focus of the following research question:

- *RQ2: Which courses in bachelor's study programs in journalism are practical and related to media practice, and which courses are theoretical and related to the academic environment?*

Journalism is a largely autonomous discipline, and the issue of the training and education of journalists remains subject to considerable debate. Some journalism programs are mainly built around practical training courses in which students gain skills in academic training newsrooms. As Jaakkola (2018) has noted, training newsrooms and news laboratories serve as a possible means of providing practical courses in journalistic practice. The number of practical courses in journalism training usually depends on the type of study program and whether the bachelor's study program continues into a master's program. However, students are usually taught about the media and society from different perspectives in an interdisciplinary approach encompassing, among others, history, sociology, psychology and political science. However, this method requires a more academic approach with a greater number of theoretical courses featuring appropriate academic literature. The aim of the third research question in this paper map the academic disciplines that form part of the journalism curricula at selected universities.

- *RQ3: Which academic disciplines are included in the courses of bachelor's study programs in journalism?*

3. METHODOLOGY

In order to conduct a systematic review of the courses, we employed basic techniques of document analysis. The total number of courses offered to students by universities ($N = 12$) was analysed. The sample consisted of a list of courses ($N = 774$) of bachelor's study programs in journalism (180 ECTS) in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia during the ac-

ademic year 2023–2024. For each country, we identified three universities that offer bachelor’s study programs in journalism. The unit of analysis was the sum of compulsory, compulsory elective and elective courses, although it should be noted that not all of the courses in the study programs fall within these categories, and we can see some variety in the study process, which will be described below. The institutions included in the research (*N* = 12) are listed in Table 1. These universities are established academic institutions in journalism studies in the Central European region. In order to identify the most relevant institutions in these countries, we applied criteria such the awarding of complete academic degrees, a practical focus on the journalistic profession, the possibility to continue with a master’s degree, and an established reputation as institutions with praxis in journalism education, with universities offering specific study programs in journalism being prioritised. These programmes were selected on a priority basis, and if none of the institutions in a particular country offered a study program in journalism, the selection was extended to similar programs that educate journalists. The titles of the bachelor’s study programs in the studied institutions were mainly *Journalism* (*N* = 4), *Communication and Media Studies* (*N* = 3), *Journalism and Social Communication* (*N* = 2), *Journalism and Media Studies* (*N* = 1), *Media Studies and Journalism* (*N* = 1) and *Communication Studies* (*N* = 1). Only two of the selected universities were members of the European Journalism Training Association (EJTA), an organisation of 79 institutions in 33 countries (see: ejta.eu/list-members). Current study program lists (*N* = 12) and course syllabi were found on the official websites of the universities, with most of the information presented visually in the official languages of the respective countries; the study programs were all offered in the respective official language.

Table 1: Selected institutions with journalism study programs.

Source: Author

Country	Institution	Bachelor’s degree program
Czech Republic	Masaryk University Department of Media Studies and Journalism	Media Studies and Journalism
	Palacký University Department of Media and Cultural Studies and Journalism	Journalism
	Charles University Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism	Communication Studies

Hungary	Budapest Metropolitan University Institute of Communication	Communication and Media Studies
	Corvinus University of Budapest Institute of Communication and Sociology	Communication and Media Science
	Eötvös Loránd University Department of Media and Communication	Communication and Media Science
Poland	Jagiellonian University Institute of Journalism, Media and Social Communication	Journalism and Social Communication
	University of Warsaw Faculty of Journalism, Information and Book Studies	Journalism and Media Studies
	University of Wrocław Institute of Journalism and Social Communication	Journalism and Social Communication
Slovakia	Catholic University Department of Journalism	Journalism
	Comenius University Department of Journalism	Journalism
	Constantine the Philosopher University Department of Journalism	Journalism

For the purposes of the analysis, all course information and course syllabi were downloaded and any duplicated courses offered across different levels of study programs were eliminated. The courses were then divided into three categories of compulsory, compulsory elective and elective courses (RQ1a, RQ1b, RQ1c). The courses were then analysed to identify those that were taught at all of the studied universities. Two further categories were then created to identify which courses were practical and related to media practice and which courses were theoretical and related to the academic environment (RQ2). Then we identified groups of courses which focused on identical or similar academic disciplines (RQ3) in bachelor's study programs. In carrying out this analysis, we drew upon the Frascati Manual, the OECD Classification, and Distribution by Fields of Research and Development (OECD 2015).

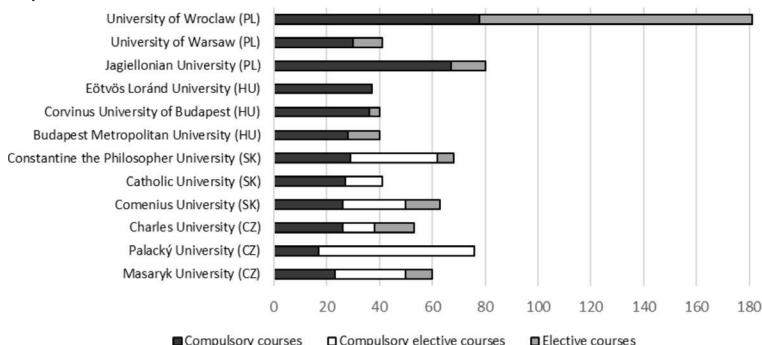
4. ANALYSIS

4.1. Compulsory, compulsory elective and elective courses

In our analysis of the lists of courses in the selected universities in four countries, we first identified the courses belonging to one of the following groups: compulsory, compulsory elective and elective courses (RQ1a, RQ1b,

RQ1c). By studying the lists of courses, it is possible to trace the compulsory courses onto that students must enrol in during their bachelor's study program. The main differences between the studied countries are outlined in Table 2. While the universities in the Czech Republic and Slovakia offer courses across all three categories, Hungary and Poland do not offer compulsory elective courses. One Hungarian university, Eötvös Loránd University, offers its courses in a single study module as a compulsory unit. One of the main differences between the studied countries is the fact that some institutions (in the Czech Republic and Slovakia) offer accredited study programs with all three groups of courses (Figure 1). Students are required to take compulsory courses, some compulsory elective courses with a defined number of credits and some elective courses.

Figure 1: Three groups of courses in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Source: Author



The similarity is not only a result of the linguistic proximity of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, but also by the similarities between the study programs and courses which the universities of these countries offer.

Regarding the total number of available courses, the results show that Polish institutions offer the most courses on average ($N = 101$), with Slovak institutions offering the fewest courses on average ($N = 55$). As Table 2 shows, an average of 87% of courses in Hungary ($N = 33.7$) are compulsory, followed by Poland (67%, $N = 58.3$), Slovakia (51%, $N = 27.3$) and the Czech Republic (37%, $N = 22$). The curricula in Hungary correspond mostly to compulsory courses, with only two institutions offering 4 and 12 elective courses, respectively. As the results indicate, students in Poland are required to complete the highest average number of compulsory courses ($N = 58.3$), while students in the Czech Republic must take only 22. Poland also offers bachelor's students the most elective courses ($N = 42.3$). The results show that

approximately one-third of courses can be selected by students, thereby enabling them to choose the subjects and focus that best suit their needs. This is particularly the case with the study program in music journalism offered by the University of Wroclaw in Poland. A fuller explanation of the system of student choice in terms of compulsory courses in the Czech Republic (average N = 27.3) and Slovakia (average N = 22) is perhaps necessary because institutions in these countries require students to take fewer compulsory courses than other institutions. As was mentioned above, the lack of these courses is compensated by the greater range of compulsory elective courses (average, Czech Republic N = 32.7, Slovakia N = 24). Both countries offer similar systems of course management, which offer students considerable latitude over the compulsory elective courses in which they can enrol in line with the minimum number of credits for compulsory elective courses.

Table 2: Bachelor’s degree courses in universities in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. Source: Author

Country	University	Compulsory courses		Compulsory elective courses		Elective courses		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Czech Republic	Masaryk University	23	38%	27	45%	10	17%	60	100%
	Palacký University	17	22%	59	78%	0	0%	76	100%
	Charles University	26	49%	12	23%	15	28%	53	100%
	AVERAGE (CZ)	22.0	37%	32.7	48%	8.3	15%	63	
Hungary	Budapest Metropolitan University	28	70%	0	0%	12	30%	40	100%
	Corvinus University of Budapest	36	90%	0	0%	4	10%	40	100%
	Eötvös Loránd University	37	100%	0	0%	0	0%	37	100%
	AVERAGE (HU)	33.7	87%	0	0%	5.3	13%	39	
Poland	Jagiellonian University	67	84%	0	0%	13	16%	80	100%
	University of Warsaw	30	73%	0	0%	11	27%	41	100%
	University of Wroclaw	78	43%	0	0%	103	57%	181	100%
	AVERAGE (PL)	58.3	67%	0	0%	4.3	33%	101	
Slovakia	Catholic University	27	66%	14	34%	0	0%	41	100%
	Comenius University	26	41%	24	38%	13	21%	63	100%
	Constantine the Philosopher University	29	47%	33	53%	0	0%	62	100%
	AVERAGE (SK)	27.3	51%	24	42%	4.3	7%	55	

In order to gain an overview of the courses ($N = 774$) that are taught in all selected universities, the range of available courses was summarised, and any similar or identical courses were identified.

Table 3 presents the results of the analysis of the courses offered by the studied institutions ($N = 12$) and displays courses that are provided by a minimum of two universities in each of the selected countries. The Table also offers an overview of the courses included in the university curricula as compulsory elective and elective courses. The results show the focus of journalism education in universities in each country and give some insight into which courses are considered key in the education of future journalists.

If we examine the courses available to journalism students, four are common to all universities, namely the bachelor's final thesis seminar, Foreign Language, Practice and Language (official). Most universities ($N = 11$) offer courses in the theory of mass media communication and communication, and this is also the case with Media Law of New Media/Online Journalism. Almost all the institutions ($N = 11$) offer courses in Philosophy, Political Science and Television Journalism as compulsory courses for future journalists. Despite the broad similarity of most courses, Media Sociology or Sociology is found in only three countries. One major discrepancy between the countries is seen in the case of investigative journalism and only one institution in Slovakia and the Czech Republic teaches this course, while Data-Driven Journalism is also absent from the bachelor's study programs in all the studied institutions, although the basics of the subject may be covered by other courses. As Kirchhoff (2022) reminds us, data skills are becoming increasingly important for future journalists, and Lucia Virostková (2021) also notes the significant role of investigative journalism and its position in society. In contrast, most of the studied institutions ($N = 10$) deal with economics or economic journalism in which data journalism is partially involved. All of the studied institutions focus their attention on history or media history, a fact which is perhaps an inheritance from the past, in which academics and students needed to address the legacy of the communist regime and understand the role of journalism and media in a democratic state. Furthermore, within the journalism study programs, we find courses that can be considered as contemporary, offering students an education in issues reflecting current issues in society. Examples of such courses include Media and Migration (Charles University), Basics of Criminology (Palacký University), Solutions Journalism (Masaryk University), Safety and the Work of a Journalist in the Online Environment (Comenius University), Propaganda, Hoaxes and Manipulation (Catholic University), Discourses of Identity (Eötvös Loránd University) and Psycholinguistics (Corvinus University of Budapest).

Table 3: Comparison of all courses across all institutions. Source: Author

Courses	Czech Republic				Hungary			Poland			Slovakia			
	Compulsory	Compulsory elective	Elective	Total N (0-3)	Compulsory	Elective	Total N (0-3)	Compulsory	Elective	Total N (0-3)	Compulsory	Compulsory elective	Elective	Total N (0-3)
Bachelor's final thesis seminar	3	0	0	3	3	0	3	3	0	3	3	0	0	3
Foreign Language	2	1	0	3	2	1	3	3	0	3	0	3	0	3
Practice (practical courses)	3	0	0	3	3	0	3	3	0	3	3	0	0	3
Language (official)	3	0	0	3	3	0	3	3	0	3	3	0	0	3
Theory of Media/Communication	3	0	0	3	3	0	3	3	0	3	2	0	0	2
Media Law	3	0	0	3	3	0	3	2	0	2	3	0	0	3
Online Journalism/New Media	1	2	0	3	2	0	2	2	1	3	1	2	0	3
Philosophy	2	0	0	2	3	0	3	3	0	3	2	0	0	3
Political Science	1	1	0	2	3	0	3	1	1	2	1	1	1	3
TV Journalism	0	3	0	3	1	1	2	2	1	3	2	1	0	3
Communication and Culture	1	2	0	3	2	0	2	2	1	3	0	1	0	1
Journalistic Ethics	3	0	0	3	1	0	1	3	0	3	1	0	0	1
Media Sociology/Sociology	3	0	0	3	2	0	2	3	0	3	0	1	0	1
Photojournalism	0	3	0	3	1	0	1	3	0	3	1	0	0	1
Psychology	1	1	0	2	2	0	2	1	1	2	2	0	0	2
Technology Skills	2	0	1	3	1	0	1	2	0	2	2	0	0	2
Economic Journalism/Economy	1	1	0	2	2	0	2	3	0	3	1	1	0	2
History	3	0	0	3	2	0	2	3	0	3	0	0	0	0
Introduction to Journalism	2	0	0	2	2	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Radio Journalism	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	2	1	3	2	1	0	3
Rhetoric/Voice training	1	2	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	3	2	0	0	2
Media Research Methodology	3	0	0	3	3	0	3	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Audiovisual Journalism	1	2	0	3	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0
Desktop Publishing	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	3
Journalism Genres	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	3	0	0	3
Marketing/PR/Advertising	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	3	0	3	0	0	0	0
Media History	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	3	0	0	3
Workshop	0	2	1	3	0	0	0	3	0	3	0	0	0	0
Media Studies	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	0	2	2	0	0	0	0
Journalism/Reportage	2	1	0	3	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0
Anthropology	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	0
Information Sources	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0
Media Language	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	0	0	0	0
Media Literacy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
Presenter	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Regional Journalism	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
News Reporting	3	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Science	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sport Journalism	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Statistics	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stylistics	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3
Visualization in Journalism	0	0	0	0	2	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

4.2. Practical vs. theoretical courses in journalism studies (N = 774)

There is a strong need for suitable practical courses in study programs in journalism, although there is still considerable debate over the balance between academic and professional orientation (Jaakkola and Uotila, 2020). Kirchhoff (2022) refers to survey findings that suggest that the general opinion of journalists and journalism educators is that reflective practice requires a suitable knowledge base. Based on course titles and descriptions, we identified courses that offer students the opportunity to gain practice in a journalistic environment, with the remaining courses being categorised as theoretically orientated.

Table 4 provides an overview of the fields covered by practical courses for journalists in selected Central European universities. The most common practice is to allow students to create media content directly in the classroom (24.9%) or to attend workshops led by practising journalists (23.1%). The focus of the practical courses gives us an insight into the way journalists are taught practically in Central Europe.

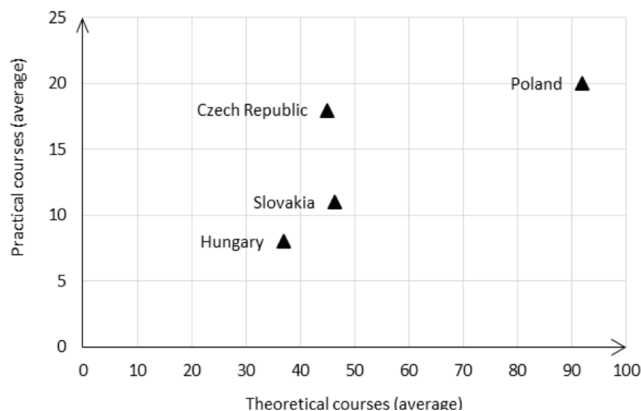
Table 4: Focus areas of practical courses. Source: Authors

Area	Areas of practical courses (%)	Student abilities
Media Studio	24.9	Creating media output during the course.
Media Workshop/Lab	23.1	Working on assignments mostly under the guidance of media professionals.
Professional Practice/Training	9.7	Looking for internships and work with journalists.
Television Journalism	8.2	Creating content for television broadcasting.
Radio Journalism	6.7	Creating content for radio broadcasting.
Technological Competences	6	Editing video and audio material using software.
Desktop Publishing/Typography	5.2	Preparation of text for printing and Web without typographical errors.
Audiovisual Journalism	4.5	Creating content for television and radio broadcasting.
Creative Writing/University Radio	4.5	Ensuring the functioning of the university radio and the university's periodic.
Infographics	3.7	Visualising data, placing data on the map.
Editing	3.5	Proficiency in editorial activities.

Figure 2 shows the status of each country relating to the ratio of practical to theoretical courses. Poland is in the first place with the highest average number of practical courses (N = 20), while institutions in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary offer 18, 11 and 8 courses, respectively. Uni-

versities in Poland offer courses named Practice which incorporate specialisations in all media areas, including Creative Writing, New Media and Technical Skills, and the option of audio, video and online editing. Students in the Czech Republic can enrol on workshop courses that are aimed at television, radio, print and online media, such as those titled Photojournalism Workshop, Editorial Workshop and Desktop Publishing Workshop. A similar approach to practical learning is also found in other countries. Institutions in Hungary favour Creative Writing, Writing Articles, Media Project, Typography, and University Radio Course, while Slovak institutions offer Media Workshops in each study year, which include radio, television, online media and print journalism. Practical skills are enhanced by courses where students can create their own faculty journal or learn about safety and the work of a journalist in the online environment. The most common areas in practical teaching in Poland and Slovakia are in the Journalistic Genres. Unsurprisingly, an inherent part of university journalism training is audio and video journalism with an emphasis on online media.

Figure 2: Position of the institutions for each country in practical vs. theoretical courses. Source: Authors



The most noticeable differences between institutions can be observed in relation to the implementation of practice and regular contact with the media and their editorial process. While some study programmes require journalism students to spend specific periods of time during each semester in newsrooms (e.g., Slovakia, Poland), students in the Czech Republic can participate in boot camps at the university during the semester, which are organised by journalists currently working in media outlets.

Some universities organise practical courses with the participation of journalists or former journalists. The faculties in Poland and Slovakia make

agreements with editorial staff in media outlets for practical cooperation and providing opportunities for students to gain practical skills. Additionally, training, internships and educational excursions also offer students the chance to gain work experience and, in many cases, a future position in newsrooms. The most obvious discrepancies in practical implementation are found in the extent to which the media are involved in the educational process. All this seems to indicate that, despite the presence of practical courses in the curriculum, there is a predominance of practical courses that lack any connection to everyday work in media outlets.

Given the academic nature of the university environment, it is perhaps unsurprising that theoretical courses outnumbered practical courses in all the studied institutions. The smallest difference was recorded in the study programs offered in the Czech Republic (N = 27), followed by Hungary (N = 29), Slovakia (N = 35) and Poland (N = 71).

4.3. Academic disciplines in study programs in journalism

This research question refers primarily to the analysis of theoretical courses taught in bachelor study programs. A university education is typically made up of courses based on different academic disciplines, and while a greater emphasis is placed on theoretical education at the master's level, a significant number of courses also reflect this approach in bachelor's study programs. Table 5 lists the academic disciplines that feature in the bachelor's study programs in journalism at all the studied institutions. According to the Frascati Manual (OECD 2025), we identified all of the academic disciplines (N = 11) that are associated with journalism studies. As the results show, disciplines like Languages, Media and Communication, Political Science, and Social Science are taught at all of the studied institutions, and despite minimal differences, scholarly subjects such as Arts, Economics and Business, History, Law, and Philosophy are also present in the majority of the universities (N = 11). All institutions in the Czech Republic and Poland (N = 6) emphasise Journalism Ethics, but the subject is taught at only one institution in both Slovakia and Hungary; this is also the case with Sociology.

We can conclude that there are only minor variations between institutions in traditional and core disciplines. In some cases, we can observe slightly different course names with similar educational content (e.g., Ethics, Journalism Ethics, or Ethics in Journalism), and it is natural that we would perceive these cases to be the same courses and academic disciplines. Moreover, journalism study programs often apply integrated approaches that bring together different modes of knowledge in their course modules. For example, the objectives of theoretical, practical, and contextual learn-

ing have been merged into work-integrated learning (Ripatti-Torniainen and Mikkola, 2023). However, in the institutions examined in this study, there is a clear distinction between practical and theoretical education.

Table 5: Academic disciplines in the journalism study programs. Source: Authors

Academic disciplines											
Country	Arts	Economics and business	Ethics	History	Languages	Law	Media and communication	Philosophy	Political science	Social science	Sociology
	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Czech Republic	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Hungary	3	3	1	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	2
Poland	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3
Slovakia	2	2	1	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	1

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The period after the fall of the Iron Curtain transformed the environment in which Central European journalists operated, and this sea change was also reflected in the new opportunities made available to universities in the education and training of future journalists, with institutions now being required to incorporate the newly emerging trends of the media industry into their study programs. This study has attempted to show how the academic sector has risen to this challenge and to describe the contemporary environment for journalism students in Central Europe.

As we have seen, the background of the academic curricula in Central Europe shows some degree of flexibility in terms of introducing new courses for journalism students. Although most compulsory and elective courses require time to be accredited, institutions have the opportunity to tailor the education that they offer to future journalists. It can be said that, as far as elective courses are concerned, they are included in the curriculum mainly based on reflection on practice and on the basis of the rules of the individual universities and also on the basis of cooperation with the media editorial offices. Our analysis of the courses also indicates that institutions mostly accredit their programmes with compulsory and elective courses based on the university’s internal policies, in contrast to introducing elective courses

that can be offered to students immediately because they are not part of the core study programs. The special nature of these courses allows universities to respond to the education that they offer to the contemporary situation and reflect the unpredictable circumstances in which journalism students could find themselves in their future careers (e.g., war coverage, coverage of migration crisis, exposure to death threats, etc.).

The structure of the elective course list allows educational institutions to develop study programmes that are more realistic and practical. In both the Czech Republic and Slovakia, universities offer a series of compulsory elective courses, some of which students are required to take during their bachelor's studies. The findings indicate that most journalism students have access to elective courses that are in accordance with their professional leanings. As Kirchhoff (2022) reminds us, programs and their courses are limited by the discourse and practice of journalism because they are largely dependent on professional journalists as teachers and are required to meet the expectations of media and journalism students.

Compared to other related academic degree programmes, journalism is also a practice-oriented discipline with a need for teachers who are connected to professional media practice; the quality of the lecturers available depends on effective managerial decisions, which can attract external lecturers with professional experience in the media industry. While most of the senior lecturers on journalism courses are academics, former journalists who have chosen an academic career may also teach in such programs once they have completed their doctoral studies, as a Ph.D. is a standard requirement for working in the academic field in Central Europe.

This paper has mapped the scale of practical and theoretical courses, and our analysis indicates that all of the studied universities offer their students a series of practical courses. We identified greater differences in the ways in which students gain experience in the media. While some institutions provide internships during their studies, other universities encourage students to seek out such opportunities on their own. Our analysis shows that there are courses where students gain practice regularly during the semester and those where students practice in newsrooms in their free time, with credits being awarded for their published content. This approach is in line with the recommendations made by Valencia-Forrester (2020), who argues that practical journalism education must move beyond traditional internship models to equip students with the skills they need to flourish in this challenging industry environment.

Since the establishment of free journalism education after the end of the communist regimes, Central European universities have been heavily influenced by Western institutions with well-established curricula in me-

dia education, in particular by institutions in Nordic countries. The background of this process, which has been initiated and continues to this day, and above all the aforementioned Western influence, is now also being approached and criticised by authors who examine the so-called De-Westernisation of Journalism and describe the causes of this process (Glück, 2018; Háló and Demeter, 2023; Waisbord and Mellado, 2014). De-Westernisation can be described as a critique of Eurocentric and American-centric world-views in the academic field, but also in journalism education. The essence of this concept is the enrichment of academic knowledge through the acquisition of experiences, research findings and theoretical frameworks also developed in other parts of the world (Waisbord and Mellado, 2014). Simply put, de-Westernisation is a broader concept that focuses on reducing the influence of exclusively Western ideas and values in various fields (Glück, 2018) and this perspective of de-Westernisation is often necessary in the field of global journalism, for example, to avoid stereotypical perceptions and factual distortions that can alter the global perspective (Ivanič, 2024, p. 38).

Our analysis has shown that Central European curricula are slow to adopt specific courses that reflect the current situation in society and integrate new knowledge and skills, with notable failings in the context of large-scale data analysis, data-driven journalism and mobile reporting. There is little evidence that regional or local journalism forms an important component of curricula, even though some students live in the regions in smaller towns where such news portals operate. Similarly, we might expect a greater focus on war reporting because of the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, but there is no sign that this has occurred to date. The lack of such an approach is concerning, especially given the fact that, as Guo and Volz (2021, p. 106) remind us, “for front-line journalists, the required competencies are mostly task-based and emphasise functional skills such as shooting, reporting, and interviewing.”

When we examine the issue of other academic disciplines studied by students in journalism study programs, we can see a broad similarity among the institutions in the studied countries, and this is likely related to the period and manner in which academic journalism courses and programs were established in the region (Terzis, 2009). The findings suggest that journalism is often classified as a social science and humanities and that it is seen as having much in common with political science and sociology. Our research shows that the departments and institutions are closely related not only to Journalism, but also to Media Studies, Communication Studies, and Social Communication programmes. The academic system and the extensive use of elective courses enable course coordinators to adapt

the composition of courses in response to developments in contemporary society and the changing demands of practice in editorial offices (for example, an increased reliance on data-driven journalism, solution journalism, migration issues, and the safety of journalists online).

After examining the subjects available to students, we can conclude that there are clearly areas that have not received enough attention in the education of future journalists in Central Europe. There is a distinct lack of courses focused on artificial intelligence or mobile journalism in the curricula, and there is considerable scope to strengthen the teaching of journalistic ethics (in Hungary and Slovakia in particular) and psychology, all aspects which are largely absent at the undergraduate level. On the other hand, we can also see an insufficient focus on, for example, journalism genres, with many study programs failing to reflect the changes that the industry has undergone in relation to online content.

This article has focused on the bachelor's study programs in academic institutions across Central Europe and provided a comparative analysis of the courses that these bodies offer. It should be noted, however, that journalism education is a more general issue that could be more broadly researched across a more diverse range of academic institutions in Europe. Our research into the teaching of journalism studies could yield further important findings if it is extended to examine the subject at the master's level. Lastly, the preparation for this research also revealed the need for a literature review addressing the issue of academic journalism programs.

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IMMIGRANTS' INTEGRATION STRUGGLES WITH MISINFORMATION AND FRAUDULENT SCHEMES IN A DIGITAL SPACE: THE CASE STUDY OF RUSSIANS FROM KAZAKHSTAN LIVING IN CZECHIA

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study focuses on immigrants' experiences with misinformation and fraudulent schemes encountered online, and on the implications for integration into a host country. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 immigrants of Russian ethnicity from Kazakhstan living in Czechia. The findings show that while many participants have an awareness of online procedural misinformation and fraudulent schemes, ability to critically assess and manage these risks varies. This awareness is often based on personal experiences or incidents within their social networks. Immigrants facing language barriers often rely on information shared within online communities, where the reliability of sources may be questionable. Fraudulent schemes in areas such as visa applications and employment, take advantage of vulnerabilities of immigrants. The findings also highlight the need for targeted information literacy programmes and policies to improve immigrants' skills in evaluating the reliability of information, reduce their vulnerability to fraud schemes, and improve integration outcomes.

KEYWORDS

information literacy • immigrant integration • misinformation • fraudulent schemes • digital media • social media • qualitative research

INTRODUCTION

Information literacy (IL), is broadly defined as ability to identify, locate, evaluate and effectively use information (UNESCO, 2023). These skills are critical for getting involved with various aspects of daily life, such as understanding legal obligations, accessing healthcare and securing employment. It is challenging to pursue the bureaucratic system when facing language barriers unfamiliar norms and different legal systems. The ability to manage new and complex information sources is a basic need. With the increasing reliance on digital technologies and online platforms for information sharing, the need for IL increases. In the context of integration, immigrants should not only be able to access information but also critically assess its reliability and relevance, particularly online.

This study focuses on misinformation and fraudulent schemes, both pose significant risks to immigrants with limited language proficiency who are more prone to relying on unofficial or unreliable sources. Misinformation is defined as false or misleading information shared without the intent to deceive (Chen et al., 2023) and differs from the disinformation where the intent to deceive is present (Tackling Online Disinformation, 2025). Fraud involves intentional deception for personal gain (Riehle, 2024). This vulnerability can have serious consequences, potentially threatening immigrants' integration progress. Immigrants may fall victim to fraud schemes that take advantage of their vulnerable legal status or make ill-informed decisions that negatively affect their employment, housing or health. To develop strategies to support immigrants' integration, it would be helpful to understand:

- (RQ1) *To what extent are immigrants familiar with the concepts of misinformation and fraudulent schemes in the context of their integration?*
- (RQ2) *What experiences do immigrants have with misinformation and fraud, and how do these experiences shape their knowledge about the topic?*

Social media and online communities play a significant role in immigrants' lives and their information-seeking behaviour (Lášticová, 2014; Thejirika & Krtalić, 2021; Perrenoud et al., 2023). Social media platforms also offer valuable resources, including support networks and information sharing, which can assist immigrants in many ways during their integration process. Online platforms also support a sense of community and belonging (Nessi & Bailey, 2019; Madianou, 2019), which is important for immigrants who may be isolated from traditional networks such as family and friends. Nevertheless, these same platforms are also places of misinformation and fraudulent schemes (Vidros et al., 2016; Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020; Pe-

droza, 2022), which can cause confusion, fear and unfortunate outcomes when immigrants rely on inaccurate information.

The existing literature on IL and immigration largely focuses on the integration of immigrants in relation to accommodation, legislation and employment (Caidi & Allard, 2005; Lloyd et al., 2013; Qayyum et al., 2014; Mansour, 2018; Yeon & Lee, 2021). Immigrants must manage a wide range of information-related tasks, such as understanding legal documents, completing forms, and making informed decisions about healthcare, housing and finances. The presence of unreliable information and online fraud further complicates these tasks, highlighting the relevant role of IL in the integration process.

The present study aims to contribute to the existing body of research by studying the IL practices of immigrants, with a specific focus on how immigrants are aware of and able to avoid misinformation and fraudulent schemes. By examining how immigrants get involved with these challenges while they seek information in their daily lives, this research aims to show the difficulties they encounter and the strategies they use to ease them.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Immigration and information literacy in the digital space

Immigration refers to the movement of individuals from one country to another, often motivated by the pursuit of better economic opportunities, education, or family reunion (IOM, 2019). Upon migrating, immigrants undergo the process of integration, which involves becoming part of the social, economic, cultural and political fabric of the host society (Ager & Strang, 2008). Successful integration involves mutual adaptation, where both immigrants and the host society adapt to one another (Berry, 1997). Key aspects of integration include language proficiency, securing employment, accommodation and accessing basic services such as healthcare and education (Ager & Strang, 2008). IL is connected to this process.

Numerous studies have focused on the relationship between immigration, integration and IL (Shoham & Strauss, 2008; Lloyd et al., 2013; Qayyum et al., 2014; Mansour, 2018). According to Lloyd et al. (2013), IL is one of the key skills required for immigrants to successfully integrate into society and minimise their vulnerability. The integration process often involves overcoming language barriers, learning new cultural norms to feel included, and understanding the complexities of the host society, many of which are shared and discussed on social media platforms (Riegel, 2019; Vorobeva et al., 2022). It can be said that in today's digital age, the ability to critically engage with digital technologies has become a central component

of IL, as most information pathways now lead through digital media.

Regardless of their backgrounds, immigrants increasingly turn to digital platforms, including social media, government websites and online communities, as primary sources of information (Lášticová, 2014; Timmermans, 2018; Shuva, 2021; Ihejirika & Krtalić, 2021; Perrenoud et al., 2023). Platforms such as Facebook, Telegram and WhatsApp enable immigrants to maintain connections with their home countries while building social networks in the host country (Williams Veazey, 2022). These platforms are used not only for getting information and meeting basic needs but also for building social understanding, sharing experiences, obtaining support, and creating a sense of community (Nessi & Bailey, 2019; Madianou, 2019; Zaher, 2020).

Nevertheless, the use of social media also exposes immigrants to challenges such as the spread of misinformation (Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020), which can complicate the integration process and potentially have negative impacts on their well-being. Misinformation regarding immigration legislation or healthcare can lead to poor decision-making and even legal issues. Fraud also poses a significant threat in the digital space, as for vulnerable populations such as immigrants (Madden, 2017). Fraudsters often take advantage immigrants by offering deceptive employment opportunities (Vidros et al., 2016), housing or legal assistance, taking advantage of their unfamiliarity with local systems and their urgent need for reliable information and services (Pedroza, 2022). IL can be initial tool in helping immigrants recognise the warning signs of fraudulent schemes, such as unrealistic promises or demands for upfront payments. By developing IL skills, immigrants can critically evaluate the credibility of sources, cross-reference information, and avoid falling victim to these types of schemes. As in the case of migrants fleeing from Central America to the United States where experiences of misinformation, and fraudulent schemes (in addition with disinformation) on social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp were high. Many migrants fell victim to schemes and false information with blurry line of purposefully or not purposefully deceiving (TTP, 2022).

To conclude, IL is an important skill that can improve integration of immigrants into their host countries. Ability to effectively search for, critically evaluate and use information to their advantage can reduce their vulnerability. Distinguishing misinformation and fraudulent schemes can help immigrants avoid negative experiences that could complicate their long-term integration.

By analysing immigrants' awareness of misinformation and fraud in the context of Czechia, the study aims to identify potential knowledge gaps. Examining their personal experiences with misinformation and fraud will

provide insight into how these encounters affect their ability to recognise and respond to deceptive practices in the future.

1.2. Local systematic bureaucracy: The Czech case

Immigrants seeking to reside in Czechia must obtain government approval for their residence. This can be done by applying for a permit, which requires submitting the necessary documentation. Permits vary in purpose and duration. Preparing the documentation can be a complex process, as documents may need translation, multiple levels of verification, and other formalities.

The issuance of residence permits falls under the Ministry of the Interior (MoI) and its designated Department of Asylum and Migration Policy (DAMP, in Czech Oddělení azylové a migrační politiky) which operates The Information Portal for Foreigners (in Czech Informační portal pro cizince).¹ This portal is available in Czech, English and Ukrainian, providing information on visa, forms, required documents, legal obligations etc. The portal is funded by the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and MoI to improve the quality of information provided for immigrants from non-EU countries. While the multilingual translations help reduce barriers, language nuances, legal terminology and cultural differences can still create obstacles for the immigrants. In addition, immigrants with decreased information or digital literacy skills may face challenges using these platforms and understanding the legal terminology.

When facing the difficulties with obtaining permits or other required documentation, immigrants can approach various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Czechia that assist with integration. Key NGOs include the Integration Centre Prague (in Czech *Integrační centrum Praha*), which offers counselling, language courses, and cultural events, and the Counselling Centre for Integration (in Czech *Poradna pro Integraci*), which provides legal, psychological, and social support. Other notable NGOs include InBáze and the Centre for Integration of Foreigners (in Czech *Centrum pro integraci cizinců*), which offer counselling, language classes, and community programmes.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative approach to investigate the experiences and perceptions of 11 Russian-speaking immigrants in Czechia, regarding their encounters with misinformation, fraudulent schemes and challenges in accessing information. The primary criterion for participation in the

1 The Information Portal for Foreigners here <https://ipc.gov.cz/en/visa-and-residence-permit-types/>, accessed on March 28, 2025.

research interviews was that individuals be adult immigrants of Russian ethnicity, originally from Kazakhstan and currently residing in Czechia. Participants were approached through a combination of social media platforms, the researcher's personal contacts, and the snowball sampling method, specifically targeting Russian-speaking communities in Czechia. The author would like to acknowledge a possible bias, since she is also an immigrant. Even though during the interview, this fact helped to get the rapport with participants, it might have influenced the interpretation of the experiences. However, the author is not aware of anything in particular, that might have been unconsciously misinterpreted due to this bias. In addition, since she has been feeling integrated for decades, she does not have personal experiences with misinformation and fraud schemes regarding the integration process or is not aware of them.

Given the sensitive nature of the topics under investigation, i.e., integration, misinformation, and fraud, recruiting participants from this demographic posed a challenge with regard to ensuring anonymity. The confidentiality of participants was rigorously maintained through data anonymisation, which was emphasised during the recruitment process and repeated before each interview. Prior to conducting the interviews, informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw from the study at any point were discussed. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions or raise concerns at any stage before or during the interview. Participants were also reminded throughout the interview that they were not obliged to answer specific questions and could terminate their participation at any time. After the interview, the researcher shared her contact information with the participants and reminded them to reach out if needed.

Interviews were conducted with 11 participants (4 males and 7 females, aged 26–43) residing in Prague, Central Bohemia region and Hradec Kralove Region (Table 1), economically saturated regions in Czechia. Most of whom held higher education qualifications and all the participants were employed. Almost a half of participants have moved to Czechia mostly for education purposes. After their studies were completed, they chose to stay and integrate to the local society. Others have moved due to better living conditions. A semi-structured interview guide, developed by the researcher, consisted of 10 core questions and explored participants' encounters with misinformation, strategies for verifying information, experiences with fraud, and overall access to information. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility, enabling participants to elaborate on their responses and providing the researcher the opportunity to ask additional questions if necessary (Puchta and Potter, 2004).

Table 1: The overview of details about participants. Source: Author

Code	Age	Gender	Education	Region	Length of stay
P1	29	Male	Higher	Central Bohemia	5 years
P2	28	Male	Higher	Hradec Kralove	11 years
P3	41	Female	unknown	Prague	15 years
P4	43	Female	Higher	Prague	3 years
P5	31	Male	Higher	Prague	13 years
P6	28	Female	Higher	Prague	9 years
P7	26	Female	Higher	Prague	10 years
P8	35	Female	Higher	Prague	16 years
P9	35	Female	Higher	Prague	5 years
P10	36	Male	Higher	Prague	10 years
P11	33	Female	Higher	Prague	5 years

Interviews were conducted from April to May 2023, most of them in person, with two interviews held online via the Zoom platform to suit participants' preferences. Interviews of 30 to 45 minutes long were recorded using either a dictaphone or a mobile phone, after which the recordings were transcribed and then deleted. To ensure anonymity, participants were assigned unique codes during the transcription and analysis phases of the study.

An inductive approach was applied to data analysis, enabling the researcher to capture and interpret participants' experiences and knowledge without imposing preconceived frameworks. During the data analysis process, the researcher reviewed the interview transcripts and assigned codes to the text. MAXQDA software was used for the coding and analysis, but without the use of AI features. Thematic analysis was employed to group codes that were similar in relation to specific facts, approaches or participant experiences. Themes were identified by analysing relationships between the codes and organising them into broader categories. These categories were then further refined into overarching themes that summarised the key findings of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3. FINDINGS

Table 2 presents the overview of categories with example quotes that were further used to identify themes, which follow in subchapters below.

Table 2: The overview of categories with example quotes leading to themes. Source: Author

Category	Example Quotes
What is misinformation/ disinformation	"Rumours or unreliable information" (P7); "Information that does not align with reality" (P8).

Types of frauds	"You've been rejected... and there's no way for you to verify it" (P9); "Send the deposit here... then the person disappeared" (P7).
Personal experiences with fraud or misinforming content	"I sent about 14,000 crowns, and then the person disappeared" (P7).
Noticing misinformation/ fraud online	"Social media administrators... often issue warnings or ban content identified as misinformation" (P4).
Fact-checking	"I always try to fact-check and find the source" (P4); "You can access the official page... and see exactly what they have posted" (P4).
Spoken word	"Someone may ask a question about paperwork... others begin to offer advice based on their experiences" (P1).
How to avoid being scammed	"It's an issue I could never trust anyone else to handle" (P7).
Language limitations	"They won't explain anything to you in any language—often they don't even want to speak English with you" (P9).
Access to education/ information	"There was no information at all on the Internet at the time" (P3); "What I mostly need is nuanced and minor, and such information isn't usually translated" (P1).
The willingness to share knowledge	"I started my own blog and began to publish a lot of things" (P3).
Information needed unavailable/unreachable	"Newcomers are more likely to use services that are fraudulent because of a lack of information" (P1).

3.1. Level of awareness and personal experiences

What is misinformation and how does it spread?

Based on the interviews, participants have a high level of awareness regarding misinformation, with many expressing familiarities with the distinction between misinformation and disinformation. While the participants' experiences and understanding of misinformation and fraudulent schemes varied, certain common themes emerged across the data.

Many participants provided their own definitions of misinformation and fraudulent schemes. For example, Participant 7 (P7) described misinformation as "rumours or unreliable information", while P8 referred to it as "information that does not align with reality". Despite their awareness, participants often expressed uncertainty about how to identify misinformation, reflecting a broader sense of ambiguity when receiving information: "I don't know how to recognise if they're doing it on purpose or if they really think that" (P11).

Two main forms of misinformation emerged from the analysis of participant responses. The first form was linked to cultural and national contexts, particularly among Russian-speaking immigrants from Russia or Kazakhstan who migrated to Czechia with preconceived views and information that they believed to be accurate, even when it was not. As P8 noted, in their home countries "the dissemination of accurate information can be

somewhat lacking. These individuals arrive in their new environments carrying the false information they've acquired".

The second form of misinformation involved individuals who, while attempting to help others, spread unverified or outdated information. P1 remarked: "that's not necessarily helpful because each case may be different; it's best to refer to the official website for accurate information. Misinformation like this is rampant". The risk of misinformation was further highlighted by those who offer advice based on personal experiences, which may inadvertently mislead others. P1 elaborated on this issue, explaining that "especially in chat groups or forums, someone may ask a question about a problem, maybe related to paperwork, and others begin to offer advice based on their experiences". A similar concern was raised by P7 in relation to visa issues, where shared information that is outdated could be harmful, even if unintentionally.

Participants emphasised the importance of fact-checking in dealing with critical information that lacked reliable sources: "I always try to fact-check and find the source. [...] Misinformation should not be propagated. Even if I come across information that I doubt, if there's a provided source, I will search for it in English or Czech and verify it" (P4).

Participants noted that people often refer to media outlets or claim that certain information is sourced from that outlet. P4 observed that "it's always easy to verify. We live in an amazing time where you can access the official page of any publisher and see exactly what they have posted". P4 also mentioned that the social media administrators in the groups she visits often issue warnings or ban content identified as misinformation.

Caution regarding fraudulent schemes

Participants demonstrated a high awareness of fraudulent schemes operating in Czechia, often through the negative experiences encountered either personally or the experiences of others. This awareness fostered a sense of caution in dealing with individuals or organisations offering services related to visas, accommodation, education, or other immigration-related matters. Several participants recounted direct encounters with such schemes. One type of fraudulent scheme occurs before migration, promising guaranteed admission to educational institutions or the assurance of a work visa, in exchange for an advance payment. P9 explained:

"In Kazakhstan, they create fraudulent websites that collect all your documents and apply for visas on your behalf, charging you an extra 2000 to 3000 euros, a significant amount, but they don't even send your documents. And then, for example, they would say, 'You've been rejected'. And there's no way for you to verify it".

In such cases, there is often a lack of proper documentation or contractual guarantees. Another fraudulent scheme involves false promises of guaranteed employment in the destination country, coupled with assurances of a work visa. Participants described how, upon arrival, they discovered that the alleged employer had no knowledge of their hiring, leaving them stranded without the promised job. P9 recounted: “You pay, and when you arrive at your position, they say, ‘No! We haven’t hired you.’ And you’re just left here, with no money, because you gave it all to someone, all your money. I mean, with the documents, but you just have to go back, and you’ve lost significant amounts of money. Because they gave you a Schengen visa, but not a proper work visa”.

Another commonly mentioned scheme involves fraudulent services offering guaranteed visa extensions, which, in reality, cannot be guaranteed; visa extension decisions are made solely by the Ministry of the Interior’s Department of Asylum and Migration Policy, so, any service claiming to guarantee such an extension is inherently deceptive.

Fraudsters also target potential clients through language schools and lure young people from Russian-speaking countries to enrol in language courses in Czechia before they start their studies at higher education institutions. These students are misled that Czech is an easy language to learn.

P5 shared his experience: “These schools, who told me that Czech is very easy, almost like Russian, just with the Latin alphabet. When I arrived here, I was shocked. That’s why I had a kind of... how should I say it, a kind of frustration for the first six months because I expected one thing and got another” (P5). This mismatch between expectations and reality can complicate the integration process by forcing students to face unexpected linguistic and cultural barriers.

Another fraudulent practice involves parents being promised guaranteed admission for their children into higher education institutions in exchange for (usually) large sums of money. P1 remarked on this practice: “It’s simply impossible to offer such a guarantee. I’ve even seen a medical appraisal offering a guarantee of passing the exam”.

Employers and accommodation fraud in Czechia have been a topic of concern among participants, for example in instances of unfair wages or financial deceit. In these cases, seeking accurate information proved to be a valuable tool for avoiding inadequate pay. P4 explained: “When they start claiming that everyone does it, I say no. I live here, I’m actively seeking employment, and I know exactly the average hourly wage and working conditions”. Another issue highlighted by participants is the practice of charging for services that should be free, such as changing employ-

ment. This can give the misleading impression that all basic procedures in Czechia require payment, which can be difficult to pay and discourages immigrants from integrating further into society. P1 noted that “the individual, misled, then believes that they need to pay a significant amount for these basic services. This could lead to a negative experience as they get the impression that everything costs quite a bit, even something as fundamental as changing jobs or place of residence”.

Being defrauded often serves as a harsh learning experience. One participant shared a negative encounter in which she lost money on a deposit for an apartment rental. Securing accommodation without meeting the owner or viewing the property can be risky and is a common type of fraud that affects not only newly arrived immigrants but also long-term residents. In this case, the participant believed her age played a role in her vulnerability. She recounted: “I found an apartment, and it was advertised as ‘Here I am abroad, and this is my daughter’s apartment, which I bought. She has already finished school, everything is fine, and I’m renting it out, but I can’t come. You can rent it remotely. Send the deposit here.’ Well, I was 18 years old, and I thought, ‘I can handle this on my own.’ And that’s how it ended up. I sent about 14,000 crowns, and then the person disappeared” (P7).

3.2. Access to information and avoidance strategies

Access to accurate information and the ability to critically evaluate it are of great importance for immigrants when managing a new environment. Nevertheless, they encounter a language barrier which often leads them to rely on information found online, mainly through social media and other immigrants’ personal experiences. This reliance can result in harmful situations such as dependency on unreliable sources or fall victim to fraudulent actors.

Information literacy and critical thinking

Participants recognised that a lack of IL and critical thinking skills can make individuals vulnerable to negative experiences such as dependency. P4 noted that “a person can find themselves in a dependent or unpleasant situation, and it’s because not everyone has access to proper education or critical thinking. Yes, individuals can end up in unpleasant situations where they lose their documents, money, or simply waste their time”.

Several participants viewed IL as an important asset. P10 stated: “One of the best qualities is to be able to distinguish good information from bad information. Because there’s a huge flow of information right now, and you just have to be able to filter it out”. Similarly, P5 reflected on the impor-

tance of critical thinking: “I’ve had enough critical thinking so far not to get caught up in certain things”.

Participants also discussed strategies for avoiding negative situations and fraudulent schemes. Participant 3, for example, shared a positive experience with InBáze, an organisation that supports immigrants. Initially cautious, she found that the organisation provided genuine assistance: “They certainly helped me, especially with qualification courses that they paid for, like marketing courses. But it was still necessary to find out if they really helped, if it wasn’t just words”. This cautious approach also helped P3 avoid fraudsters offering to renew her and her spouse’s visas. She also described the Internet and social media, despite being sources of misinformation, as useful tools for preventing fraudulent schemes since immigrant social media groups help users warn each other about suspicious offers. However, for sensitive matters such as visas, all the participants remained highly cautious. For example, P7 stated: “For me, the visa issue was always a top priority. If it was possible to apply for a visa in three months, I applied for it. I had all the necessary documents in order. [...] It’s an issue I could never trust anyone else to handle. But it paid off for me”. One participant also shared an example of a friend who was deported because of visa issues, and consequently, she handled her own visa-related documentation with care.

Despite the availability of information on social media, some participants expressed frustration with the repetition of questions in online groups, suggesting that many immigrants struggle to search for existing information. P1 observed: “They keep posting the same questions and receiving the same answers. I suppose this could be due to an inability to navigate and search for information”. He also emphasised the challenges faced by newcomers to the system, who, because of a lack of information, are more likely to use services that are fraudulent.

Interpersonal connectivity and language barriers

Information sharing between immigrants in social media groups fosters a sense of community, as many face difficulties accessing relevant information in their native language. Participants indicated that their proficiency in the local language is often insufficient to manage legal documents, leading them to seek advice from fellow immigrants online. P1 explained: “What I mostly need is often nuanced and minor, and such information isn’t usually translated”.

In response to these challenges, some immigrants take steps to fill the information gap. For example, P3 started a blog to provide guidance on topics such as maternity leave and financial aid: “I can tell you that when I moved,

there was no information at all on the Internet at the time. [...] I started my own blog and began to publish a lot of things. [...] I wrote about how they work, the system, social benefits and how to get them. I also wrote about living in Prague on a minimum budget". Her blog, written in her native language, has been well-received by other immigrants, as evidenced by the positive feedback she receives by email.

Many participants expressed frustration with the limited language support provided by state institutions. P9 noted: "They won't explain anything to you in any language—often they don't even want to speak English with you". This language barrier extends to work contracts, which are typically written in the local language, and immigrants lack the language proficiency to understand the terms. P4 emphasised the importance of not rushing into signing documents: "Whenever I'm asked to sign any document, I always say, 'There's no need to rush. Translate it into a language you understand'".

DISCUSSION

The findings from the study emphasise the importance of IL skills for immigrants when dealing with basic integration needs in the digital space. As mentioned in the Introduction, this study focuses on two research questions:

- (RQ1) *To what extent are immigrants familiar with the concepts of misinformation and fraudulent schemes in the context of their integration?*
- (RQ2) *What experiences do immigrants have with misinformation and fraud, and how do these experiences shape their knowledge about the topic?*

The participants showed a high level of familiarity with the concepts of misinformation and fraudulent schemes. They also experience challenges in recognising and avoiding them. However, it is important to note that the selection of participants was not geographically diverse. The majority were based in the capital city, with only two individuals coming from other regions.

Regarding their experiences, in some cases, participants fell victim to frauds when looking for accommodation or during the process to obtain visa; or they know about the cases of other victims. Those participants who fell victim were usually those of younger age or it happened when they were younger. These experiences and knowledge made them more cautious in the future when looking for the information. This agrees with the theoretical framework which suggests that IL is of a great importance for immigrants (Shoham & Strauss, 2008; Lloyd et al., 2013; Qayyum et al.,

2014; Mansour, 2018) when encountering information which is important yet often unreliable or unsuitable to their needs as shown in report of the TPP (2022) survey on the case of immigrants fleeing from Central America to the United States.

The study confirmed a present issue with the language barriers which is a common struggle in the case of immigrants (Watkins et al., 2012; Zhao et al., 2019). Immigrants cannot rely on official sources because of language barriers, leading them to seek information from various, often unreliable, sources since language proficiency skills significantly affected the participants' abilities to access and critically evaluate information from official sources such as government websites. Many immigrants lack the necessary language skills to effectively know and use these official channels, which are often among the most reliable sources of information. As a result, immigrants frequently rely on information shared in their native languages within their online communities, which function as informal support systems (Williams Veazey, 2022). The reliance on other immigrants for information, while well-intentioned, can be problematic when the advice provided is outdated or incorrect, as in matters involving legal or bureaucratic processes. Incorrect information can lead to severe consequences, such as losing visa permissions. This highlights the social media as both a valuable resource and a potential source of misinformation (Ihejirika & Krtalić, 2021; Perrenoud et al., 2023; Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020; Pedroza, 2022). The participants' experiences emphasise the importance of IL in evaluating the quality and accuracy of information shared on these platforms, where distinguishing between reliable advice and misinformation can be difficult.

Fraudulent schemes were also identified as a significant issue affecting immigrants, in areas such as visa applications, employment and accommodation. The participants were aware of various types of fraud, both before and after their arrival in the host country, which often involved promises of guaranteed outcomes in exchange for money. These fraudulent schemes take advantage of immigrants' urgent need for reliable information and services, as well as their unfamiliarity with local systems. This vulnerability arises from immigrants' limited knowledge of the host country's processes, making them targets for fraudsters. These findings support the notion that vulnerable populations such as immigrants are often targeted by fraudsters in digital spaces (Madden, 2017). The findings are in consensus with the claim that immigrants with knowledge and skills to identify and avoid scams are more likely to avoid falling victim to fraud which otherwise can lead to significant setbacks in their integration, affecting basic needs such as visas, employment and housing.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that while participants were aware of misinformation and fraudulent schemes, many still found it difficult to recognise or avoid them, mostly during the early phases of their settlement. Experiences with fraud—such as in securing housing or applying for visas—were often mentioned as moments that led to greater caution and awareness over time. Language barriers were a frequent issue, making it harder to use official sources and encouraging reliance on advice shared within social media groups or informal networks. These sources, while often helpful, also carried the risk of spreading incorrect or misleading information, especially in situations where accurate understanding is necessary. Similar patterns have been observed elsewhere; for instance, a survey conducted by the Tech Transparency Project (TTP, 2022) among migrants from Central America to the United States found widespread use of platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp where respondents often encountered false claims and deceptive content in the process of migration, which brought difficulties to it.

This study has certain limitations in terms of sample size, cultural and social contexts and the generalisability of its findings to the broader immigrant population. Nevertheless, the results indicate that targeted policy interventions and practices could be beneficial to immigrants and their IL. For example, educational programmes and workshops designed to improve IL in immigrants concerning their interactions on digital platforms with misinformation and fraudulent schemes, could help prevent potential abuse by fraudsters and ease the negative impact on the integration process caused by misinformation. Some countries have begun addressing these issues through adding IL educational components to courses for immigrants. In Canada, the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) has funded the *Digital and Media Literacy Training* organised by the COSTI Immigrant Services² (community-based multicultural agency). In Czechia, however, such initiatives remain limited. While there are basic orientation services and courses, such as the Adaptation and Integration Course, available to newcomers, structured IL education is not yet a consistent part of integration policy.

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2 More information available at https://www.costi.org/programs/program_details.php?sid=42&pid=9&id=242, accessed on March 29, 2025.

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MOBILE MENTAL HEALTH UPTAKE AMONG EMERGING ADULTS: INTEGRATING HEALTH COMMUNI- CATION AND TECHNOLOGY ACCEPTANCE PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

This study identifies key factors influencing the use of mobile applications for mental well-being (m-Mental Health) among emerging adults. Integrating health communication and technology acceptance frameworks, it develops a new model to understand m-Health technology adoption, examining how privacy, safety concerns, and the app's commercial status affect user decisions. A mixed-methods design using a survey and experimental manipulation was employed to test the new model among adults aged 18-29. Conducting a PLS-SEM analysis of 229 observations, the study confirmed the model's solid predictive ability and supported the positive impact of social influence, self-efficacy, and health technology efficacy on attitudes toward m-Mental Health and usage intentions. However, stronger privacy and safety concerns negatively affected these attitudes, with the app's (non-)commercial status showing no significant impact.

KEYWORDS

mobile health applications • mental health • emerging adults •
technology adoption • health communication

INTRODUCTION

Rising depressive symptoms and suicide rates among young people present significant public health challenges (Twenge, 2006; WHO, 2013), particularly as mental health disorders frequently begin between ages 18 and 25 (Public Health England, 2014; Stroud et al., 2013). Defined as emerging adulthood, this period of life involves significant independence and exploration (Arnett, 2000), expanded to ages 18-29 to account for varying socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds (Arnett et al., 2011).

Although numerous recent studies point to a link between the use of new technologies and psychological problems (e.g., Coyne et al., 2018; Twenge et al., 2018; van Velthoven et al., 2018), the very same platforms can also serve as facilitators of positive health behaviour change (Mohr et al., 2013), reducing stigma and addressing barriers to accessing traditional prevention such as long waiting times for in-person consultations with professionals (Stiles-Shields et al., 2016; Watts & Andrews, 2014). Online mental health interventions and support platforms may be preferred to offline sources of help by young people for their anonymity (Wong et al., 2021) and rapid availability (Rickwood et al., 2016) and have the potential to successfully reduce problems such as depression or anxiety (Ahmedani et al., 2016; Mahoney et al., 2021), particularly in the early, less severe phases. Specifically, m-Mental Health apps (i.e., mobile apps developed to help tackle or prevent psychological problems; Apolinário-Hagen, 2017) based on proven methodologies such as mindfulness (Tan et al., 2022) are among the approaches most commonly highlighted for their potential to cost-effectively improve psychological wellness (Kumar et al., 2013; Price et al., 2014) with wide-reach prevention and treatment solutions (Sort, 2017). The past decade brought a boom in m-Mental Health apps for smartphones (Powell, 2016), with many commercial companies saturating the market with their own solutions for psychological well-being (Tucker & Goodings, 2015). The recent COVID-19 pandemic further boosted the potential of and need for accessible m-Mental Health as many emerging adults experienced significantly heightened levels of depression and anxiety while having limited access to face-to-face support (Wirkner & Brakemeier, 2024).

Despite the ongoing influx of novel m-Mental Health services and their undeniable potential (Harrison et al., 2011), young people's uptake of and engagement with mobile-based self-help interventions for mental health could be improved (Bear et al., 2024; Fleming et al., 2018) to widen their impact. Research into why individuals do or do not use specific health technologies often follows one of these two avenues: health communication, which examines attitudes, social norms, and self-efficacy (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975); and studies building on the foundation of the Technology Acceptance Model

(TAM), which considers perceived usefulness and ease of use (Davis, 1986). Previous research employing the TAM and other related models pointed to efficacy beliefs (Holtz et al., 2023) or privacy concerns (Becker, 2016) as important determinants of the m-Mental Health use of young people, while health communication-oriented studies suggested the levels of convenience (Kornfield et al., 2023), personalization and technology (Koulouri et al., 2022) might be key drivers of the uptake of such apps among emerging adults. However, a comprehensive overview of young adults' decision-making factors regarding m-Mental Health adoption is lacking.

To fill this gap, the present study aims to test a comprehensive new model of m-Mental Health uptake determinants within the population of emerging adults. The model, which serves as the study's framework, is grounded in both digital health communication and technology acceptance research. The study integrates these approaches to form and test a model that also introduces a novel variable, Confidence in Health Technology, addressing privacy concerns within the sensitive context of mental health. While m-Mental Health apps offer continuous access and innovative features at lower costs than traditional care, their effectiveness is often questioned due to lack of supporting evidence (Hilty et al., 2017; Derks et al., 2017). A significant number of these apps lack empirical backing (Donker et al., 2013), and privacy concerns further complicate their adoption, as potential users might fear data misuse (Patel et al., 2018). This research therefore seeks to clarify the role of efficacy and privacy concerns in the adoption of digital mental health solutions which remains unclear despite previous research attempts (e.g., Apolinário-Hagen et al., 2016). More specifically, the present study aims to uncover whether the (non-)commercial nature of a m-Mental Health tool may inspire different levels of trust, which could subsequently interplay with the determinants of the tool's uptake among emerging adults.

After bridging the languages of technology acceptance research and health communication scholars, the study turns to the young population currently under an increasing danger of mental health issues, in striving to answer the following research question:

- *What are the determinants of the use of m-Mental Health among emerging adults?*
- *And to what extent do they differ for commercial and non-commercial applications?*

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

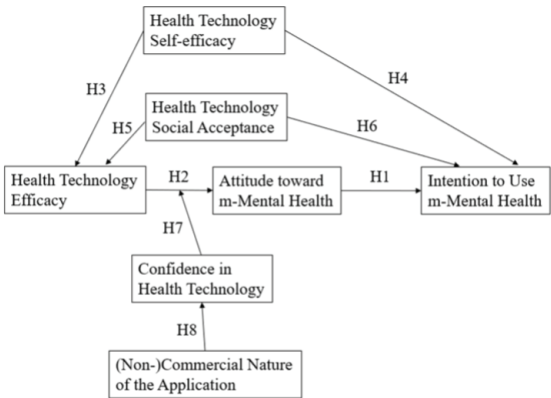
To offer a synthesis of health communication and technology acceptance perspectives to explain the uptake of m-Mental Health, the present study extracts

parts of several theories which are relevant to the field of mental health promotion, the mobile app technology, and the target group of emerging adults, and merges them into a new contextualized model. It employs a user-oriented approach to studying the selection and use of a particular medium, focusing on user characteristics and expectations rather than the features of a technology (Flanagin & Metzger, 2001).

This theoretical framework is structured around the model's main variables. While the Intention to Use m-Mental Health, Attitude toward m-Mental Health, Health Technology Efficacy, Health Technology Self-efficacy, and Health Technology Social Acceptance variables are defined by aligning the theoretical perspectives and glossaries of technology acceptance studies and health communication, Confidence in Health Technology and its accompanying (Non-)Commercial Nature of the Application variable are newly conceptualized based on recent empirical and industry insights specifically relevant for the context of m-Mental Health.

The relationships between the variables expected to influence emerging adults' intentions to use m-Mental Health apps, depicted in Figure 1, are proposed in the subsequent sub-chapters through a process of identifying overlaps and relevant complementary decision-making elements in prominent technology acceptance and health communication theories, while also considering relevant empirical learnings about e-Health, m-Health, and the uptake of other new technologies. Rather than following a perhaps more common sequential logic, the structure of this theoretical chapter (and consequently also its hypotheses) moves from the presumably core variables (intention to use, attitudes, efficacy) to variables of anticipated secondary importance (self-efficacy, social acceptance) before it introduces the new concepts (trust in the technology, influence of (non-)commercial origin).

Figure 1: Conceptual model. Source: Author



As Figure 1 illustrates, the proposed model hypothesizes that the intention to use mobile apps for mental health is directly associated with one’s attitudes toward them, as well as with perceived social acceptance of and self-efficacy related to such apps. These two concepts are also anticipated to predict one’s beliefs regarding m-Mental Health solutions’ efficacy, or helpfulness, which is hypothesized to directly correspond with attitudes. This relationship is expected to be moderated by one’s (privacy and safety-related) trust in mobile mental health apps, a concept hypothesized to be predicted by the commercial or non-commercial origin of an app.

For ease of reading, Table 1 below provides a glossary of the abbreviations for theories and concepts that will be used in the remainder of the present section.

Table 1: Glossary of abbreviations. Source: Author

TPB	Theory of Planned Behaviour
TAM	Technology Acceptance Model
HTE	Health Technology Efficacy
HTSE	Health Technology Self-Efficacy
HTSA	Health Technology Social Acceptance
CHT	Confidence in Health Technology

1.1. Attitude toward and intention to use m-Mental Health

Studies commonly assess the intention to adopt e-Health tools (e.g., Razmak et al., 2018) rather than actual usage (e.g., Or et al., 2008). While behavioural intention plays the role of the central dependent variable in both the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM; Davis, 1986), the construct of attitude derives solely from the latter where it stands for an evaluative affect about a behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and is mostly determined by beliefs about the behavior’s outcomes (Doğanyigit, 2018). TPB suggests that alongside positive subjective norms and higher self-efficacy, a more favourable attitude boosts behavioural intentions (Fishbein & Cappella, 2006); hence the study’s first hypothesis (H1):

- *H1: More favourable attitudes toward m-Mental Health positively predict the intention to use m-Mental Health apps.*

1.2. Health Technology Efficacy

Health Technology Efficacy (HTE) represents the perceived ability of a technology to treat or prevent health issues, specifically to improve men-

tal health within the context of this study. HTE combines two concepts from health communication theory - behavioral beliefs and outcome evaluations, reflecting the perceived likelihood that using the technology will achieve health goals, which influences the persuasiveness of health messages (Fishbein and Cappella, 2006; Cismaru et al., 2009). It also encompasses technology acceptance aspects like perceived usefulness and performance expectancy (Luo & Remus, 2014; Razmak et al., 2018; Venkatesh et al., 2003).

Addressing theoretical inconsistencies in how perceived usefulness affects technology use (Davis, 1986; Venkatesh & Bala, 2008), this study employs the Combined Technology Acceptance Model and Theory of Planned Behaviour (C-TAM-TPB; Venkatesh et al., 2003) to examine how health technology efficacy predicts attitudes towards m-Mental Health; hence the second hypothesis (H2):

- *H2: Health Technology Efficacy positively predicts more favourable attitudes toward m-Mental Health.*

1.3. Health Technology Self-Efficacy

Health Technology Self-Efficacy (HTSE) reflects an individual's perceived ability to use specific health technologies effectively, theoretically aligning with Fishbein & Capella's (2006) understanding of self-efficacy as perceived barriers to a target behavior, as well as with Bandura's (1986) concept of self-efficacy tailored to domain-specific actions. Within the context of this study, HTSE encapsulates both one's perceived ability to use technologies to improve their health (Ramzak et al., 2018) and perceived ability to use mobile apps (i.e., mobile self-efficacy; Doğanyığıt, 2018), specifically in mental health.

Although previous m-Health research has shown that perceived ease of use can boost perceived usefulness and indirectly enhance behavioral intentions through perceived usefulness (Hung & Yen, 2012), Holden and Karsh's (2010) review of more than 20 technology acceptance-driven e-Health studies suggests that its direct influence may be limited. To inspect HTSE's relationships with both HTE and intention to use m-Mental Health, this study tests two separate hypotheses:

- *H3: Health Technology Self-Efficacy positively predicts one's perceived Health Technology Efficacy.*
- *H4: Higher Health Technology Self-Efficacy positively predicts one's intention to use m-Mental Health.*

1.4. Health Technology Social Acceptance

Health communication theory regards social norms as one of the determinants of health-related behavioural intentions, whereby social norms represent the observed behaviours and presumed normative opinions of one's important others (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Cappella, 2006). Technology acceptance scholars use the term subjective norms to describe a person's beliefs about whether or not their important others want them to use the technology of interest (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). The width of the Health Technology Social Acceptance (HTSA) concept this study proposes rests more on the health communication approach; it combines both descriptive (i.e., observed behaviours) and injunctive norms (i.e., assumed opinions; Prentice, 2008) to capture the normative influence, as well as the sociological factor of an increased awareness of m-Mental Health apps as proposed by Razmak et al. (2018).

Prior research in web-based e-Health (Ryan et al., 2017), m-Health (Doğanyigit, 2018), and technology acceptance studies (Venkatesh et al., 2003) provides empirical grounds to assume that the degree to which one believes other people use and approve of using a mobile app for mental health could positively predict behavioural intentions, and perhaps even outweigh any negative beliefs regarding the efficacy or ease of use of m-Mental Health. However, similarly to HTSE, technology acceptance studies have also found strong links between social influence and perceived efficacy (Buccoliero & Bellio, 2014; Venkatesh & Bala, 2008); hence there are two hypotheses reflecting the role of social influence:

- *H5: Health Technology Social Acceptance positively predicts one's perceived Health Technology Efficacy.*
- *H6: Health Technology Social Acceptance positively predicts one's intention to use m-Mental Health.*

1.5. Confidence in Health Technology

Van Schaik et al. (2004) emphasize that balanced models assessing both benefits and risks enhance the predictive power in technology acceptance studies. When risks such as data privacy concerns are evident, trust in technology decreases, potentially hindering e-Health adoption (Sillence & Briggs, 2015; Beldad et al., 2010). Empirical evidence shows that credibility and accuracy concerns significantly influence trust in online health resources (Montagnani et al., 2016; Lee & Cho, 2016; Musiat et al., 2014; Stiles-Shields et al., 2017). This study introduces Confidence in Health Technology (CHT) to encapsulate such worries.

Evidence suggests that many m-Mental Health apps lack empirical support,

raising concerns about their effectiveness and safety (Donker et al., 2013; Hale et al., 2015; Hilty et al., 2017; Lal & Adair, 2013). In this highly sensitive context (Anderson & Agarwal, 2011), numerous studies have shown that data privacy and security concerns can reduce users' confidence in an app, thus decreasing the app's uptake (e.g., Gulliver et al., 2015; Young, 2005; van Velthoven et al., 2018). Together with the worries about treatment accuracy, the degree to which a person believes their highly confidential mental health input will be safely encrypted and secured (Kumar et al., 2013) and not disclosed to any third parties without their explicit consent constitutes a general sense of trust in m-Mental Health. Since the potential ineffectiveness or even harmfulness of a mental health app is directly linked to perceived efficacy, and privacy concerns were found to be closely linked to perceived usefulness by Chung et al. (2010), this study hypothesizes a moderating role for CHT:

- *H7: Confidence in Health Technology positively moderates the relationship between Health Technology Efficacy and attitude toward m-Mental Health.*

1.6. (Non-)commercial nature of an app

Users often have to rely on heuristic cues such as provider credibility to assess an app's trustworthiness (Briggs et al., 2002; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). As noted by Pornpitakpan (2004), messages from more credible sources typically have a larger impact on the attitude and behaviour of the receiver. Building on Gulliver et al.'s (2010) suggestion that young people are strongly influenced by the credibility of mental health service providers, this study aims to uncover if a similar effect exists for commercial and non-commercial m-Mental Health apps.

When being unable to map trust-forming factors such as information quality, usability, or popularity of a particular app (Hale et al., 2015), users have no other choice but to look for heuristic indicators of quality, security, and privacy (Sillence & Briggs, 2015), including organization logos or accreditation endorsements by governmental entities (Batterham et al., 2015). Although there is no guarantee that m-Mental Health apps adhere to evidence-based standards (Luxton et al., 2011), non-commercial apps often align with rigorous data privacy and security norms, such as the European Commission's (2016) Voluntary Code of Conduct. In contrast, commercial apps may lack comprehensive quality and safety frameworks (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2014). Thus, this study hypothesizes that non-commercial apps are trusted more:

- *H8: Confidence in Health Technology is greater for non-commercial m-Mental Health apps compared to commercial ones.*

1.7. The present study

To summarize, the theoretical framework was established primarily via a merger of concepts and terminology from key theories in technology acceptance and health communication studies but also supported by insights from relevant empirical e-Health and m-Health research. The intention to use mobile apps for mental health is presumably positively predicted by how much one believes in their ability to use an m-Mental Health solution, how socially accepted they think it is, and how positive their attitudes toward it are. The attitudes are hypothesized to be more positive if one finds the m-Mental Health solution helpful, which is expected to be more likely if they also find it socially accepted and if they believe they themselves can use it well. The extent to which stronger efficacy beliefs predict more positive attitudes is anticipated to be higher with greater confidence in an app for mental health, which is hypothesized to decrease if the app in question is commercial, compared to a non-profit application.

The primary objective of this study is to test this comprehensive model in the context of mobile applications for mental health and with emerging adults, a population segment that could potentially greatly benefit from improved adoption rates of effective m-Mental Health solutions. Another key target contribution of the study lies in the investigation of the impact of privacy and safety-related trust and the extent to which such trust among young adults is or is not determined by (non-)commercial origins of mobile apps in the highly sensitive area of mental health.

To complete these research objectives, a survey study with an experimental vignette element was conducted. Based on previous empirical research, the study anticipated potential confounding effects of age (e.g., Chung et al., 2010; Hung & Yen, 2012), sex (e.g., Cho et al., 2014; Venkatesh et al., 2003), education (e.g., Cho et al., 2014), health technology awareness (e.g., Apolinário-Hagen 2017), e-Health literacy (e.g., Apolinário-Hagen 2017; Khazaaal et al., 2008), and previous health technology use (e.g., Apolinário-Hagen 2017; Venkatesh et al., 2003). Additionally, following the example of Fonseca et al. (2016), the current state of mental well-being – one's ability to cope with common stress, be productive and contribute to their community (World Health Organization, 2014) – was also included as a control variable.

2. METHODS

The forthcoming sections depict the survey research approach of the present study, explaining the operationalization of the main variables, sampling, experimental vignette technique, and other important characteristics of the research method.

Cross-sectional survey design was chosen for its suitability for measur-

ing beliefs, attitudes, and intentions of a large number of people (Bryman, 2012). Moreover, the confidential nature of an individually administered, Web-based, self-completion questionnaire should encourage the openness of respondents even for questions regarding highly sensitive topics such as one's mental health (Fowler, 2014).

2.1. Participants

Due to the lack of a sampling frame, convenience sampling was adopted to recruit participants aged 18-29 using social media posts and private messages. A charitable incentive was employed to counter the growing survey fatigue (Fowler, 2014).

The data collection was conducted between April 28 and May 9, 2019. After deleting 11 responses by ineligible participants (2 did not own a smartphone, 9 had participated in the development of an m-Mental Health app) and 2 responses by people aged higher than 29, the final sample, N = 229, was 52% female, with age distribution quite diversely between 19 and 29 (minimum 19, median 23, maximum 29, SD = 1.82). The respondents lived predominantly in Czechia and the Netherlands and reported diverse educational backgrounds and employment statuses, although the majority were university-educated (61.1%). In total, 27 different countries of residence were reported. Nationality was not monitored. All the respondents completed the survey in English.

Table 2: Demographics of the sample. Source: Author

Characteristic	(N = 229); M (SD) or %
Sex	
Male	48
Female	52
Age	23.40 (1.82)
Country of Residence	
Czech Republic	57
Netherlands	21.5
Other (25 different countries)	21.5
Education	
High school	38.9
University degree	61.1
Professional status	
Unemployed or full-time student	33.6
(Self-)employed part-time	03.9
(Self-)employed part-time and student	41.9
(Self-)employed full-time	20.5

2.2. Procedure

The independent variable encapsulating the (non-)commercial nature of m-Mental Health was included in the survey via an experimental manipulation. Experimental vignettes are used in survey research to elicit respondents' opinions or sentiments about a certain situation (Atzmüller & Steiner, 2010) and to study the target population's decision-making (Evans et al., 2015). After reading short general definitions of m-Mental Health apps and mental well-being, the respondents were randomly assigned to read one of two vignettes – descriptions of either a non-commercial (condition A, N = 115) or commercial (condition B, N = 114) fictional m-Mental Health app (see Figure 2) – and keep it in mind while answering the following set of questions about their opinions and beliefs regarding m-Mental Health apps. The controlled random assignment with the goal of even distribution was conducted automatically by the *Qualtrics* survey software.

Figure 2: Randomly assigned survey vignettes. Source: Author

Example A – non-commercial app

Mindiooo is a **non-commercial smartphone app** developed by a team of university researchers. The app is freely available via App Store and Google Play. Mindiooo is intended to **increase your overall mental wellness and help you manage your daily stress** or any negative thoughts **without any contact with a therapist**. Based on the results of an intake psychological questionnaire, Mindiooo provides a user with relevant mental health information and training tailored to their needs. Moreover, the app enables users to keep track of their moods and thoughts, as well as to improve their stress-coping through a series of guided exercises.

Example B – commercial app

Mindiooo is a **commercial smartphone app** developed by O-care, a tech company designing digital healthcare products. You can download the app via App Store or Google Play and use all the main features for free, with optional paid-for add-ons. Mindiooo is intended to **increase your overall mental wellness and help you manage your daily stress** or any negative thoughts **without any contact with a therapist**. Based on the results of an intake psychological questionnaire, Mindiooo provides users with relevant mental health information and training tailored to their needs. Moreover, the app enables users to keep track of their moods and thoughts, as well as to improve their stress-coping through a series of guided exercises.

Following the vignette element, the scales for main variables were presented in random order, except for the instruments measuring attitude and intention which were placed at the end of this block, with items randomized within each scale. After completing the main section, participants provided control variable data and demographics before being debriefed and voting for a charity to receive a donation from the study's author.

In line with research ethics standards, the respondents first briefly informed about the study and its approval by the Ethics Review Board of the University of Amsterdam and reassured of the study's confidentiality. Informed consent was collected while highlighting the unlimited opt-out possibility.

The survey was piloted on a small convenience sample (N = 11) of emerging adults to refine clarity before broader distribution.

2.3. Main variables

(Non-)commercial nature of an app

Participants were instructed to keep their commercial or non-commercial app example in mind while answering the ensuing questions. Manipulation of the app characteristics was based on a review of both commercial and non-commercial m-Mental Health apps by Anthes (2016). The app and company names were fabricated.

Scale validation

All the main latent variables were measured with multiple items using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *Completely disagree*, 7 = *Completely agree*) and answered by all respondents, $N = 229$. All survey questions were mandatory, preventing item-level non-response. After recoding negatively worded items, the reliability of all latent variables was tested, and their validity inspected using exploratory factor analyses with a principal-axis factoring extraction.

Health Technology Efficacy

To measure this newly conceptualized variable that encapsulates the perceived ability of a specific technology to help people improve their health, a four-item indicator was developed, with each item referring to one specific potential outcome of using m-Mental Health: effective management of mental well-being, prevention of mental health issues, convenient access to help regarding mental health, and guidance in self-improving mental health. Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agree or disagree with statements such as “*m-Mental Health apps could help me effectively manage my mental well-being*”, which were based on the original perceived usefulness operationalization (Davis, 1989) and inspired by similar items contextualized in mental health (Apolinário-Hagen et al., 2018). A mean scale computed to measure this composite latent variable reported good reliability, Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$. On average, the sample scored slightly higher on Health Technology Efficacy scale than the mid-score ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.11$).

Health Technology Self-Efficacy

Three items largely derived from the study by Rahman et al. (2016) and inspired by the perceived ease of use measures of Razmak et al. (2018) were used to capture one's beliefs about their ability to effectively use m-Mental Health apps. Specifically, the respondents indicated the extent to which m-Mental Health apps are (or would be) “*easy to use*” for them,

if they felt “*comfortable using them*”, or if they felt “*worried about pushing the wrong button and putting their mental health at risk*”. The instrument was found to have low reliability in this sample, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .55$. The mean scale ($M = 5.18$, $SD = 1.10$) seemed to be in line with the presumption that mobile app self-efficacy would be rather high in a young population (Cho et al., 2014).

Health Technology Social Acceptance

Following Fishbein and Ajzen (2010), as well as Razmak et al. (2018), this variable comprised injunctive (“*Most people who are important to me (would) approve of me using of an m-Mental Health app.*”), as well as descriptive norms (“*Many people similar to me use an m-Mental Health app.*”) surrounding the use of health technologies. While the injunctive norm scores were nearly one point above the mid-point ($M = 4.99$, $SD = 1.41$), the sample reported a relatively low observability of the use of m-Mental Health among people similar to them ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 1.44$). The two items in this scale were weakly but significantly correlated, $r = .19$, $p = .003$. The mean scale averaged slightly lower than the mid-point ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.10$).

Confidence in Health Technology

This variable considered potential disadvantages of using m-Mental Health apps and focused on safety and privacy concerns. Its two privacy-related items were adapted from the MUIPC (Mobile User’s Information Privacy Concerns) scale (Xu et al., 2012) and covered two factor sub-scales with the highest reliability in the study by Bol et al. (2018), namely perceived intrusion (“*As a result of me using an m-Mental Health app, others might know more about me than I am comfortable with.*”) and unauthorized secondary use of personal data. The other two items followed the attitude-measuring scale of Rahman et al. (2016) and covered safety concerns through negative outcome beliefs about mobile apps providing incorrect and potentially harmful mental health advice, and about m-Mental Health use potentially creating negative mental health impact. All four items were negatively worded, meaning higher scores indicated greater concern about health technology. To ensure that higher scores represented greater Confidence (i.e. lower concern) in Health Technology, all items were reverse-coded prior to analysis. The Cronbach’s α of .64 indicated rather low reliability of the mean scale. Respondents reported on average a slightly higher Confidence in Health Technology than the mid-score, $M = 4.29$, $SD = 1.16$.

Attitude toward m-Mental Health

Respondents' attitude toward m-Mental Health was measured using a three-item scale. Two rather general items were adapted from Schnall et al. (2018) into statements about m-Mental Health apps potentially improving people's lives and encouraging people, by virtue of their anonymity, to use them openly and honestly for mental health prevention or treatment. The third item, more reflective of the specifics of m-Mental Health, was added from Apolinário-Hagen et al. (2018): "I think m-Mental Health apps are a positive addition to the variety of mental health self-help tools available." The mean scale reported slightly low yet still acceptable reliability, Cronbach's $\alpha = .72$. On average, the sample reported a rather positive attitude compared to the mid score, $M = 5.42$, $SD = .98$.

Intention to use m-Mental Health

In line with Fishbein and Ajzen (2010), behavioural intention was measured with one item reflecting recommendations to close ties ("*How likely is it that you would recommend one of your friends or family members to use an m-Mental Health app?*"), $M = 4.11$, $SD = 1.86$, and the other focused the respondents' own use, $M = 4.26$, $SD = 1.80$. Each item was accompanied by an example situation of encountering mental health difficulties ("*... going through mentally and emotionally challenging times or start feeling symptoms of some psychological problems...*") adapted from Fonseca et al. (2016). On average, the sample reported behavioural intentions slightly higher than the mid-score ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 1.69$). The two items of this instrument were strongly correlated, $r = .70$, $p < .001$.

2.4. Control variables

e-Health literacy was measured with three items on a 5-point Likert scale adapted from Razmak et al. (2018) who originally derived them from the eHEALS instrument, developed and validated by Norman and Skinner (2006). The statements were about knowing "*how to find helpful health resources on the Internet*" and correctly interpret and use this information. The mean scale ($M = 3.42$, $SD = .86$) reported fairly good reliability, Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$, and showed that the sample had a slightly higher e-Health literacy than the mid-score.

Table 3 summarizes the distribution of the awareness and use of m-Mental Health apps alongside the relevant survey items and possible answers, showing that most respondents did not know any specific m-Mental Health apps and an overwhelming majority had no experience with using them.

Table 3: Use and awareness of m-Mental Health apps. Source: Author

Characteristic	(N = 229); n %
Awareness ("Do you know any m-Mental Health apps?")	
Yes	54 (23.6)
No	147 (64.2)
Not sure	28 (12.2)
Use ("Have you ever used any kind of...?", "During the past 6 months, how frequently...during a regular week?")	
Never	
Yes, but not in the past 6 months	191 (83.4)
Once per week	14 (6.1)
Multiple times per week	10 (4.4)
Once each day	1 (0.4)
Don't know	1 (0.4)

The respondents' current mental well-being was measured with the seven-item Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (Stewart-Brown et al., 2011), asking respondents to indicate how often (in the past two weeks) they felt positive about the future and their ability to deal with problems, think clearly, and make up their own mind, and how often they felt useful, relaxed, and close to other people on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = None of the time, 5 = All of the time). In line with the official guide to using this instrument (NHS Health Scotland et al., 2006), a sum scale was computed with fairly good reliability, Cronbach's alpha = .79. On average, in comparison with scores published in the instrument's guide, the sample reported a rather low level of mental well-being, M = 24.21, SD = 4.24.

Age, biological Sex, and the highest level of education were collected at the end of the survey together with the rest of the demographics.

2.5. Statistical analysis

Structural equation modeling (SEM), specifically the variance-based partial least squares technique (PLS-SEM), was employed for its suitability for complex models with latent constructs, smaller sample sizes, and non-normal data (Hair et al., 2014; Lowry & Gaskin, 2014). Contrary to a regression approach, PLS-SEM runs equations simultaneously and interdependently to provide a more accurate picture of complex models such as the one proposed in this study.

Data preparation and exploratory analyses were conducted using SPSS 26 by IBM, and the model was tested with *SmartPLS 3*. Initially, each control variable was tested separately to identify significant confounders. The final model addressing the study's hypotheses only incorporated control variables with significant effects.

3. RESULTS

PLS-SEM was employed after testing several regression assumptions. Multivariate normality, lack of multicollinearity (VIF 1.17-2.06), absence of autocorrelation (Durbin-Watson 2.00), homoscedasticity, and linear relationships were verified. Harman’s single factor test indicated no significant common method bias, with a single factor explaining 31.28% of the variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

The social acceptance and behavioural intention constructs were labelled as formative in *SmartPLS 3* due to their composite nature. Therefore, regular PLS algorithm and bootstrapping were chosen for the analyses over the Consistent algorithm, which is intended for fully reflective models.

Formative constructs for social acceptance and behavioral intention necessitated using the regular PLS algorithm over the Consistent algorithm. Several control variables showed significant effects on the model outcomes, particularly e-Health literacy and frequency of m-Mental Health usage being positively linked to attitudes and intentions respectively, while previous usage and knowledge were negatively linked to Confidence in Health Technology.

Model fit was assessed via the PLS algorithm and bootstrapping, with an SRMR of .065 indicating good fit. The model accounted for 46.3% of variance in intention to use m-Mental Health ($R^2 = .46$, $p < .001$), 56.1% in attitude toward m-Mental Health ($R^2 = .56$, $p < .001$), and 33% in Health Technology Efficacy ($R^2 = .33$, $p < .001$), but only 6.4% in Confidence in Health Technology ($R^2 = .06$, $p = .071$).

Table 4: PLS-SEM path analysis results summary. Source: Author

Path ¹	β	p	t	R^2 (p)	Adjusted R^2 (p)
ATT → BI	.42	.000***	6.17	0.46 (.000)	0.46 (.000)
HTSA → BI	.10	.133	1.50		
HTSE → BI	.26	.000***	4.27		
USE_ipW → BI	.11	.000***	3.50		
HTE → ATT	.56	.000***	10.30	0.56 (.000)	0.56 (.000)
EHL → ATT	.11	.034*	2.13		
Moderation	-.12	.008**	2.68		

1 ATT: Attitude toward m-Mental Health; BI: Intention to Use m-Mental Health; HTSA: Health Technology Social Acceptance; HTSE: Health Technology Self-Efficacy; HTE: Health Technology Efficacy; EHL: e-Health Literacy; CHT: Confidence in Health Technology; (Non-) Com: (Non-)Commercial Nature of an App; USE_ipW: used an m-Mental Health app once per week in the past six months; USE_Never: never used an m-Mental Health app; USE_NotIn6m: did not use an m-Mental Health app in the past six months; AWA_Yes: knows some specific m-Mental Health apps

HTSA → HTE	.25	.000***	3.87	0.33 (.000)	0.33 (.000)
HTSE → HTE	.43	.000***	6.81		
(Non-)Com → CHT	.02	.812	0.24	0.06 (.071)	0.05 (.245)
USE_Never → CHT	-.24	.001**	3.24		
USE_NotIn6m → CHT	-.16	.037*	02.9		
AWA_Yes → CHT	-.17	.020*	2.34		

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The summary of hypotheses testing is provided in Table 5. The relationship between attitude toward m-Mental Health and intention to use such apps was found to be highly significant, $\beta = .42$, $t = 6.17$, $p < .001$, thus confirming H1. Similarly, the significant strong association between Health Technology Efficacy and attitude toward mobile mental health provided support for H2, $\beta = .56$, $t = 10.30$, $p < .001$.

Furthermore, confirming H3 and H4 respectively, Health Technology Self-Efficacy had a significant positive relationship with Health Technology Efficacy, $\beta = .43$, $t = 6.81$, $p < .001$, as well as with the behavioural intention to use m-Mental Health, $\beta = .26$, $t = 4.27$, $p < .001$. Similarly, Health Technology Social Acceptance had a significant positive relationship with Health Technology Efficacy, confirming H5. On the other hand, Health Technology Social Acceptance was not significantly related to the intention to use m-Mental Health, $\beta = .10$, $t = 1.50$, $p = .133$; therefore, H6 was not supported.

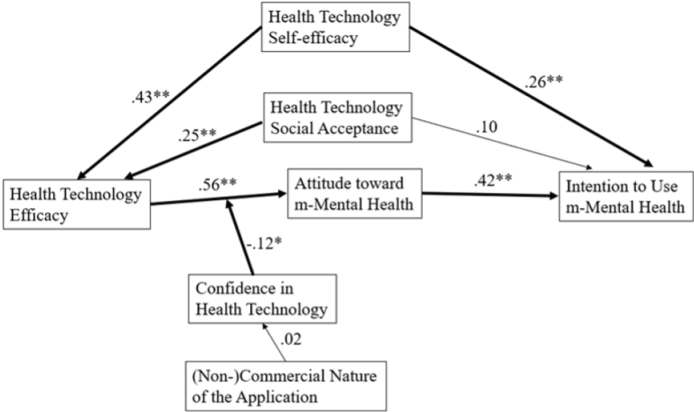
Table 5: Summary of hypotheses testing. Source: Author

Hypothesis	Relationship tested ²	β	p	Results
H1	ATT → BI	.42	.000	Supported
H2	HTE → ATT	.56	.000	Supported
H3	HTSE → HTE	.43	.000	Supported
H4	HTSE → BI	.26	.000	Supported
H5	HTSA → HTE	.25	.000	Supported
H6	HTSA → BI	.10	.133	Not supported
H7	Moderation	-.12	.008	Not supported
H8	(Non-)Com → CHT	.02	.812	Not supported

2 ATT: Attitude toward m-Mental Health; BI: Intention to Use m-Mental Health; HTSA: Health Technology Social Acceptance; HTSE: Health Technology Self-Efficacy; HTE: Health Technology Efficacy; EHL: e-Health Literacy; CHT: Confidence in Health Technology; (Non-)Com: (Non-)Commercial Nature of an App; USE_IpW: used an m-Mental Health app once per week in the past six months; USE_Never: never used an m-Mental Health app; USE_NotIn6m: did not use an m-Mental Health app in the past six months; AWA_Yes: knows some specific m-Mental Health apps

Figure 3 offers a visual depiction of the main results by showing path coefficients along with their level of significance.

Figure 3: Conceptual model with main results. Source: Author



* $p < .01$, ** $p < .001$

The moderating relationship between Confidence in Health Technology and Health Technology Efficacy in predicting the attitude toward m-Mental Health was found to be significant, $\beta = -.12$, $t = 2.68$, $p = .008$. However, contrary to H7's predicted positive direction, the negative beta-value revealed that increased Confidence in Health Technology in fact reduced Health Technology Efficacy's predictive power on attitudes towards m-Mental Health.

Finally, the effect of the (Non-)Commercial Nature of an App was insignificant, $\beta = .02$, $t = 0.24$, $p = .812$, hence no support was found for H8.

DISCUSSION

This study explores the drivers of m-Mental Health uptake among emerging adults. It strives to contribute to both academic and practical developments in this promising area of mental health treatment and prevention by generating a comprehensive quantitative insight into the factors related to emerging adults' intentions to use or not use m-Mental Health tools. To complete this objective, the study bridges theoretical models and concepts from technology acceptance and health communication studies, creates a new complex model grounded in the context of mental health and mobile health applications, and tests the model with a population which could largely benefit from more widespread adoption of m-Mental Health – young

adults. Another important objective of the study was to investigate the potential moderating role of privacy and safety concerns about m-Mental Health, which were hypothesized to be higher for commercial applications.

The proposed model accounted for significant variance in usage intentions and the significant paths were in line with both theory and previous studies. The findings suggest that when emerging adults are to decide whether or not to use an app to prevent or improve their mental well-being, several factors come into play: Perceived efficacy of the app, positively linked with one's self-efficacy (H3) and social influence (H5), predicts behavioural intention through the attitude toward m-Mental Health (H2 & H1), while health technology self-efficacy is also directly related to the intention to use such an app (H4). In other words, a young adult's beliefs about the helpfulness of an m-Mental Health app positively predict the young adult's intention to use the app through their attitude toward it. These helpfulness beliefs are more positive if the young adult perceives the app as commonly used by others and if they think they could easily use it for their mental health benefit, which is a decision-making factor that is also directly linked to intentions to use the app.

Moreover, a significant moderation by the newly developed Confidence in Health Technology variable was found, but its direction was the opposite than hypothesized: Higher trust in m-Mental Health predicted a weaker relationship between the respondents' beliefs about the efficacy of m-Mental Health and their attitudes toward such tools. The unexpected direction of the moderation suggests need for more thorough theoretical exploration in order to accurately place this novel variable in such a complex model. With stigma- and privacy-related fears being identified as major obstacles to young people's help-seeking regarding their mental health in prior research (Kim et al., 2022; Mitchell et al., 2017), the role of emerging adults' trust in m-Mental Health apps in their uptake of such tools ought to be investigated further.

Interestingly, the study failed to deliver supportive evidence for the assumed effect of the (non-)commercial nature of an m-Mental Health app on the privacy and safety concerns it arouses in emerging adults. Given the predominantly cross-sectional nature of the data, this was the only causal relationship tested in the model. By not supporting it, this study disconfirmed the assumption that young people would be less confident in the app if they were confronted with signs of its profit-driven origin. However, the lack of a pre-test and attention check made it impossible to fully verify the effectiveness of the manipulation - a failed manipulation can be deemed a quite likely explanation of the lack of significant results in this part of the model.

One possible cause of an unsuccessful manipulation could be the design which relied on the respondents actively thinking about the randomly assigned vignette with a specific example app throughout the survey while answering questions about m-Mental Health apps in general. Another viable explanation could be that the negatively worded survey items did not accurately capture the positively worded concept of Confidence in Health Technology, i.e. that the lack of concerns about m-Mental Health might not necessarily imply the presence of trust in m-Mental Health.

A major limitation was the participants' general unfamiliarity with specific m-Mental Health apps, which makes the findings bound to apps designed to increase overall mental wellness through daily stress self-management (based on the app descriptions provided in the survey). Another important limitation is the rather low reliability of many of the scales, which could have impacted the results. The most likely reason behind the low reliability is inadequate scale length, caused by the combination of a complex model, accompanied by several control variables, and the study's ambition to obtain a relatively high number of online respondents from a population which could be easily deterred by a very extensive survey. The short scale length might have also caused low internal consistency, as many of the variables were newly created as a merger of overlapping yet still distinctive concepts. While efforts were made to ensure content validity through careful, theory-informed item selection, the ad hoc nature of scale development may have contributed to lower internal reliability. It is desirable for future research to develop and validate more robust multi-item scales with higher reliability that would enable a more confident interpretation of the findings.

Identifying key uptake drivers offers practical value for m-Mental Health practitioners aiming to improve app engagement among young adults. Despite limited app awareness, participants exhibited readiness to use m-Mental Health solutions. Identifying the most influential uptake factors may help both commercial and non-commercial practitioners translate the past decade's boom in m-Mental Health (Powell, 2016) into actual usage growth. However, because this study analyzed data collected in 2019 and the m-Mental Health industry has substantially transformed since then (Ding et al., 2023), the findings of this study should be read and applied with caution.

Future studies should focus on in-depth qualitative, as well as follow-up quantitative investigations into privacy and safety concerns, potentially re-defining how these factors are modeled in health technology research and practice. It would also be interesting to assess the role of privacy concerns in the uptake of other highly confidential e-Health areas such as women's health apps.

CONCLUSION

Despite being often listed among the main contributors to the deteriorative mental well-being of emerging adults nowadays, smartphones offer vast potential in the field of preventing or treating mental health issues. The study advanced m-Mental Health research and practice by delivering a comprehensive exploration of uptake determinants and introducing a novel variable, Confidence in Health Technology. A PLS-SEM analysis of 229 online survey responses by adults aged 19-28 reported solid predictive power of the newly developed model, grounded in both technology acceptance and health communication theories. The findings can inform the efforts of m-Mental Health providers to utilize the potential of the generally positive attitudes of emerging adults toward apps for mental well-being. Future research should provide in-depth exploration of the role of privacy and security concerns to shed more light on the various roles they might play in m-Mental Health uptake and other highly sensitive areas of e-Health.

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NEWS SHARING ON FACEBOOK: SOCIAL MEDIA EFFECTS ON NEWS SELECTION IN SPORTS JOURNALISM

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ABSTRACT

Social media audiences and their preferences, as represented in social media analytics results, tend to replace the traditional gatekeeping factors. This new role of the audiences, which have taken on the task of secondary gatekeeping or gatewatching, creates a challenge to the newsrooms. It weakens the sports media in a fragile balance of power against athletes and sports organizations. This paper applies the news values concept, which is elementary for the research of news selection, to social media news-sharing practices. The analysis performed on the 2021 content of the Facebook pages of Czech traditional sports media shows that ethnocentric success, celebrity, competition status, and human interest are among the most prominent news factors for the top shared posts. The weakened newsrooms may tend to adopt these patterns that correspond to the priorities of a loud and formidable layer of social media users, i.e., sports fans. Enhancing sports journalists' own fandom can adversely affect current processes and disrupt the identity of sports journalism itself.

KEYWORDS

social media • sports journalism • news values • news gap • Facebook

INTRODUCTION

As a result of the rise of digital media, journalism (Pavlik, 2000) has experienced fundamental challenges – and changes. Additionally, the communication process has further developed due to the evolution of social media. People have found new access to news channels, and they have become more active players in the communication processes, including their roles in gatekeeping and news sharing. Instead of traditional news media usage (newspapers, radio, television, and their Internet platforms), the majority of people now read the news on social media. In 2015, Newman et al.'s (2015) report showed that two-thirds of Facebook users used the platform as a news source. Bergström and Jervelycke Belfrage (2018) found that 91 percent of people between 16 and 25 years of age read the news on social media. Being successful on social media has become crucial for traditional media corporations, and this aspect has influenced the practices in the production of media content, including news. The development of social media meant significant infringement of the power of traditional media and the establishment of new power relations between communication actors (Broersma & Eldridge, 2019).

After the introduction of social media, new multilayered features were added to communication culture (Humayun & Ferrucci, 2022), and at least two of them have affected the notion of media audiences. New platforms provided publishers and researchers with a chance to approach new data regarding media content reception. Web analytical tools replaced the vague ideas that publishers and journalists had about their audiences based on contact with familiar recipients and unrepresentative and partial responses from the unknown public, such as mailed individual reactions (Sullivan, 2019; Turnbull, 2020). Seeing what audiences like, share, or comment on their social media, together with present-day automated data collection and analytical tools changed, the idea of the audience (Hanusch & Tandoc, 2019; Tandoc et al., 2021). The audience, on the other hand, got a chance to demonstrate their active approach to the news flow. Bruns (2007) named the activity that was made available to the users through social media 'produsage'. The tracking of social media use and users' responses has become an integral part of journalistic routines, so mastering them is required for any journalist or media professional (Bossio, 2017) because it contributes to the evaluation of their professional qualities (Papanagnou, 2023).

1. SOCIAL MEDIA EFFECTS ON GATEKEEPING PRACTICES

One of the most important duties journalists have is defining and deciding what content is suitable for the limited space available on the newspapers' pages or for a slot in a broadcasting time. The gatekeeping procedures

(Shoemaker & Reese, 2014; Vos, 2009) are based on an evaluation of any real-world event or any topic that comes to the newsroom processes. The editors, in their role as gatekeepers, judge various aspects of the events and topics and then decide what is and what is not newsworthy. The complex criteria and characteristics assessed in this process were named 'news values'.

The concept of news values was first introduced by Galtung and Ruge (1965) for the research of reporting on international conflicts. The theory was developed by various authors. Nowadays, the constructed – and constructive – nature of the news values is emphasized, as the news values serve to construct the mediated reality while they are themselves constructed in the news discourse (Caple & Bednarek, 2015). When any event is assessed as having a high news value and is selected to be published in the respective media, the final story is developed and framed so that the news factors constituting the high news value are highlighted in the text to dominate the discourse.

A new development in the research of news values has occurred with the introduction of the audiences' preferences to the news selection. While shareability – the suitability to be shared in digital or social media – has been included among the news factors by Harcup and O'Neill (2017), it has been studied more often from within media contents (Trilling et al., 2017). The new tools of web analytics and social media analytics became available for news values research and helped create a new notion of audiences' preferences (Paulussen & Aelst, 2021). As soon as the first analyses of shareability were conducted, the relationship between the shareability of news items on social media and traditional news values was verified (Bednarek, 2016). On the other hand, the researchers found that the audiences' preferences (shareworthiness) and journalists' selection (newsworthiness) did not exactly overlap. Boczkowski and Mitchelstein (2013) called this phenomenon 'the news gap'. This gap has consequences for the perception of specific types of news (Bright, 2016) and can be an important factor in the audience's decreasing level of trust in the media (Nelson, 2021). The uneasy debate on whether the media should succumb to the audiences' preferences or follow their journalistic logic that is important to their journalistic identity (Nelson, 2021; Tandoc et al., 2021) began long ago but has become more critical with the delivery of social media.

As of today, when the web and social media analytics data are available almost in real-time, the news gap problem backfires on journalistic routines. Web analytics often replace the editorial discussions of newsworthiness in the newsrooms and it brings up the question of whether the elementary principles of journalism are still being applied (Tandoc et al., 2021). The findings and the newly identified trends have led to the formula-

tion of a theory according to which the audience itself assumes the role of gatekeepers (Landis & Allen, 2022; Vu, 2014). While Singer (2014) called it 'secondary gatekeeping', Bruns (2003) described the activity of the online media users as 'gatewatching' – a principle on which the major task is not to block some stories from being shared, but on the contrary, to promote selected stories for further sharing.

Moreover, in recent years, there has been a significant increase in news avoidance, with many individuals actively disengaging from traditional news media such as television, radio, and print. This trend is particularly pronounced among younger demographics, who are increasingly turning to social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram for their news consumption. The Reuters Institute's Digital News Report 2024 (Newman et al., 2024) highlights that while Facebook remains a notable source of news, its usage has been in long-term decline, with weekly access dropping from 42% to 28% over the past seven years. Conversely, platforms like TikTok have seen a surge in popularity among younger audiences, with 20% of 18- to 24-year-olds using TikTok for news, up from 15% the previous year. This shift suggests that younger users prefer platforms offering a more personalized, participatory, and engaging news experience, often curated by influencers and content creators rather than traditional news outlets. Toff et al. (2024) described the systemic causes of news avoidance on the audience's side, but gaps in evaluating the media's responses to news avoidance persist (Andersen et al., 2024). This evolution in news consumption habits underscores the need for traditional news organizations to adapt their strategies to engage audiences, especially of young age, effectively. Palmer and Edgerly (2024) studied the journalists' attitudes towards avoiding or reducing news avoidance, concluding that they fail to target structural causes. The phenomenon of news avoidance is multi-layered, and so some researchers (e.g., Villi et al., 2021; Tian, 2022) argue that the process of news avoidance can be culture-dependent and does not necessarily apply to each individual (even in the same age group) the same way.

Thus, the news selection process has become more vulnerable to any disruptions of the routines caused by the social media audiences' response. The gatekeeping procedures in sports journalism have been greatly affected by social media, not only by the audience's response but also by the individual journalists' social media presentation (English, 2017). Moreover, for the sports actors (e.g., athletes, sports organizations), social media serves as a direct channel to bypass the gatekeeping of the traditional media, further undermining their significance, although still maintaining the complementarity between the two (Nölleke et al., 2017). Being dependent on a strictly regular sports calendar, sports journalism is seen as even more

routinized than general journalism (Washburn & Lamb, 2020), and thus, the news selection process is even more vulnerable to any disruption of these routines.

2. SOCIAL MEDIA, SPORTS MEDIA, AND SPORTS JOURNALISM

Throughout the history of modern sports, the media have played a crucial role in shaping sports culture while simultaneously benefiting from the audiences that sports attract. Rowe (2008, 2011) refers to this interdependent relationship as the ‘media sports cultural complex,’ highlighting the mutual benefits and symbiosis between sports and media. The impact of social media on sports (Abeza et al., 2021; Abeza & Sanderson, 2023), sports fans (Kim et al., 2020), sports media, and sports journalism, is comparable to its effect on media and journalism in general (Boyle, 2021; English, 2014). Social media added new voices to sports communication, including fans and athletes, both strengthening and challenging the dominant discourse of hypermasculinity (Antunovic, 2022). The disruptive effects of social media usage on sports journalists’ integrity have been described long ago (Reed, 2011). The sports world is also acclimating to the new environment (Miah, 2017); however, as the power balance is fragile, any weakening of sports media means that the equilibrium is disrupted in favor of sponsors and sports organizations (Boyle & Haynes, 2013; Rowe, 2008). Sports journalists deal with competition from the athlete’s or club’s media and fan blogs while struggling to establish or maintain their unique legitimacy and protecting their gatekeeping role (McEnnis, 2022). Wiske and Horky (2021) named interaction and social media agenda setting, data-driven content, loss of the sports media gatekeeping function, and entry of new players as the most significant sports journalism challenges caused by the development of social and digital media in general.

As far as news selection in sports journalism is concerned, Loosen (1998; Loosen & Ravenstein, 2000) applied news values research to this discipline of journalism. Although there were several later attempts to deepen the analysis further, they were more like individual ones – Ihle’s studies (2018, 2022; Rehbach et al., 2016) or Lee and Choi’s (2009) application of Shoemaker’s (1987) concept of significance and deviance as news values in soccer journalism – these can hardly be described as a continuous interest in newsworthiness and news values research of sports events.

We consider the news gap in sports journalism, as it manifests on social media, to be a topic worthy of research. This study aims to examine and understand variations in news selection within social media stories. Given that news values traditionally represent the criteria for news selection,

they also serve as a valid framework for analyzing the news selection process, both in general and specifically within social media contexts.

It is clear that reasons for creating common users' social media posts vary, and they are mostly very different from what the journalists consider in their news selection; in fact, this is logically the source of the news gap. Many studies explore the reasons for sharing social media posts, even for the news stories in detail. In summary of these studies, Hermida (2014) and Martin and Dwyer (2019) concluded that the most important reasons for social media news sharing include, among others, entertainment, informativeness, socializing with others, maintaining relationships, status-seeking, criticism, promoting one's own opinions, political activation, seeking help. There are also examples of studies, like Diez-Gracia and Sanchez-García (2022) or de León and Vermeer (2023), that use the data from social media analysis to assess specifically the depth of a news gap. Park and Kaye (2021) conducted research to compare Shoemaker's (1987) news values of significance and deviance between the most liked and most shared posts of traditional Korean media.

For the news values analysis, we followed the theoretical framework of the two-component theory of news values, created by Kepplinger (1998; Kepplinger & Ehlig, 2006). According to the theory, there are specific news factors attributable to any event. While these factors are less influenced by the type of media, organizational preferences, interests, and others, they are strongly influential on the news selection processes in newsrooms, including the individual preferences of the editor (comp. with Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). The evaluation of the sum of news factors in the specific environment of the medium then establishes the specific news value of the event that determines if the event is or is not included in the media content.

All these statements are applicable to the situation in the Czech Republic. Although it is a small central European country, it has a rich sports legacy with a relatively extensive base of popular sports led by football (soccer) and ice hockey, supplemented by tennis, track and field, and others (Osborne et al., 2023). The media system in the Czech Republic is affected by manifestations of a post-communist and post-transformation era, including the onset of 'oligarchization' (Volek, 2022). The first Czech newspapers' sports sections were established in the first half of the 19th century (Lukšů, 2022), setting the tradition of sports media in Czechoslovakia, which has continued in the Czech Republic through a variety of services in traditional print and broadcasting media as well as new digital media, both specialized only in sports and providing sports related information inside a full-format service.

For our research on news values and social media in the Czech Republic, our research question is:

- *For the Facebook profiles of Czech sports media, is there any significant difference in the news factors of highly shared and low shared posts?*

3. METHOD

Multiple research methods are used for news values research; this methodological pluralism (Mast & Temmerman, 2021) offers scientists a free choice between the tools applicable to any specific research question. Since this study is grounded in the two-component theory of news values, we have followed the relevant methodological German tradition of news values theory and research, which relies on quantitative content analysis as the primary method (Maier et al., 2018).

As Facebook is still the most popular social media platform in the Czech Republic despite the progress of Instagram, Pinterest, and TikTok (MediaGuru.cz, 2022), we chose Facebook and its pages of Czech traditional sports media or sports section of full-format media as the source of the material to be analyzed. The four different Facebook pages selected cover a wide and variable spectrum of the media production of sports journalism in the Czech Republic. ČT sport is a sports television channel, one of the six channels of the Czech national public broadcaster Czech Television. Nova Sport is a family of sports channels of the commercial television TV Nova. iSport is a website of a specialized sports daily Sport, and Sport iDNES is a sports section of a website iDNES.cz, which is an online project of the full-format daily newspaper MF DNES.

The basic set of data contained all posts from the period from June to December 2021, collected with the Crowdtangle.com tool on January 3, 2022. The overview of the posts selected into the basic set is described in Table 1.

Table 1: The basic set of Facebook posts and their users' shares.

Source: Authors processing

Facebook page	Number of posts	Average number of likes	Average number of shares	% of non-shared posts
ČT sport	3,861	564.56	19.94	26.24 %
iSport	9,328	88.88	3.17	48.48 %
Nova Sport	2,762	125.21	5.49	44.79 %
Sport iDNES	2,243	169.87	4.36	47.97 %
Total	18,194	205.32	7.23	43.14 %

As our tool for categorization of posts, we chose the posts' sharing instead of liking or commenting because it best represents secondary gatekeep-

ing or gatewatching. As demonstrated in Table 1, a significant number of posts were not shared at all. The data obtained from the four pages via Crowdtangle.com indicates that the frequency of sharing is a minor activity compared to liking. Except for the ČT sport Facebook page, the average varies between three and six shares per post, and almost half of the posts were not shared by anyone. The difference between the ČT sport page and the three others stems from the fact that the ČT sport page had approximately 2.5 times more fans than the other three pages at the time of data collection. However, just like the other pages, the ČT sport page exhibited a very uneven distribution of sharing of posts, the majority of them having only a low single-digit number of shares.

These characteristics were considered when we constructed the analysis sample. As we wanted to compare the highly shared posts with lowly shared posts, we divided the basic set into three parts: the top decile of the most frequently shared posts, the lower 75 percent of posts with no or low shares, and the remaining 15 percent of medium-shared posts that we were not interested in. The size of the low-sharing subset was determined by the frequency of non-shared posts in the sample, as we wanted to include at least some of the low-shared samples besides the non-shared ones.

From every sub-set, a computer random numbers generator was used to select 100 posts for the research sample of 800 posts, 400 with a high number of shares and 400 with a low number of shares. Table 2 describes the final research sample.

Table 2: Description of the analyzed sample. Source: Authors processing

Facebook page	Posts with high shares		Posts with low shares	
	Number	Average of shares	Number	Average of shares
ČT sport	100	118.15	100	1.78
iSport	100	18.62	100	0.28
Nova Sport	100	37.26	100	0.64
Sport iDNES	100	31.71	100	0.60
Total	400	51.44	400	0.83

All posts were tested for 14 news factors. The list of factors and codebook was created based on the founding work of Loosen (1998), who then, for her analysis, applied the news factors lists elaborated for the political or general news media. However, Loosen and Ravenstein (2000) stressed the importance of a specific approach to the general or political media news factors (for an exemplary summary of general media news factors lists, see

Caple & Bednarek, 2013) when analyzing sports journalism naming three procedures to be combined when constructing the news factors list for analysis of sports journalism: leaving the adopted news factors unmodified when possible, modifying the definition of adopted news factors that need to be redefined specifically for sports journalism, and adding new news factors specific to sports journalism.

Inspired by these remarks, a pre-graduate theses by Winnebeck (2010), and own-conducted interviews with the editors of Czech sports media regarding the news selection processes (Langer, 2021), we created the list of 14 news factors: timeliness, time form, proximity, ethnocentrism, facticity, controversy, rule violation, personalization, celebrity, human interest, sport status, competition status, ethnocentric success, and ethnocentric failure. All factors were coded on a four-point scale, from the lowest (or none) level of the factor coded 1 to the highest level coded 4, although there are exceptions in the coding as described in more detail in Table 3.

Table 3: List of news factors for the analysis. Source: Authors processing

News factor	Definition, description, coding
Timeliness	What is the length of the time period of the event (competition)
	4 – 1 day
	3 – several days (to two weeks)
	2 – long period (months, years)
Time form	1 – no definitive time period connected
	The time when the event (competition) takes place
	4 – today
	3 – yesterday
Proximity	2 – before yesterday
	1 – in the future
	The proximity of the location of event to the Czech Republic.
	4 – event in the Czech Republic
Ethnocentrism	3 – event in Europe
	2 – event in North America or Asia
	1 – event in South America, Africa or Australia
	The relation of the depicted event to the Czech Republic
Facticity	4 – event in the Czech Republic with participation of a Czech or Czechs (a Czech participant)
	3 – event outside the Czech Republic with a Czech participant
	2 – event in the Czech Republic without a Czech participant
	1 – event outside the Czech Republic without a Czech participant
	Does the post deal with facts or opinions (of actors)?
	4 – almost exclusively facts
	3 – mostly facts
	2 – mostly opinions
	1 – almost exclusively opinions

Controversy	Does the post contain information about a controversy or conflict between the participants? 4 – big controversy 3 – medium controversy 2 – small controversy 1 – no controversy
Rule violation	Does the post contain information about a rule violation? As the rules, the sports rules as well as the civil norms and laws are taken into account. 4 – severe violation 3 – moderate violation 2 – minor violation 1 – no violation
Personalization	Does the post name specific people, general group or impersonal phenomena? 4 – post names at least one participant by name 3 – post names at least one participant by his function (e. g. coach, referee, young footballer) 2 – post names a group of people (e. g. club players, fans, men) 1 – post names only impersonal actors or institutions (e. g. football union, club, also natural forces or social phenomena)
Celebrity	Does any sports celebrity act in the event? 4 – big celebrity (personality known even in the audiences that rarely follows sports) 3 – medium celebrity (personality known in sports environment, the star of his or her sport) 2 – minor celebrity (personality regularly celebrated in his or her sport, exceptionally labeled a star) 1 – no celebrity
Human interest	Does the post deal with sports or with out-of-sports (personal, family, social etc.) circumstances of the actors' story? 4 – the post deals almost exclusively with an out-of-sports (human interest) dimension 3 – the post deals predominantly with an out-of-sports dimension 2 – the post deals predominantly with a sports dimension 1 – the post deals almost exclusively with a sports dimension
Sport status	Social status of the sport 4 – highest status (like football/soccer, ice hockey, tennis, formula 1) 1 – low or no status (minor non-olympic sports)
Competition status	Social status of the competition. 4 – highest status (like the Olympics, world or continental championships) 3 – middle high status (widely respected international competitions) 2 – middle low status (national competitions) 1 – low status (local competitions)
Ethnocentric success	Does the story include information about the success of a Czech participant? The success is evaluated for the strength of the opponent, quality of competition, partiality or finality of the result etc.) 4 – big success 3 – middle success 2 – small success 1 – no success
Ethnocentric failure	Does the story include information about the failure of a Czech participant? 4 – big failure 3 – middle failure 2 – small failure 1 – no failure

Although the discussion of the coded news factors is not a focus point of this paper, we should stress that not only are the individual news factors of any story media-constructed, but also many of the general definitions are media-constructed, such as the celebrity status of actors and social status of a specific sport or competition. This is also one of the reasons why news factors are not universal; on the contrary, they are culture-dependent, as Galtung and Ruge (1965) have mentioned.

As requested by Loosen and Ravenstein (2000), the news factors were modified to suit the area of sports journalism. From the list of news factors, timeliness, time form, ethnocentrism, facticity, controversy, and personalization are the values that were adopted similarly to the general media news values analysis. The definitions of proximity, rule violations, and celebrity were modified to emphasize the sports aspect of the factors. As completely new news factors, human interest, sport status, competition status, ethnocentric success, and ethnocentric failure were introduced.

The authors of the paper conducted all the coding. A random sub-set of 80 items (10 % of the data) was coded by both authors to test the coding reliability. The inter-coder reliability was measured using Krippendorff's alpha with the result values ranging from 0.80 for factor of human interest to 1.00 for sport status, that proves sufficient inter-coder reliability.

As all the data have nominal or ordinal character, the results were tested by chi-square tests of equality, one-by-one news factor.

4. RESULTS

Analysis proved that some of the news factors are present with a different distribution in the set of posts with high shares. Table 4 presents the results of the tests, with the detailed results included for individual factors where the difference between both groups of posts was found by chi-square test on a 0.05 significance level.

Many significant differences between posts with high number shares and posts with low number of shares were identified. For seven news factors, the significance of the difference was under 0.01.

Of the sports-specific news factors, two were high determinants of higher sharing, competition status, and, especially, ethnocentric success: When the Czech Republic or Czech athletes record a big or at least a medium success that is described in the post, it is much more likely to be frequently shared among the users. In the sample of 243 high-shared posts within the sample (excluding the missing values for posts with no Czech participation), there were 79 medium to high ethnocentric success posts (32.5 %) in contrast to 31 medium to high ethnocentric success posts among 229 low-shared posts (13.5 %).

Table 4: Results of the test of equality between the highly shared and lowly shared posts. Source: Authors processing

News factor	N	Chi-square	Sign.	Differences among the individual factors for posts with high shares			
				adj. resid. for value 4	adj. resid. for value 3	adj. resid. for value 2	adj. resid. for value 1
Timeliness	759	3.89	.274				
Time form	758	12.48	.006***	today -3.55 ▼	yesterday +3.28 ▲	before +.58	future -.49
Proximity	782	2.23	.526				
Ethnocentrism	748	6.70	.082*				
Facticity	758	9.14	.027**	facts -2.74 ▼	+2.46 ▲	+.13	opinions -.81
Controversy	771	14.40	.002***	high controversy +2.52 ▲	+2.70 ▲	-.84	no controversy -1.90
Rule violation	764	14.20	.003***	severe violation -.03	+3.77 ▲	-.27	no violation -2.44 ▼
Personalization	776	5.49	.139				
Celebrity	772	17.19	.001***	high celebrity +2.07 ▲	+2.56 ▲	+.92	no celebrity -4.08 ▼
Human interest	764	14.83	.002***	mostly human interest +1.15	+3.40 ▲	-.42	mostly sport -3.08 ▼
Sport status	773	2.46	.482				
Competition status	660	15.54	.001***	high status +3.55 ▲	-3.28 ▼	-.58	low status -.49
Ethnocentric success	472	28.19	.000***	big success +3.49 ▲	+3.38 ▲	-.26	no success -3.90 ▼
Ethnocentric failure	476	04.9	.129				

* sign. < .1, ** sign. < .05, *** sign. < .01, ▲ adj. res. > +2, ▼ adj. res. < -2

If a given news value factor occurs significantly more often in the group of posts with high shares, it is marked with an upward arrow. Conversely, if the factor appears significantly less frequently, a downward arrow is used. For example, regarding the ‘ethnocentric success’ news factor, the highest two values (indicating major successes) appear significantly more often among highly shared posts, while the lowest value (indicating ‘no success’) is significantly less frequent. All differences are statistically significant at the 0.000 level. The rightmost four columns present differences in specific

news factors only for cases where the Chi-square test indicates statistical significance at the 0.05 level or lower.

Although for journalists, the Czech success stories are the most attractive, as proved in interviews with Czech sports editors (Langer, 2021), social media users are even more keen to share these stories. On the contrary, the difference for the news factor ethnocentrism was lower and closer to the threshold significance of 0.1 (more specifically, the posts with no Czech participation taking place outside the Czech Republic were more often in the low-shared group, with the adj. res. = +1.97), while there was no significant difference in sharing the posts according to the ethnocentric Czech failure.

For human interest stories, the most frequent sharing was in the group where human interest dominated, but some sports dimension was present. It is typical for stories published shortly after a big ethnocentric success, where the personal and professional stories of the respective successful athletes are presented to the audiences, usually in an attempt to explain the success.

The users also shared elite competitions related posts much more often than posts related to the regular international competitions (including the NHL and UEFA football European cups).

All these results may have been affected by the specificity of the 2021 June to December sample which included the 2020 UEFA Euro tournament, end of the 2021 IIHF World Championships in ice hockey and, most of all, the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympic Games. While in the Olympic Games the Czech team was unusually successful, it performed more or less as expected in the 2020 UEFA Euro and underperformed in the IIHF World Championships.

Users also shared sport celebrity related posts much more often than posts without any celebrity. Rules violations provoked higher number of shares in cases of moderate violations, which was a typical coding for the dispute between Czech and Scottish football teams and Czech and British media on racism issues that resonated extensively in Czech society and won high-share rates on social media.

DISCUSSION

The analysis confirms that there are general patterns of preferences in the news selection process of users who further share sports social media posts. The higher *shareability* of posts based on the presence of sports celebrities and ethnocentric success can be understood and described as a manifestation of fandom (Bradshaw & Minogue, 2019). It confirms that for sports fans, the factors that provoke their media usage patterns include those specific to the sports sphere, like fandom identity and identification (Koronios et al., 2020). Fandom group identification is one form of identity

construction processes, and these processes, described as ‘symbolic declaration of the self’ or ‘shaping how others see us’, are important functions of news sharing in general (Hermida, 2014, pp. 35, 36). It is yet another example of how the interconnected operation of mainstream sports media and fandom is mutually beneficial (Kim et al., 2020). Although only one part of the audience follows sports events with an intense fan interest and the other part is much less engaged (Crawford, 2004), it is reasonable to conclude that the higher *shareability* of social media posts is powered largely by the users inclined to fandom. The posts about the athletes’ successes – and especially of the successes of sports stars – with which the audience identifies achieve the best results in sharing statistics. They overperform the effect of other, generally accepted news factors. From the methodological point of view, that confirms the need to consider a specific repertoire of news factors for the specific types of journalism, as forecasted by Loosen and Ravenstein (2000) and as we did in this study.

The interpretation of the results must account for the fact that social media users engage with a media-constructed reality (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Loosen, 1998; Schulz, 1989), in which various events are allocated different levels of prominence based on editorial evaluations of news values — concepts that are themselves mediated constructs (Caple & Bednarek, 2015; Paulussen & Aelst, 2021). While this mediated reality reflects the preferences of media gatekeepers, the differences identified in this study reveal the autonomous preferences of the audience. Therefore, when the news values of highly shared posts differ from those of less shared posts, it indicates the presence of an existing or emerging news gap, which could lead to future disruptions in sports journalism practices. As the study is based on the audiences’ responses to the social media content, a more precise description of the audience is crucial because – as Turnbull (2020) pointed out – the definition of the audience is often a function of the research design. For this research, it is easier to describe what the true audience captured in our data is not rather than what it is. Facebook audiences, even those of the respective traditional media Facebook pages, overlap with the original audiences of the traditional media (the television or the newspapers), but they are not identical. Moreover, the individual post’s audience, although similar to the population of fans of the respective Facebook pages, is not the same either. The Facebook engine offers individual posts to a range of users that is difficult to define, where the interaction of the users, the hypertext functions, and other factors play their role in the Facebook algorithms (Lada et al., 2021). While there were multiple studies about what the algorithms present to audiences (e.g., Bandy & Diakopoulos, 2021, 2023), the attempts to describe actual algorithmic audiences (Gallagher, 2017)

were much less frequent. As Riemer and Peter (2021) put it, algorithms select the set of recipients for any message ad hoc. For these reasons it is hard to describe the relationship between the original audience of traditional media outlets and the audience of social media individual posts. For sports digital media, the connection between users' engagement and sports fandom is often mentioned (Kennedy et al., 2022; Lewis et al., 2017). This aligns with our findings that sports fandom-related characteristics of social media content are a positive factor for higher shareability.

The algorithms that provide the users with stories according to what they and their social media friends previously interacted with are, to some extent, black boxes whose functional parameters are not publicly available (Burns, 2017). The role of these algorithms is challenged by some authors who show that news consumption on social media might still be incidental and such opportunities for incidental news reading have increased lately (Park & Kaye, 2020), while other authors object that algorithmic selection of news in social media feeds undermines the reliability of the news media (Scheffauer et al., 2023). However, whatever the reason for displaying the post in an individual user's news feed, the means of attraction to such a news story is crucial not only for the recipients but also for the media.

The journalistic profession has begun to adopt the means of increasing the attractiveness of social media posts. Journalists have become more than just authors of the stories in their media; they also create short social media 'statuses'. In their few sentences, the author (or the editor, if the media outlet has a dedicated social media personnel) must grab the audience's attention through principles different from those that apply to traditional press headlines (Opgenhaffen, 2021). Although all four media we included in the research have independent teams of journalists for traditional media and social media, this is not the rule. For newsrooms where one team takes responsibility for both areas, the influence of the practice of using social media on the creation of traditional journalistic content is strengthened.

In sports journalism, the traditional journalistic identity is challenged even stronger. The socialization of journalists with regard to sports fandom is typical for sports journalists, especially for the male ones (Schoch & Ohl, 2021). Although while executing their jobs, they want to distance themselves from being sports fans (Reed, 2018), they are continuously under pressure to balance their position between objective journalism and the ever-growing sphere of journalists-like bloggers, publishing their fan-made sports blogs (McCarthy, 2014; McEnnis, 2021). This creates serious ethical challenges and opens sports journalists to criticism objecting against their proximity to the athletes and lack of objectivity (Bradshaw, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The shareability analysis of sports social media posts suggests that audiences specifically seek out and spread posts related to specific news factors, most notably celebrities and ethnocentric successes. In answering our research question, we identified these news factors as more common in Facebook posts that users share more frequently. If the traditional media continue their accommodation to the audience's preferences (Tandoc et al., 2021) and their effort to bridge the news gap (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2013; Bright, 2016), more of this fandom-related orientation can also be expected in their mediated content.

The results of this study can be seen as a prognosis of trending changes in preferences in news selection in the sports media that can have serious consequences for sports journalism and journalists' identity (English, 2014; Reed, 2011) and their gatekeeping role (McEnnis, 2022; Wise & Horky, 2021). Since we posed a research question concerning only the intensity of news values related to the shareability of Facebook posts, while we did not compare the representation of the topics in the original traditional media, we cannot state the existence or the severity of the news gap in sports journalism. We also did not study the actual effects of shareability statistics on journalism practices, neither through observations in newsrooms and through interviewing journalists nor in their manifestation in the shift in media content. There is also a lack of relevant data on traditional sports media content in the Czech Republic that could be compared with this paper's findings. That inadequate basis fundamentally leaves all these questions open for further discussion and research.

The main limitations of this research relate to the selection of one social media platform – Facebook – in one cultural environment of the Czech Republic. It is vital to understand that various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or TikTok provoke a different approach to what to share. As different readers consume different content on these platforms, so do the topics vary. For instance, in some European countries – e.g., Norway, Twitter is considered to be a place for sharing the hard news and is usually used for breaking news, whereas soft news would more likely be shared on Facebook (Kalsnes & Larsson, 2018). This may, of course, vary in different countries depending on various factors.

Little is known about traditional media's reaction to social media development, specifically in the Czech Republic. Eight years after its publishing, we can already evaluate the ground-breaking study of Hladík and Štětká (2017) as outdated, and further updates like Pavlíček (2022) provide only partial findings, however valuable they can be. Based on that little evidence,

we have no reason to dispute the general validity of the theory that social media metrics can lead to modifications in editorial processes to bridge the actual or presumed news gap.

Further research is necessary to enhance the insights provided by this initial study. Other social media besides Facebook should be studied, as well as other countries and cultural spaces, to evaluate if the findings presented in this study can be assumed culturally unconditioned and unrelated to the specific features of Facebook. And, for the more advanced stage of the discussion, the comparison between traditional media and social media contents, their prominence in terms of media outlets' attention, and users' shareability and likeability shall be studied, both in the framework of news value theory and in general. Asynchronous research studying the development of editorial practices and the identification of its dependency on the influence of social media users' behavior, using observation or survey questioning techniques, is another way to continue the research. With further findings, media studies can evaluate the actual level of the risk that social media usage and traditional media orientation to shareability statistics pose to sports journalistic independence.

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POLITIKA EXPORTU ČESKÉ HUDBY: INSTITUCIONÁLNÍ ANALÝZA EXPORTNÍ KANCELÁŘE SOUNDCZECH

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ABSTRAKT

Studie předkládá výsledky institucionální analýzy české hudební exportní kanceláře SoundCzech a identifikuje výzvy a rizika, kterým pracovníci kanceláře v současnosti čelí. Součástí analýzy je rovněž zkoumání vztahu mezi strategickými cíli kanceláře a kulturní politikou České republiky a Evropské Unie v hudební oblasti. V první části studie shrnujeme aktuální stav zkoumání hudebních exportních kancelářů a hudebního exportu v České republice. Ve druhé části popisujeme kulturní politiku EU a ČR v oblasti podpory mezinárodní cirkulace evropského kulturního obsahu. Ve třetí části analyzujeme fungování exportní hudební kanceláře SoundCzech, a to zejména z hlediska rizik a překážek, kterým zaměstnanci kanceláře čelí. Čtvrtá závěrečná část je zaměřena na rekonstrukci normativních principů a účinků fungování exportní kanceláře. Zdrojem dat jsou: národní a unijní legislativní a nelegislativní dokumenty týkající se internacionalizace kulturních odvětví a mezinárodní cirkulace kulturního obsahu; výzkumné rozhovory, které jsme vedli od března 2023 do října 2024 s pracovníky exportní kanceláře SoundCzech, externími spolupracovníky kanceláře, zástupci spolupracujících zahraničních exportních kancelářů, podpořenými českými hudebníky a zaměstnanci ministerstev, kteří mají na starosti agendu podpory a rozvoje kulturních odvětví v České republice; sekundární analýza dat získaných prostřednictvím dotazníkového šetření mezi podpořenými českými hudebníky a hudebními profesionály; oficiální a veřejně dostupné informace a strategické dokumenty exportní kanceláře; dvě zúčastněná pozorování při realizaci dílčích pracovních úkonů zaměstnanci kanceláře v průběhu let 2023 a 2024.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

hudební export • kulturní politika • hudební exportní kancelář •
institucionální analýza • SoundCzech

THE EXPORT POLICY OF CZECH MUSIC: AN INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE EXPORT OFFICE SOUNDCZECH

ABSTRACT

The study presents the results of an institutional analysis of the Czech music export office SoundCzech and identifies the challenges and risks currently faced by its staff. The analysis also includes an examination of the relationship between the office's strategic goals and the cultural policies of the Czech Republic and the European Union in the field of music. In the first part of the study, we summarize the current state of research on music export offices and music export in the Czech Republic. The second part describes the cultural policy of the EU and the Czech Republic regarding the support of international circulation of European cultural content. In the third part, we analyze the functioning of the Czech music export office, focusing primarily on the risks and barriers encountered by the office's employees. The fourth and final part focuses on reconstructing the normative principles and effects of the office's functioning. The data sources include national and EU legislative and non-legislative documents related to the internationalization of cultural industries and the international circulation of cultural content; research interviews conducted between March 2023 and October 2024 with SoundCzech staff, external collaborators of the office, representatives of partner foreign export offices, supported Czech musicians, and ministry employees responsible for the support and development of cultural industries in the Czech Republic; secondary data analysis obtained through a survey among supported Czech musicians and music professionals; official and publicly available information and strategic documents from the export office; and two participant observations during the execution of specific tasks by the office's employees throughout 2023 and 2024.

KEYWORDS

music export • cultural policy • music export office • institutional analysis • SoundCzech

ÚVOD

Exportní hudební kanceláře jsou relativně novým vynálezem kulturní politiky. Jejich založení ve východoevropských zemích v uplynulé dekádě (v ČR v roce 2017) bylo inspirováno modelem kanceláří ze západoevropských zemích, jako je Německo, Francie, Nizozemí a Belgie, které patří k prvním zemím Evropy, kde byly kanceláře zřizovány. Jejich zřizovatelem je ve většině případů stát či samosprávný územní celek, popř. nezisková organizace. Ideovým základem pro zakládání exportních hudebních kanceláří je přesvědčení, že vstup domácích hudebníků a domácího repertoáru na zahraniční trh vyžaduje státní či kulturně-politickou intervenci, a to zejména ze strany států, které nemají centrální postavení v rámci globálního hudebního trhu.¹ Tento názor převzaly postupně po vzoru západoevropských zemích i země střední a východní Evropy, které se nacházejí na periferní či semiperiferní pozici vůči centrům, kde jsou usazeni hlavní aktéři globálního hudebního trhu a kde je produkována globálně úspěšný (tj. anglo-americký) repertoár. Zřizovatelé kanceláří dále vychází z přesvědčení, že populární hudba není výlučnou záležitostí volného trhu a měla by se naopak stát součástí kulturní politiky státu, protože má exportní potenciál, který může sloužit k naplnění kulturních, zahraničních a ekonomických cílů příslušné země (Homan, 2015). Význam podpory exportu a internacionalizace domácího hudebního sektoru z veřejných zdrojů prostřednictvím exportních kanceláří v současnosti vzrostl rovněž v souvislosti s rozvojem globálních hudebních služeb na vyžádání, které umožňují globální šíření hudby s relativně nízkými „logistickými“ náklady a snadnou online komunikaci se zahraničním publikem. Internacionalizace představuje – vzhledem k nízkým sazbám licenčních odměn za streamování hudby (Tschmuck, 2022) – v rámci globalizovaného digitálního trhu s hudbou příležitost, jak mohou hudebníci z malého periferního či semiperiferního trhu navýšit svůj příjem z prodeje hudebních nahrávek a překonat omezenou velikost domácího trhu. Překračováním hranic malého periferního trhu, kterým je hudební trh v České republice, je překonávána jeho relativní omezenost, což pozitivně ovlivňuje příjmovou bilanci nejen hudebníků, ale i hudebních vydavatelů a nakladatelů. Exportní kanceláře se přitom stávají důležitým partnerem, který je v tomto jejich úsilí vstoupit na zahraniční trh podporuje, ať už formou poradenského servisu a networkingu či prostřednictvím finanční podpory jejich exportních aktivit. Narůstající význam exportních hudebních kanceláří reflektuje

1 Například v USA a Velké Británii exportní kanceláře nejsou zřízeny. Nicméně tamější organizace kolektivní správy (jako např. PRS) podporují prostřednictvím nadačních příspěvků domácí hudební talenty v rozvoji jejich profesních kariér.

rovněž vzrůstající zájem akademického výzkumu zaměřeného na analýzu jejich fungování (Chen et al., 2021; Homan, 2015).

Hlavním cílem naší studie je provést institucionální analýzu fungování české hudební exportní kanceláře SoundCzech a identifikovat výzvy a rizika, kterým pracovníci kanceláře v současnosti čelí. Součástí analýzy je rovněž zkoumání vztahu mezi strategickými cíli kanceláře a kulturní politikou ČR a EU v hudební oblasti. Konkrétně nás zajímá, zda a jakým způsobem ovlivňuje česká a evropská politika v oblasti internacionalizace kulturních odvětví a mezinárodní cirkulace evropského (zejména hudebního) obsahu strategické cíle kanceláře SoundCzech, která byla založena v roce 2017 jako součást Institutu umění, který je financován jako státní příspěvková organizace Ministerstvem kultury. Kancelář je financována Odborem umění, knihoven a literatury MK jako tzv. kulturní aktivita. Na financování prezentace české hudby v zahraničí (na festivalech a veletržích) se podílí rovněž Odbor mezinárodních vztahů Ministerstva kultury. Rozpočet kanceláře ročně osciluje okolo 4,5 milionu korun českých a dotační podpora hudebních veletrhů činí v ročním průměru přibližně 1,4 milionu korun českých.² Mezi hlavní strategické cíle SoundCzech patří podporovat a propagovat české interprety v zahraničí, poskytovat odborné vzdělávání, prohlubovat spolupráci mezi zástupci českého hudebního odvětví, propojovat tuzemské profesionály s mezinárodní hudební scénou a vytvořit informační platformu pro českou hudební sféru.³

Studie má čtyři části. Zatímco první dvě části poskytují širší teoretický a kulturně-politický kontext pro analýzu, třetí a čtvrtá část shrnují výsledky analýzy. V první části shrnujeme aktuální stav zkoumání hudebních exportních kanceláří a hudebního exportu v České republice. Ve druhé části popisujeme kulturní politiku EU a ČR v oblasti podpory mezinárodní cirkulace evropského kulturního (hudebního) obsahu. Ve třetí části analyzujeme fungování exportní hudební kanceláře SoundCzech, a to zejména z hlediska rizik a překážek, kterým zaměstnanci kanceláře čelí. Reflektujeme zde rovněž na vliv unijní a národní kulturní politiky na strategickou agendu kanceláře. Čtvrtá závěrečná část poukazuje na normativní principy a účinky fungování exportní kanceláře.

Zdrojem dat jsou: (a) národní a unijní legislativní a nelegislativní dokumenty týkající se internacionalizace kulturních odvětví a mezinárodní, resp. celoevropské cirkulace kulturního (zejména hudebního) obsahu;

2 V rámci výzev Národního plánu obnovy SoundCzech získal navíc podporu pro mobility v rámci výzvy Ministerstva kultury, a to v roce 2022 v hodnotě 1 125 000 Kč a v roce 2023 v hodnotě 8 135 000 Kč (více viz IDU, 2023, s. 58).

3 Více viz SoundCzech, 2020a.

(b) výzkumné rozhovory, které jsme vedli od března 2023 do října 2024 s pracovníky exportní kanceláře SoundCzech (celkem 4), externími spolupracovníky kanceláře (6), zástupci spolupracujících zahraničních exportních kancelář (7), podpořenými českými hudebníky (8) a zaměstnanci ministerstev, kteří mají na starosti agendu podpory a rozvoje kulturních odvětví v České republice (2); (c) dotazníkové šetření, které pracovníci kanceláře realizovali mezi podpořenými českými hudebníky a hudebními profesionály za účelem získání zpětné vazby v rozmezí let 2022 až 2024; (d) oficiální a veřejně dostupné informace a strategické dokumenty exportní kanceláře; (e) dvě zúčastněná pozorování, a to při zajišťování zpětné vazby od podpořených umělců, hudebních profesionálů a zástupců zahraničních exportních kancelář (v délce jednoho měsíce) a během nepravdivé spolupráce s pracovníky kanceláře na výzkumu exportu české hudby v průběhu let 2023 a 2024.

Důvodem triangulace dat z různých datových zdrojů a triangulace odlišných technik jejich sběru bylo překonání metodické jednostrannosti, kterou by představovalo omezení výzkumu na sérii výzkumných rozhovorů vedených s relativně omezenou a homogenní profesní skupinou informantů (např. s pracovníky exportní kanceláře). Na obecné metodologické rovině jsme totiž řešili dilema, zda data získaná z rozhovorů dokládají rétorické strategie institucionálních aktérů a stávají se tak v podobě jazykových výpovědí předmětem samotného výzkumu, nebo naopak poskytují výzkumníkům vhled do toho, jak se věci skutečně mají (viz např. Taylor, 2001). Ostatně lidé často mění své názory na minulé události a nejsou často schopni reflektovat na fenomény, které považují za samozřejmé a nedokážou rovněž reflektovat na události, které jsou příliš komplexní či tvoří neuvědomovanou součást jejich pracovního života. Naše metodické stanovisko vychází z přesvědčení, že při pečlivé kontextualizaci a pozorné analýze výzkumných rozhovorů tento typ dat informuje nejen o užitých (rétorických či diskurzivních) strategiích institucionální práce, ale také o skutečnostech, které jsou předmětem rozhovoru. Z výše uvedených důvodů jsme se uchýlili k různým technikám sběru kvalitativních dat a do výzkumného vzorku informantů jsme zahrnuli zástupce hudebního průmyslu, kteří v něm zastávají odlišné pozice a zároveň je pro ně činnost hudební exportní kanceláře nějakým způsobem relevantní. Rozhovory se zástupci rozmanitých zájmových skupin hudebního pole a data z dotazníkového šetření nám umožnily konfrontovat a ověřovat výpovědi informantů. Metoda zúčastněného pozorování nám umožnila zachytit nediskurzivní aspekty institucionální práce zaměstnanců kanceláře a pozorovat je v rozmanitých pracovních situacích a zachytit tak jejich postoje a chování. Studium oficiálních dokumentů a strategií nám umožnilo

kontextualizovat výpovědi informantů. Při vyhodnocování získaných dat jakožto zdrojů informací o referovaných fenoménech jsme v neposlední řadě vycházeli z vlastní odborné zkušenosti a odborných znalostí o povaze práce v kulturních průmyslech a institucích. Dodejme, že kvalitativní data získaná z výzkumných rozhovorů a dotazníkového šetření jsme podrobili tematické analýze (Braun & Clarke, 2006), jejíž výsledky předkládáme v odd. 3 a 4.

1. VÝZKUM EXPORTU ČESKÉ HUDBY A EXPORTNÍCH KANCELÁŘÍ V POSTKOMUNISTICKÝCH ZEMÍCH STŘEDNÍ A VÝCHODNÍ EVROPY

Překážkám exportu české hudby je věnována ojedinělá studie (Elavsky, 2011) analyzující postavení české populární hudby po roce 1989 v rámci mezinárodního hudebního trhu, který ovládají majors a jejich lokální pobočky. Její autor upozorňuje – na základě vlastního etnografického pozorování a rozhovorů vedených s hudebníky a představiteli hudebních vydavatelství – na to, že národní pobočky majors jsou sice nápomocné lokálním umělcům v dosažení úspěchu na domácím trhu, ale již nedokážou domácím umělcům poskytnout podporu pro dosažení mezinárodního úspěchu vzhledem k jejich podřízenému postavení k centrálním jednotkám. Elavsky dále popisuje kulturní a systémové překážky, kterým čelí čeští zástupci lidové hudby (*world music*), kteří vydávají svou hudbu pod domácím nezávislým hudebním vydavatelem a chtějí uspět na mezinárodní scéně. K těmto překážkám a rizikům patří zejména: tlak na přizpůsobení hudební produkce požadavkům a očekáváním zahraničních kulturních zprostředkovatelů, tj. booking agentů či organizátorů koncertů, popř. zahraničního publika; elitářství a estetický hierarchismus na straně nezávislého hudebního vydavatele s mezinárodními kontakty v oblasti *world music*; nižší rozpočet nezávislého vydavatele, jehož důsledkem je slabší prezentace a rotace v komerčních médiích na domácím trhu; estetická kvalita hudebního stylu obsahující prvky západní hudby, který není pro zahraniční posluchače dostatečně exotický a zajímavý ve srovnání s hudební produkcí ze vzdálenějších (např. balkánských) zemí; neznalost české národní identity a obtížná rozpoznatelnost typicky českého zvuku v zahraničí.

Studie analyzující fungování exportních kanceláří v postkomunistických zemích vycházejí z teorie světového systému (Wallerstein, 2004), která umožňuje autorům a autorkám nahlížet na domácí trh s populární hudbou jako na semiperiferní hudební trh, který je relativně malý, vyznačuje se nižší kupní silou, nedostatečnou profesionalizací aktérů hudební scény a převahou importu anglo-amerického repertoáru nad exportem lokální hudby, jehož hudební export (včetně estetiky hudební produkce)

je orientován na globální hudební trh podléhající kapitalistické logice a je v podřízeném postavení ve vztahu k velkým nadnárodním hudebním vydavatelstvím. Barna (2021) popisuje příklady nerovných mocenských vztahů mezi semiperiferním domácím trhem a globálním hudebním trhem na úrovni kulturních stereotypů a obchodních vztahů. Vychází přitom zejména z vlastního pozorování showcase festivalů a rozhovorů s aktéry (hudebníky a organizátory proexportních platforem a showcase festivalů) hudebního exportu v Maďarsku. Galuszka (2024) analyzuje a porovnává fungování a překážky relativně nově zřízených exportních kanceláří ve východoevropských zemích (Polsko, Maďarsko a Chorvatsko), a to na základě hloubkových rozhovorů s jejich představiteli. Studie upozorňuje zejména na nerovnosti a překážky internacionalizace lokální hudební scény, které souvisí s omezenými finančními prostředky zkoumaných exportních kanceláří; nedostatečnou politickou podporou hudebního exportu; nedostatečnou profesionalizací hudebních profesionálů a hudebníků v důsledku institucí formálního vzdělávání nereflektujícího potřeby hudebního podnikání, chybějící historické zkušenosti aktérů lokálního hudebního průmyslu s tržní ekonomikou a dynamicky se proměňujícím hudebním trhem.

Na rozdíl od výše uvedených odborných studií analyzujících fungování exportních kanceláří jakožto nástroje pro překonávání mocenských nerovností světového hudebního trhu a semiperiferního postavení aktérů lokální hudební scény ve vztahu k centrům globálního hudebního průmyslu se náš výzkum zaměřuje na institucionální analýzu (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) kanceláře SoundCzech zasazenou do kontextu národní a unijní politiky kulturního exportu. Institucionální analýza klade důraz na odhalování strategií aktérů, kteří se vědomě podílejí na vytváření, reprodukci, transformaci či narušování institucí. Relevantní je přitom nejen výzkum strukturních podmínek ovlivňujících jednání reprezentantů zkoumané instituce, ale zejména role institucionálních aktérů a jejich tzv. institucionální práce, jejíž prostřednictvím jsou instituce budovány, udržovány a reprodukovány.

Výsledky doposud nejrozsáhlejšího výzkumu exportních hudebních kanceláří představila výzkumná zpráva *Developing Music Export in Europe I* (Sillamaa, 2023), jejíž autor popisuje a srovnává fungování 29 exportních kanceláří (včetně kanceláře SoundCzech), které jsou součástí evropského sdružení exportních kanceláří EMEE. Data byla sbírána v roce 2018 a 2020 prostřednictvím rozhovorů se zástupci kanceláří a analýzy dostupných výročních zpráv a informací na webových stránkách zkoumaných kanceláří. Na rozdíl od výše uvedených odborných studií zpráva nevychází z určitého teoretického rámce a neklasifikuje hudební trhy z pozice centra a (semi)periferie. Její přínos spočívá v induktivním budování koncep-

tuálního aparátu, který slouží ke klasifikaci a popisu jednotlivých činností exportních kanceláří. Navržená typologie aktivit exportních kanceláří reflektuje jejich odlišné funkce (*learn, grow, cross and rise, exchange, measure*). Zpráva rovněž podává srovnání kulturně-politických cílů kanceláří, strategických cílů, cílových skupin, trhů a hudebních scén, způsobu řízení, finančních modelů, velikosti týmu a alokace času na jednotlivé aktivity. Kromě toho zpráva uvádí rovněž příklady dobré praxe. Nicméně kvantifikující a zobecňující (ve vztahu k jednotlivým kancelářím často anonymizované) zjištění, která jsou prezentovaná ve zprávě, neumožňují vyvodit konkrétní závěry o fungování české hudební exportní kanceláře. Přínos našeho výzkumu spočívá naopak v rekonstrukci institucionální práce zaměstnanců české exportní kanceláře a v identifikaci specifických překážek a výzev, kterým při jejím výkonu zástupci SoundCzech v současnosti čelí.

2. KULTURNÍ POLITIKA EU A ČR V OBLASTI INTERNACIONALIZACE HUDEBNÍHO ODVĚTVÍ

Legislativní dokumenty (Nařízení (EU) 2017/1128, (EU) 2018/302, Směrnice (EU) 2019/789), jejichž prostřednictvím EU podporuje vytvoření jednotného digitálního trhu a cílí na odstranění legislativních a obchodních překážek lepší mezinárodní cirkulace evropského kulturní obsahu, nemají fakticky žádný vliv na programovou agendu exportních kanceláří, a proto se jimi nebudeme podrobněji zabývat. Relevantní jsou v tomto ohledu nelegislativní aktivity EU. EU prostřednictvím dotačních programů (zejména prostřednictvím programu Creative Europe) podporuje iniciativy zaměřené na zlepšení mezinárodní kulturní výměny a exportu evropského hudebního obsahu. Pro hudební odvětví je v tomto ohledu zásadní činnost evropské sítě hudebních exportních kanceláří EMEE, jejichž zástupci ve spolupráci s mezinárodním výzkumným centrem KEA European Affairs připravili evropskou exportní strategii *Music Moves Europe: A European Music Export Strategy* (Le Bureau Export, Music Austria, KEA European Affairs, Factory 92 & EMEE, 2020). Strategie identifikuje dílčí překážky hudebního exportu v EU⁴ a v návrhové části předkládá schéma navazujících dílčích cílů vedoucích ke zlepšení vývozu evropské hudby jak

4 K těmto překážkám patří: (a) nedostatečná harmonizace sociální ochrany umělců napříč členskými státy EU a administrativní překážky spojené s vyřízením potvrzení o sociálním zabezpečení v domovské zemi, které nezohledňuje krátkodobý pracovní režim hudebníků vystupujících v zahraničí; (b) riziko dvojího či nadměrného zdanění hudebníků pracujících v zahraničí, administrativní překážky způsobené nestandardizovanými daňovými certifikáty v národních jazycích příslušné země a nepřímé zdanění prostřednictvím odlišné výše daně z přidané hodnoty uplatňované v EU na kulturní služby (zahrnující uspořádání hudebního koncertu či festivalu). Mezi další identifikované problémy hudebního exportu v EU patří (c) celoevropsky a celosvětově relativně nízká poslechovost evropské hudby.

v rámci EU, tak celosvětově. Návrh je adresován hudebníkům, hudebním profesionálům a hudebním firmám; zástupcům exportních kanceláří působících v členských zemích EU; členským státům a evropským institucím zapojených do podpory hudebního exportu. Strategický cíl č. 1 (LEARN) zahrnuje vytváření znalostní základny jako předpokladu pro realizaci exportních aktivit a vstupu na zahraniční trhy; cíl č. 2 (GROW) zahrnuje tréninkové aktivity pro zvýšení dovedností aktérů hudebního exportu; cíl č. 3 (CROSS) zahrnuje podporu exportních aktivit a networking na evropské úrovni; cíl č. 4 (RISE) zahrnuje podporu exportních aktivit a networking na mezinárodní úrovni; cíl č. 5 (EXCHANGE) zahrnuje podporu zahraniční mobility a výměny poznatků aktérů hudebního průmyslu a zástupců exportních hudebních kanceláří; cíl č. 6 (MEASURE) zahrnuje podporu vytvoření centralizovaného sběru a analýzy kvantitativních i kvalitativních dat o zahraničních hudebních trzích.

Strategie navrhuje rovněž šest opatření pro dosažení vytčených cílů: (1) vytvoření evropské platformy s veškerými relevantními informacemi o evropských a klíčových mezinárodních trzích a podporu sběru dat a informací o mimoevropských hudebních trzích a vybudování sítě mezinárodních kontaktů; (2) vytvoření programu pro vzdělávání evropských hudebníků a hudebních profesionálů ve spolupráci se zkušenými mezinárodními mentory, program pro podporu zahraničních stáží hudebních profesionálů a zahraničních rezidencí pro hudebníky; (3) vytvoření fondu pro podporu zahraničního turné hudebníků v rámci EU a pro podporu propagační kampaně v zahraničí; (4) podporu marketingových aktivit zaměřených na zviditelnění evropské hudby na mimoevropských trzích (např. na showcase festivalech, v rádiích a na streamingových platformách); zřízení mezinárodního fondu podporujícího vstup evropských exportních kanceláří na mimoevropský trh prostřednictvím účasti na zahraničním (mimoevropském) showcase festivalu; podporu obchodních misí zástupců exportních kanceláří realizovaných na klíčových mimoevropských trzích; (5) podporu účasti zahraničních (mimoevropských) hudebních profesionálů na evropských showcase festivalech; (6) zřízení evropského analytického centra pro sběr a vyhodnocování dat o evropských hudebních trzích, mezinárodní úspěšnosti evropské hudby a mezinárodní mobilitě evropských hudebníků.

Česká republika nemá dokument, který by vytyčoval v oblasti hudební politiky strategické cíle a aktivity vedoucí k jejich dosažení. Z hlediska politiky exportu české hudby jsou relevantní ministerské strategické dokumenty, které se okrajově dotýkají rovněž exportu kulturních statků. Strategické cíle české exportní politiky v oblasti kultury zohledňují její ekonomický, společensko-kulturní a zahraničně-politický přínos. Podpora

kulturního exportu je proto také součástí agendy tří ministerstev: Ministerstva průmyslu a obchodu (MPO), Ministerstva kultury (MK) a Ministerstva zahraničních věcí (MZV).

Strategické dokumenty MPO (zejm. MPO, 2012a, 2012b) vycházejí ze zjištění, že dosavadní exportní úspěchy České republiky plynuly z výhodné geografické polohy v centru Evropy a z relativně levné, avšak kvalifikované pracovní síly. Zástupci MPO si ovšem uvědomují, že tyto výhody ČR se ovšem v současnosti již vyčerpaly. Reálné jednotkové náklady na pracovní sílu v ČR se zvyšují, čímž klesá cenová konkurenceschopnost ČR a její komparativní výhoda na evropském trhu. MPO proto upozorňuje na potencionální hrozbu pro českou ekonomiku spočívající v nízkém objemu exportu služeb s vysokou přidanou hodnotou, protože domácí průmysloví exportéři plní především roli subdodavatelů výrobků a služeb s nízkou mírou inovace a přidaného hodnoty bez přímého napojení na koncové uživatele. Z ekonomického hlediska je proto kulturní export významný ve dvou ohledech: má potenciál: (a) diverzifikovat typ vyvážených výrobků a služeb a snížit tím koncentrovanost českého exportu na několik málo odvětví, vázaných na zahraniční výrobu v České republice (např. automobilový průmysl, elektronika) a tím zároveň snížit zranitelnost ČR vůči výkyvům na mezinárodních trzích; (b) posunout české exportéry v hodnotových řetězcích do segmentů a odvětví s vyšší přidanou hodnotou. Přičemž exportní strategie MPO zmiňuje mezi subjekty s exportním potenciálem generovat vysokou přidanou hodnotu nejen podniky z odvětví průmyslu, ale také služby s vysokou přidanou hodnotou z oblasti kreativního průmyslu. Strategie dále navrhuje centralizaci analytických a datových služeb pro tvorbu efektivního zpravodajství pro export. Tento cíl má být naplněn vznikem jednotného koordinačního a informačního centra, které eviduje poptávky po exportních službách a poskytuje informace a možnosti, jak se dostat ke všem informacím o zahraničním obchodě, a to včetně informací relevantní pro aktéry kreativních průmyslů (MPO, 2012, s. 22).

Exportní strategie MK je zaměřená na dosažení kulturně a společensky prospěšných cílů, jakými jsou zvýšení zájmu o domácí teritorium mezi širokou veřejností v zahraničí, nové příležitosti pro působení českých zástupců kulturních odvětví v zahraničí, upevňování národní identity a udržování živých kontaktů s krajanskou komunitou. Nicméně strategické dokumenty MK upozorňují i na roztříštěnost a nevyváženost systému podpory internacionalizace a exportu pro jednotlivá kulturní odvětví a na potřebu hledání nových funkčních modelů efektivní mezirezortní spolupráce. Potřeba mezirezortní spolupráce při podpoře vývozu české kulturní produkce je ve strategických dokumentech MK zdůvodňována ekonomickou povahou kulturních statků a pozitivními ekonomickými účinky

kulturního exportu, mezi které patří zaměstnanost, obchod, cestovní ruch. (MPO & MK, 2019; MK, 2021a, 2021b).

Strategické dokumenty MZV (MZV, 2019; MZV & MK, 2020), které zmiňují potřebnost kulturní diplomacie, ji zdůvodňují tím, že šíření české kultury v zahraničí přispívá k naplnění cílů zahraniční politiky, ke kterým patří posilování dobrého jména a mezinárodní vážnosti ČR. Kultura je totiž pokládána za médium, které snadno překonává hranice národních států a srozumitelně zprostředkovává duševní a hmotné hodnoty, na kterých stát spočívá. Jako důležitý nástroj pro prosazování české kulturní scény v zahraničí jsou uváděna Česká centra. Strategie Českých center (Česká centra, 2024) klade důraz na autentický (tj. osobní) kontakt s protistranou a prezentaci umělecky hodnotného obsahu, účast na prestižních mezinárodních platformách, konání akcí s jedinečným tématem či profilem a prestižními partnery.

3. INSTITUCIONÁLNÍ ANALÝZA EXPORTNÍ KANCELÁŘE SOUNDCZECH

3.1. Exportní strategie ve vzduchoprázdnu

Kulturně-politické dokumenty ministerstev nemají – vzhledem k jejich přílišné obecnosti – na volbu strategických cílů exportní kanceláře SoundCzech téměř žádný vliv. Jejich význam je spíše normativní. Zástupci kanceláře využívají tyto dokumenty jako argumentační nástroj při vyjednávání s vládními reprezentanty a vedoucími pracovníky ministerstev o navýšení podpory hudebního exportu či systémových změnách v podpoře hudebního odvětví. Nicméně tyto dokumenty nejsou závazné a politická reprezentace se jimi nemusí řídit:

“Státní kulturní politika byla udělaná za ministra Zaorálka, jenomže implementace není doteď. [...] K té implementaci nedošlo a pravděpodobně už nedojde, takže bude nová [státní kulturní politika], která bude od roku 2025 do roku 2030.” (I).

Další slabinou národních kulturně-politických dokumentů je obtížná implementace výtčených cílů v praxi, protože jejich dosažení vyžaduje dlouhodobé plánování, které je jen obtížně slučitelné se čtyřletým vládním cyklem, popř. s výměnou ministrů v čele relevantních resortů v rámci jednoho volebního období:

“Ten dokument [Státní kulturní politika na léta 2021–2025] za mě je velmi obecně pojatý a jak se na tom politickém spektru střídají ti ministři, např. tam bylo

TOP09, pak tam bylo Ano, byli tam Sociální demokrati, teď je tam ODS a každý ten politik je ovlivněn tou svojí stranou, tou strategií té strany a vnímáním toho, že tam je na čtyři roky na omezené volební období. [...] A co se týká té národní kulturní politiky, tak si myslím, že je dost ovlivněná nebo ohybatelná tím přístupem těch politiků, kteří jsou zrovna u kormidla.” (18)

Přestože národní kulturně-politické dokumenty nemají na programovou agendu kanceláře vliv, její programové cíle a aktivity jsou do velké míry ovlivněny spoluprací s evropskou asociací exportních kanceláří EMEE. Strategické cíle exportní kanceláře SoundCzech kopírují v národním měřítku cíle EMEE: a) propagace české hudební scény v zahraničí, b) podpora odborného vzdělávání formou neformálních vzdělávacích kurzů a workshopů, c) vytvoření platformy z řad zástupců hudebního průmyslu v ČR, d) vyhledávání finančních lokálních i zahraničních partnerů, e) propojování české hudební profesionály s mezinárodní scénou, f) podpora výměnných a společných projektů zaměřených na posilování regionálního hudebního průmyslu v rámci regionu Střední a Východní Evropy, g) vytvoření značky české hudby, která reprezentuje kvalitu prostřednictvím úspěšných umělců a efektivní propagace, h) vytvoření a aktualizace základní informační platformy, ch) podpora infrastruktury českého hudebního průmyslu a trvale udržitelného hudebního systému (viz SoundCzech, 2020b).

Rovněž aktivity kanceláře SoundCzech kopírují z hlediska jejich účelu (nikoliv z hlediska jejich geografického rozsahu) evropskou exportní strategii (Sillamaa, 2023). Kategorii LEARN odpovídá příprava a šíření vzdělávacích materiálů na webu kanceláře a online databáze mezinárodně úspěšných českých umělců a dalších subjektů českého hudebního průmyslu. Do kategorie GROW spadají vzdělávací workshopy, konzultace, mentorský program, přednášky a konference (spolu)pořádané kanceláří pro české hudebníky a hudební profesionály. Do kategorie CROSS a RISE patří dotační podpora rozmanitých typů exportních aktivit, jako jsou podpora propagace českých hudebních umělců v zahraničí, podpora výroby propagačního materiálu, podpora společné umělecké tvorby se zahraničním partnerem, podpora networkingu českých a zahraničních hudebních profesionálů, podpora zahraničních hudebních vystoupení a turné českých umělců, podpora účasti českých hudebních profesionálů na zahraničním showcase festivalu, podpora účasti zahraničních hudebních profesionálů na českém showcase festivalu a podpora výměnných koncertů. Do kategorie EXCHANGE spadají aktivity, prostřednictvím kterých je kancelář zapojená do evropských projektů na podporu hudebního exportu, jako je například projekt ESNS Exchange, projekt HEMI Music Hub či mezinárodní spolupráce a výměna poznatků se zástupci ostatních exportních

kanceláři v evropských zemích v rámci setkávání členů asociace EMEE. Kategorie MEASURE zahrnuje spolupráci kanceláře na pětiletém výzkumném projektu *Příležitosti a bariéry přeshraniční distribuce české hudební produkce*, jehož cílem je sběr a analýza kvalitativních i kvantitativních dat o exportu české hudby a vytvoření metodiky pro jeho měření.

Kancelář nemá deduktivně – například na základě nějakého vládního či ministerského dokumentu – stanovené cílové exportní trhy, ale podporu z hlediska jejího geografického zacílení alokuje flexibilně podle preferencí a potřeb samotných hudebníků a hudebních profesionálů. Exportní strategie kanceláře podpory tudíž kopíruje potřeby a trendy hudebního trhu. Cílové trhy si určují samotní umělci. Pokud byli umělci například vybráni k účasti na showcase festivalu v zahraničí jeho organizátorem, mohou se ucházet u české exportní kancelář o podporu svého výjezdu. Vedení kanceláře je názoru, že pokud by zasahovalo do výběru českých umělců, hrozí nebezpečí neefektivního využití veřejné podpory a pokřivení hudebního trhu, protože členové grantové komise nebudou nikdy znát zahraniční trh tak dobře jako organizátoři zahraničního showcase festivalu.⁵ Důvodem induktivní strategie kanceláře je skutečnost, že hudební trh není jednotný. Každý žánr má svůj vlastní hudební trh a hudebníci se v rámci těchto trhů mohou zaměřovat na cílové publikum z různých zemí světa. Dokonce i hudební alba jedné a téže skupiny mohou mít podle zkušeností některých hudebních profesionálů cílové publikum z jiné země. Nebylo by proto efektivní hudebníkům apriori předepisovat, na které hudební trhy by měli cílit. Hudební kancelář v malé či středně velké evropské zemi by pravděpodobně nedokázala mobilizovat pro vývoz hudební produkce do konkrétní cílové země dostatečně vysoký počet umělců a hudebních společností napříč hudebními žánry. Podporovat systémově a dlouhodobě vstup umělců na konkrétní hudební trh v zahraničí (například na hudební trh v sousední zemi) by mělo smysl pouze v případě, že by se našel dostatečně velký počet umělců a hudebních profesionálů se zájmem o daný trh a kancelář by disponovala finančními i personálními zdroji pro vedení dlouhodobé strategie zaměřené na vývoz české hudební produkce na vybraný zahraniční trh.

Ve vztahu k podporovanému typu hudební tvorby uplatňuje vedení kanceláře hodnotově neutrální strategii. Podpora zahrnuje všechny hudební žánry populární hudby (hip-hop, rock, pop, metalová hudba, elektronická hudba, jazz, lokální lidová hudba aj.) bez jejich prioritizace. Podporována je zejména hudební produkce, která byla doposud v rámci hudební

5 V této souvislosti informanti se kriticky vymezovali vůči praxi některých organizátorů hudebních festivalů, na kterých mohou vystoupit hudebníci, pokud uhradí účastnický poplatek. Kvalita hudební produkce v takovém případě hraje druhořadou roli.

politiky státu – často na základě mylného přesvědčení, že populární hudba je komerční a soběstačná oblast hudební produkce, která nepotřebuje veřejnou podporu – přehlížena a nebyla systémově podporována, ať už na úrovni infrastruktury či rozvoje uměleckých talentů a hudebních profesionálů. Podpora klasické hudby je realizována prostřednictvím jiných dotačních titulů a prostřednictvím hudebních těles (profesionální orchestry, komorní orchestry, taneční orchestry, komorní soubory aj.) zřizovaných organizačními složkami nebo příspěvkovými organizacemi státu, krajů a obcí. Tento typ hudebního sektoru – vzhledem k tomu, že se často jedná o velké kolektivy a instituce – vyžaduje pro své fungování, násobně větší objem finančních prostředků, které přesahují finanční možnosti kanceláře. V nedávné době se nicméně vedení kanceláře rozhodlo, že do programu podpory zahrne rovněž současnou hudbu, tj. skladatele a interprety soudobé vážné hudby, popř. malé hudební soubory. Žánrové zaměření podpory hudební kanceláře je vedeno snahou podpořit co možná nejširší žánrové spektrum.⁶ Dotační okruhy kanceláře jsou rovněž zaměřeny na rozmanité cílové skupiny: aktivní umělci a hudební skupiny, další hudební profesionálové (promotéři, kritici, manažeři, agenti, zástupci hudebních vydavatelství, klubů a festivalů) a organizátoři vzdělávacích akcí a show-case festivalů v ČR.

Nevýhoda chybějící národní exportní strategie spočívá v její nestabilitě a celkové finanční nejistotě vzhledem k tomu, že hudební export není představiteli státu vnímán jako státní priorita. Chybějící politický závazek ve vztahu k podpoře rozvoje hudebního odvětví a jeho internacionalizace znamená, že zástupci kanceláře a představitelé domácích hudebních asociací mají slabší vyjednávací a advokační pozici na politické úrovni a že činnost exportní kanceláře není ze strany zřizovatele podpořena víceletým financováním umožňujícím strategické plánování. Absence národní hudební politiky je ovšem současně také výhodou v tom ohledu, že vedení kanceláře může autonomně určovat exportní strategii a flexibilně reagovat na vývoj globálního hudebního trhu.

Přestože vedení exportní kanceláře nemá apriori stanovené cílové exportní trhy, na které by svými proexportními aktivitami systematicky cílilo, bylo nuceno vzhledem k omezeným finančním zdrojům určit preferované geografické oblasti pro vývoz české hudby. Tyto geografické preference

6 Podle zveřejněných výročních zpráv kancelář SoundCzech podpoří ročně v průměru přibližně 100 hudebních profesionálů v účasti na zahraničních hudebních showcase festivalech a konferencích, 20 koncertů hudebních umělců na zahraničních showcase festivalech, 10 hudebních projektů spolupráce se zahraničním umělcem, 30 zahraničních turné, 20 hudebních profesionálů v účasti na zahraničních stážích, 40 online konzultací českých umělců s hudebními profesionály ze zahraničí (SoundCzech, 2020a).

se promítají do: (a) seznamu zemí, kde SoundCzech organizuje setkávání českých hudebních profesionálů s tamními organizátory hudebních akcí a provozovateli hudebních klubů (Německo, Polsko, Slovensko, Švédsko); (b) seznamu showcase festivalů, kde pracovníci kanceláře organizují účast delegace domácích umělců a profesionálů. Výběr showcase festivalů pro pravidelnou prezentaci české hudby a networking se řídí jejich jedinečným žánrovým profilem (festivally Jazzahead, Classical: NEXT, WOMEX, Budapest Ritmo, Amsterdam Dance Week) a jejich přínosem pro vývoz českého repertoáru (Eurosonic-Noorderslag, PIN, Fifty Lab, Tallinn Music Week, MENT, SHARPE, Tak Brzmi Miasto). Strategie kanceláře je zaměřena na organizaci výjezdů na regionální showcase festivaly nebo na festivaly s celoevropskou účastí, ať už žánrově vyhraněné či významné z hlediska evropského hudebního trhu napříč hudebními žánry. K vybraným preferovaným trhům patří Polsko, Slovensko, balkánské země, skandinávské země a baltický region. V současnosti zaměstnanci kanceláře hledají vhodný showcase festival pro prezentaci české hudby v Německu a Rakousku, kde se jim doposud nepodařilo nalézt vhodnou konferenční platformu, na které by podpoření českých umělců či hudební profesionálové dokázali navázat dlouhodobější mezinárodní spolupráci. Dalším zvažovaným exportním regionem pro pravidelnou účast české delegace na menších showcase festivalech je Velká Británie a Irsko vzhledem k významu, velikosti a profesionalitě tamního hudebního trhu a výraznému zastoupení hudebních profesionálů z USA. Organizace hudebních delegací na zvažovaných showcase festivalech je nicméně podmíněna velikostí přidělených financí v dalších letech.

Pro volbu navštěvovaných festivalů je určující to, zda se českým účastníkům na nich daří navazovat trvalé profesní kontakty a účast vede k navazující spolupráci. Proto také vedení kanceláře často směřuje svou účast na menší či regionální showcase festivaly, na kterých je pro české účastníky snadnější navázat osobní kontakt se zahraničními partnery a uspět v mezinárodní konkurenci ostatních zahraničních delegací.

Kancelář vyvíjí rovněž aktivity zaměřené na podporu mimoevropského exportu české hudby.⁷ Tyto mimoevropské aktivity považují zaměstnan-

7 Vedení kanceláře díky finanční podpoře z NPO zorganizovalo účast českých hudebníků a profesionálů na vybraných showcase festivalech v USA, Kanadě a Indii, o kterých se domnívá, že mohou sloužit jako příhodný vstup na tamní hudební trh. Důvodem pro volbu výše uvedených mimoevropských trhů byla jejich velikost, význam či rychlé tempo jejich rozvoje. Potenciál amerického trhu spatřuje vedení kanceláře především ve vývozu filmové či videoherní hudby, protože umělci vystupující živě čelí nejen vysokým nákladům na dopravu, ale musí získat a uhradit pracovní vízum. Od účasti na showcase festivalu v Kanadě (Montreal) si vedení kanceláře slibuje vzhledem k jeho menší velikosti navázání kontaktů s americkými hudebními profesionály. Potenciál indického trhu spatřují zástupci kanceláře v konkurenční výhodě prvního tahu v oblasti evropsko-indické hudební spolupráce.

ci kanceláře za předčasné a nesystémové vzhledem k tomu, že usilují primárně o podporu a budování zahraniční spolupráce v rámci EU. Podpora exportu české hudby na mimoevropských trzích ilustruje problémy, kterým čelí vedení kanceláře v důsledku nejistého financování jejích aktivit ze strany zřizovatele a chybějícího dlouhodobého strategického výhledu. Důvodem propagace české hudby na mimoevropských trzích byly omezující rozpočtová pravidla pro čerpání přidělených finančních prostředků z Národního plánu obnovy (NPO), které byly kanceláři přiděleny v letech 2022–24. Pokračování mimoevropské exportní strategie je po ukončení programu NPO v roce 2025 závislé ovšem na dodatečných zdrojích financování, a tudíž i velmi nejisté.

3.2. Exportní kancelář jako přežívající organizace

Jak již bylo výše uvedeno, jednou z hlavních překážek efektivního fungování kanceláře je nedostatek finančních prostředků, a tudíž i omezená personální kapacita kanceláře vzhledem k aktivitám, které její pracovníci vykonávají:

“Dopad programu [SoundCzech] je sice zřejmý, nicméně by mohl být mnohem výraznější, kdyby výše přidělených finančních podpor byla vyšší. Současná průměrná výše podpory (15 000 Kč) na jeden projekt je velmi nízká,” (IDU, 2023, s. 95).

Kancelář zaměstnává celkem čtyři osoby na plný úvazek (vedoucí oddělení, projektová koordinátorka, administrativní pracovník, specialista na PR), které mají na starost administraci dotačních okruhů a jejich přípravu, propagaci, vyhodnocení, komunikaci s uchazeči a podpořenými umělci a profesionály, sběr a vyhodnocení zpětné vazby od podpořených osob, vyhledávání dodatečných grantových příležitostí pro podporu hudebního exportu, organizaci mezinárodní hudební konference ReConnect, organizaci vzdělávacích workshopů a seminářů, organizaci showcase festivalu pro mladé české hudební umělce Classical Music Showcase, přípravu a koordinaci účasti české delegace a hudebníků na zahraničních showcase festivalech a veletrzích, ale také na obchodních misích, konzultační činnost, správu a aktualizaci online databáze aktérů českého hudebního sektoru a správu rozpočtu přidělených dotačních titulů a reportování poskytovatelům dotace, komunikaci aktuálních témat a příležitostí směrem do sektoru a také aktualiz z české hudební scény do zahraničí, účast na mezinárodních networkingových akcích v rámci mezinárodní spolupráce a členství v mezinárodních sítích.

Za další významnou překážkou fungování kanceláře považují její pracovníci jednoleté financování a kolísání velikosti rozpočtu v závislosti na dostupných finančních prostředcích, které se často skládají z většího počtu finančních zdrojů podléhajících odlišným rozpočtovým pravidlům a zvyšujícím tak administrativní zátěž pracovníků kanceláře. Budování mezinárodní spolupráce vyžaduje naopak kontinuitu a delší časový horizont než jeden rok (obvykle 5 až 7 let), ve kterém zaměstnanci kanceláře vzhledem k jednoletému financování operují:

“A opět ale se ukazuje, že ty výkyvy financování SoundCzechu ovlivňují i tu činnost. Že pokud SoundCzech neví, jestli příští rok bude mít rozpočet milion nebo 10 milionů korun, tak zkrátka se v tom těžko funguje. A to vlastně ilustruje taky tu státní kulturní politiku. Že tam není koncepce toho, že by se řeklo, budeme na tom pracovat tímhle způsobem, budeme podporovat vzdělání, vzdělání manažerů, tak aby mohli ty interprety vozit do zahraničí a abychom my z toho mohli těžit peníze nebo diplomatickou reprezentaci, kulturní renomé a tak dále. Anebo si řekneme, že budeme podporovat moravskou lidovou hudbu, protože to je jediná typická hudba, která pochází z Čech. A tak budeme vyvážet lidovky. A už by to bylo nějaké směřování, kam to má jít.” (I17).

“Dokonce bych řekl, že ten rozdíl je mezi učící se organizací a přežívající organizací. Abyste se mohli učit, potřebujete trochu kapacity navíc k reflexi,” (I7).

Financování z veřejných zdrojů postrádá rovněž potřebnou flexibilitu, která by umožnila zaměstnancům kanceláře reagovat na aktuální trendy a potřeby na mezinárodní hudební scéně a relokaci prostředků pro jiné než původně plánované účely. Příkladem rigidity veřejné podpory je situace, kdy kancelář nemohla využít finanční prostředky z Národního plánu obnovy přidělené v letech 2022-24 na podporu proexportních aktivit v rámci EU.⁸ Tato okolnost vedla k nesystémovým snahám o propagaci české hudební scény na mimoevropských trzích.

Vedení kanceláře v současnosti usiluje o získání dotační podpory ze strany MPO vzhledem k nedostatečnému množství přidělených finančních prostředků ze strany Ministerstva kultury, jejichž výše meziročně kolísá.

8 V rámci čerpání poskytnutých financí nebyla daň z přidané hodnoty uznatelným nákladem, což omezovalo její využití pouze na náklady, které neobsahovaly DPH. Exportní kancelář (resp. Institut umění – divadelní ústav), nedisponovala jiným zdrojem příjmu, ze kterého by mohla hradit DPH, a proto nemohla z přidělené dotace hradit náklady na mobilitu v rámci EU, přestože zaměstnanci kanceláře považují za smysluplnější podporu vývozu české hudby do sousedních zemích, popř. do dalších zemí Evropy vzhledem k nižším logistickým nákladům spojených s cestováním a větší jazykovou, popř. kulturní spřízněností.

Za tímto účelem vedení kanceláře zdůrazňuje ekonomický přínos hudebního exportu. Hudební sektor vytvářejí totiž nejen umělci, ale také hudební festivaly, projekty a startupy, které mají významný vliv na hospodářský růst země. Financování hospodářsky významných hudebních projektů a společností považují vedoucí pracovníci kanceláře za kompatibilní s investiční strategií, jak ji MPO představilo ve svých strategických dokumentech na podporu tuzemského exportu. Za export lze totiž považovat nejen vývoz české hudební produkce do zahraničí, ale také import zahraničního kapitálu a účast zahraničních návštěvníků na domácích hudebních festivalech. Tato argumentační strategie prezentuje hudební odvětví jako odvětví s potenciálem akcelarovat hospodářský růst země v případě vhodně nastavených investic, nikoliv jako nesoběstačný a nevýdělečný sektor, který vyžaduje státní podporu, nemá-li zaniknout.

3.3. Systémové problémy podpory hudebního exportu: “jako když leješ olej do stroje, který ještě nebyl sestaven”

Rozvinutí exportního potenciálu hudebního sektoru je postupný a dlouhodobý proces, který podle vyjádření zástupců kanceláře lze schematicky rozdělit do tří částí. První etapa spočívá v podpoře vystupování domácích umělců v zahraničí, kteří – pokud mezinárodně uspějí – se ve své úspěšné mezinárodní kariéře nechají zastoupit zahraničními labely a manažery. Tento odliv talentu je ovšem pochopitelný vzhledem k tomu, že hudební infrastruktura v Česku není dostatečně rozvinutá a internacionalizovaná. Druhý stupeň rozvoje domácího exportu spočívá ve vybudování profesionálních kapacit, které dokážou rozvíjet domácí talenty a připravit je na mezinárodní kariéru. Důležitou úlohu přitom hraje kvalitní výchova a vzdělávání hudebních profesionálů (manažerů a booking agentů) a rozvoj nezávislých hudebních vydavatelství. Třetím stupněm je mezinárodní působení domácích hudebních vydavatelů, nakladatelů a manažerů, kteří zastupují zahraniční umělce na globálním trhu. V této etapě nedochází pouze k vývozu umělců a hudby, ale také k vývozu hudebních služeb, které jsou stabilnějšími podnikatelskými jednotkami, nežli jsou pomíjivé kariéry hudebních umělců.

Institucionální aktivity vykonávané pracovníky kanceláře pokrývají první úroveň a aspirují v některých ohledech rovněž na dosažení druhé úrovně. Pracovníci kanceláře si jsou nicméně vědomi toho, že bez systematické spolupráce s klíčovými subjekty formálního vzdělávání a lektory se zahraniční zkušeností, bude profesionalizace českého hudebního odvětví jen velmi obtížná. Rozvoj umělců a rozvoj hudebního managementu jsou ovšem spojené nádoby. Pokud se svou tvorbou dokáže uživit jen velmi malá část hudebníků, nemůže se ani dostatečně rozvíjet oblast hudebního

managementu a další subjekty hudebního průmyslu.

Za největší slabinu českého hudebního sektoru považují zaměstnanci kanceláře nedostatečnou profesionalizaci. V době vzniku kanceláře chyběly v Česku rovněž asociace, které by vyvíjely advokační činnost směrem k politické reprezentaci. Svou podpůrnou činnost proto zaměstnanci kanceláře přirovnávají lítí oleje do stroje, který ještě nebyl vytvořen. Kvůli chybějící profesionalizaci hudebního odvětví byla kancelář nucena své aktivity soustředit rovněž na základní vzdělávání v oblasti mimouměleckých dovedností (jakými jsou například marketing, základní právní povědomí, digitální distribuce hudby, zřizování živnosti a daňová problematika) a na založení asociace zastupující hudebníky a hudební profesionály ve vztahu k politické reprezentaci:

“Dále tady chybí vzdělávací instituce. Ano, máme tady HAMU, JAMU, máme tady konzervatoře, které chrlí každý rok vystudované interprety, ale už tady nemáme třeba vystudované producenty; nemáme tady studiový techniky. Všechno jsou to profese, kterým se ty lidé učí na koleni, protože je to baví, ale ne, protože by byli systematicky vzdělaní,” (I17).

Cílem vzdělávacích a advokačních aktivit exportní kanceláře je vytvoření takových pracovních podmínek, aby se hudebníci dokázali svou prací uživit.

“A tak jednoho krásného dne založíš exportní kancelář, a nakonec skončíš u toho, že poskytuješ základní vzdělávání a lobuješ za celý hudební průmysl v základních věcech.” (I2).

Zástupci hudebního odvětví se shodují v tom, že činnost kanceláře je zásadním způsobem ovlivněna tím, že český hudební sektor ve srovnání s rozvinutějšími západoevropskými hudebními trhy trpí typickými neduhy malého periferního trhu – absencí kvalitního vzdělávání v oblasti hudebního managementu a absencí manažerské a vydavatelské infrastruktury s mezinárodní expertízou a působností.

V této souvislosti poukazují informanti na příklady dobré mezinárodní praxe, kdy aktivity exportní kanceláře jsou začleněny do širšího portfolia nabízených služeb hudebního informačního střediska, které jsou primárně orientovány na potřeby hudebníků na domácím trhu. Cílem tohoto komplexního poradenského servisu je, aby se domácí hudebníci dokázali svou profesí uživit a přirozenou součástí této strategické podpory je i podpora jejich mezinárodní kariéry. Další výhodou začlenění institucionálních aktivit exportní kanceláře mezi služby poskytované větší

servisní hudební organizací (jako je například Music Information Center Austria) je zajištění podpůrných technických činností, jako je například údržba webu, marketingová a administrativní podpora, kterou zaměstnanci zodpovědní za podporu exportu národního repertoáru sdílejí s ostatními pracovníky hudebního informačního střediska. V současnosti poskytuje administrativní a technickou podporu české exportní kanceláři Institut umění – Divadelní ústav (IDU). IDU ovšem nedokáže vzhledem ke svému výzkumnému a tematicky širšímu zaměření na další oblasti živé kultury plnit funkci plnohodnotného informačního centra pro české hudební autory a interprety.

3.4. Jistá nejistota výsledků institucionální práce

Další velkou výzvou pro institucionální práci zaměstnanců kanceláře je inherentní nejistota účinků poskytované podpory, tj. dosažení mezinárodního úspěchu a jeho obtížná predikovatelnost. Podpora exportní kanceláře není určena velkým hudebním labelům a etablovaným umělcům, ale převážně začínajícím umělcům, jejichž kariéry jsou nejisté a nevyzpytatelné. Cesta k mezinárodnímu úspěchu je vždy jedinečná a neexistuje zaručený návod na jeho dosažení. Mezinárodní úspěch se bude je dlouhodobě a v případě jeho dosažení zástupci exportních kanceláří přiznávají, že nedokážou s jistotou prohlásit, že k mezinárodnímu úspěchu umělce dovedla přidělená podpora, a to vzhledem k velkému počtu faktorů, které mají na kariéry umělců vliv. V této souvislosti informanti upozorňují na význam příkladů mezinárodně úspěšných domácích umělců, které legitimizují činnost kanceláře ve vztahu ke zřizovateli, jsou důkazem exportního potenciálu lokálního hudebního ekosystému a inspiroují začínající domácí umělce.

Nejistotu efektivního vynaložení finančních prostředků zvyšuje rovněž povaha zahraničních showcase festivalů, které umožňují vzhledem k velkému množství účastníků a omezené době konání jen velmi krátká a povrchní pracovní setkání, která nejsou pro navázání dlouhodobé a hlubší mezinárodní spolupráce vhodná. Mezi další faktory, které ztěžují efektivitu showcase festivalu patří převaha nabídky zahraničních umělců nad poptávkou lokálních manažerů a booking agentů, chybějící zastoupení aktérů lokálního hudebního trhu, soupeření o pozornost booking agentů a manažerů mezi zahraničními exportními kancelářemi a jejich delegacemi, nepřipravenost a nezkušenost začínajících umělců či chybějící manažerská podpora na místě. Vystoupení na zahraničním showcase festivalu proto ještě neznamená exportní úspěch, ale má hudebníkům napomáhat k jeho dosažení. Riziku neefektivní návštěvy zahraničního showcase festivalu se pracovníci kanceláře snaží předejít tím, že kladou

důraz na strategickou přípravu hudebníků na vystoupení a networking a výběrem vhodných kandidátů spolupracujících s hudebním manažerem. Další institucionální strategií pro zvýšení viditelnosti českých zástupců hudebního sektoru na zahraničním showcase festivalu je vytváření aliancí s delegacemi z kulturně a geopoliticky spřízněných zemí. Vedení kanceláře zvažuje v reakci na rizikovost showcase festivalů rovněž navýšení podpory bilaterálních obchodních setkání hudebních profesionálů v cílové zahraniční zemi (viz dotační program ProVisit), které umožňují budovat osobní kontakt a dlouhodobou spolupráci, ze které mohou následně profitovat i domácí umělci.⁹

V neposlední řadě nejistotu účinnosti proexportních aktivit zvyšují chybějící data o úspěšnosti české hudby v zahraničí. Chybějící data o exportní úspěšnosti českého repertoáru jsou alespoň částečně nahrazována osobní zkušeností zaměstnanců kanceláře, expertízou členů Dramaturgické rady a zpětnou vazbou podpořených hudebníků a hudebních profesionálů. Chybějící datové podklady o mezinárodní úspěšnosti a poslechoвости českého repertoáru a chybějící příklady mezinárodně úspěšných žijících českých hudebníků ztěžují nicméně zástupcům kanceláře jejich pozici při vyjednávání s představiteli státu o navýšení veřejné podpory.

Jedním z nástrojů pro snížení nejistoty ohledně účinků přidělené podpory je dotazníkové šetření mezi podpořenými umělci a hudebními profesionály, které kancelář každoročně provádí. Sběr zpětné vazby neslouží kanceláři ovšem primárně jako nástroj pro evaluaci a optimalizaci exportní strategie, ale jako nástroj pro legitimizaci aktivit kanceláře ve vztahu k jejímu zřizovateli. Prokazování efektivity kanceláře je určeno typem instituce, která je jejím zřizovatelem: v tomto případě Ministerstvo kultury. Kulturní politika Ministerstva kultury je založená na předpokladu, že posláním veřejných kulturních organizací (v našem případě exportní kanceláře) je kompenzovat selhání trhu a podpořit část hudebního sektoru, který není ekonomicky soběstačný, ale vykazuje vysokou uměleckou hodnotu, a tudíž i exportní potenciál. Tento předpoklad se promítá i do argumentačního stylu výročních zpráv kanceláře. Při vyhodnocování efektivity dotačních okruhů spravovaných zaměstnanci kanceláře nejsou proto podstatné ekonomické ukazatele, jako například hospodářský přínos exportu či zvyšování mezinárodní konkurenceschopnosti českého hudebního odvětví. Důraz je kladen na naplňování kulturních a kulturně-diplomatických cílů: podpora co největšího počtu projektů, hudebních profesionálů a umělců napříč žánry, genderové zastoupení podpořených

⁹ Doposud byly realizovány krátkodobé pracovní výjezdy tuzemských hudebních profesionálů do měst v Německu, Polsku, Švédsku a na Slovensku.

osob, jejich geografická příslušnost, počet žádostí, počet návštěvníků podpořených projektů, počet mediálních výstupů, návštěvnost webových stránek, přínos exportních aktivit pro podpořené subjekty, příklady podpořených mezinárodně úspěšných umělců a budování obrazu České republiky v zahraničí jako země hudebních talentů (viz IDU, 2023).

Aktivity kanceláře se zaměřují jak na podporu začínajících talentovaných hudebníků (vzdělávací workshopy, podpory výměnných koncertů, podpora networkingu českých hudebních profesionálů v zahraničí), tak i na podporu hudebníků, kteří jsou vedením kanceláře a členy jejího poradního orgánu (Dramaturgické rady) považováni za umělce, kteří jsou připraveni na mezinárodní kariéru. Inherentní nejistotu mezinárodního úspěchu hudebníků se snaží pracovníci kanceláře snížit tím, že volbu vhodných kandidátů zakládají na kritériích, která lze považovat za indikátory umělce s exportním potenciálem. Členové výběrové komise se snaží při výběru kandidátů oprostit od vlastního hudebního vkusu a osobních preferencí:

“Já se snažím oprostit od vlastního vkusu, abych tam necpal kapely, které mně se sice líbí, ale nemají potenciál toho úspěchu. [...] Ona je otázka, co vlastně v zahraničí může uspět z české hudební scény, [...] jestli tam vyvážet to, co oni už znají a co mají svoji kvalitnější produkci. Proč bychom jim tam vozili špatnou kopii, když oni mají dobrý originál? Tak to jsou takové parametry a spíš se zaměřuji na to, co je zajímavé, co je originální,” (I19).

Při výběru vhodných kandidátů naopak zohledňují odosobněné a někdy dokonce měřitelné faktory, které podle jejich soudu představují podmínky možnosti mezinárodního úspěchu. K těmto kritériím patří zejména strategie, jakým způsobem se chce hudebník či hudební uskupení na zahraničním trhu prosadit; vydané album, popř. hudební klipy; profesní historie kandidáta; komunikace s publikem na sociálních sítích; mediální výstupy (videoklip, tisková zpráva, články v relevantních médiích); zkušenost s hudebním vystupováním před publikem; vybudované profesionální zázemí na domácím trhu (spolupráce s hudebním manažerem, hudebním vydavatelstvím atd.); schopnost komunikovat a vyjednávat se zahraničním vydavatelstvím či promotérem; originální hudební přínos v mezinárodním kontextu; technická kvalita hudebního provedení, která odpovídá modernímu mezinárodnímu standardu. Členové komise rovněž upozorňují na skutečnost, že šance prosadit se na zahraničním trhu vyžaduje od umělců flexibilitu a velkou časovou investici, což vede k tomu, že na potenciální exportní úspěch mají často vliv také osobní faktory, jako je například věk, jazyková vybavenost a rodinný status. Na základě

získaných kvalitativních dat nedokážeme nicméně určit, zda tyto osobní faktory mají na rozhodování členů komise vliv.¹⁰

3.5. Nedůvěra cílové skupiny

Zaměstnanci kanceláře čelí ve své práci kulturním a společenským stereotypům týkajících se hudební tvorby a její monetizace. Tyto stereotypy ztěžují jejich práci, protože podlamují důvěru adresátů podpory a ztěžují vyjednávání zástupců kanceláře s představiteli státního aparátu o podpoře exportních aktivit v oblasti populární hudby. Prvním stereotypem je přesvědčení, že kancelář je obchodně a komerčně zaměřená a že vyprodává české hudebníky a hudební skupiny do zahraničí. Druhým stereotypem je přesvědčení, že kvalitní a nezávislá hudba je nekomerční. Pokud hudebník dosáhne určité úrovně věhlasu a zahraničního úspěchu spojeného s obchodní a marketingovou strategií, začne být jeho hudební produkce považována za méně hodnotnou (například za “komerční”, “mainstreamovou” či “populární”):

“Když hraješ undergroundovou hudbu, tak jsi cool, ale jakmile dosáhneš určité úrovně, tak už to tak dobré není a jsi náhle zniš už moc popově,” (I3).

Ze strany představitelů státní správy čelí pracovníci kanceláře dualistickému chápání kulturních aktivit, které jsou často děleny na “komerční” a “nekomerční”, “vážné” a “populární” či “pro zábavu”, “tvůrčí” a “průmyslové” apod. Tento dualismus je často napojen na určité pozitivně oceňované hudební žánry či druhy a ve svém důsledku vytváří kulturní distinkci v rámci hudební scény, jejímž důsledkem je distinkce společenská, tj. hierarchické rozdělování zástupců hudební scény, životních stylů a způsobů kulturní produkce. Tento dualismus je často využíván rovněž k legitimizaci státní podpory jen určitým hudebním žánrům: například takovým žánrům, které nejsou považovány za ekonomicky soběstačné, přestože vedou k produkci esteticky a umělecky hodnotného repertoáru, a cílem státu je proto tyto žánry podporovat. Na druhou stranu jsou pak řazeny hudební žánry, které státní podporu nepotřebují, protože jsou svou podstatou komerční a o úspěchu a neúspěchu jejich zástupců má podle tohoto dualistického dělení rozhodovat tržní prostředí.

Pracovníci kanceláře čelí rovněž nedůvěře členů cílových skupin, tj. hudebních skladatelů a interpretů a hudebních profesionálů. Tato nedůvěra se zakládá na představě, kterou si o fungování exportní kanceláře

¹⁰ K tomuto účelu by bylo zapotřebí jiného typu výzkumu zaměřeného na sběr dat a analýzu o podaných přihláškách a podpořených umělcích.

někteří zástupci hudebního odvětví učinili, a to ať už na základě osobní zkušenosti či zprostředkovaně. Tato nedůvěra se zakládá na přesvědčení, že zaměstnanci kanceláře nemají dostatečnou kompetenci a odborné znalosti o potřebách tvůrců působících v určitých oblastech hudební produkce. Kritizovaná je rovněž nedostatečná výše podpory:

“Oni [SoundCzech] by chtěli alokovat nějaký peníze na vážnou hudbu, ale vůbec neumí přemýšlet v jinech relacích, než na který jsou zvyklý. A na co jsou zvyklý, je to, že vezmou 15 000 korun a dají to začínající kapele, aby si udělala promo. To je grantový režim, ve kterým oni operují, což je vlastně trestuhodný. Rozhazuješ prachy, za který nejde vlastně nic udělat,” (I14).

Dalším důvodem nedůvěry je skepse vůči účinnosti showcase festivalů coby vhodných nástrojů pro podporu hudebního exportu, které využívá česká exportní kancelář. Mezinárodní spolupráce se totiž podle informantů utváří na základě osobních kontaktů, a to například prostřednictvím neformálních setkání v rámci komunity sdružené okolo hudebního žánru, nikoliv na základě institucionalizované návštěvy showcase festivalu. Showcase festivaly jsou některými informanty pokládány za nevhodný nástroj pro propagaci a navazování zahraniční spolupráce:

“Relevantní festivaly nejsou showcasy. Showcasy jsou veletrhy byznysové hudby. [...] Showcase je prostě cirkus. Já neznám jediného muzikanta kolem sebe, ale to se nebavíme jako o kapelách, to se bavíme o jako profi špičkových muzikantech, kteří by se objevili na showcasu a něco by z toho měli,” (I6).

“Já musím říct, že jsem dlouhodobě trochu skeptik k nějakému institucionálnímu vývozu hudby tak, jak se to aktuálně praktikuje a dělá. [...] Osobní vztahy jsou ve výsledku klíčové, a to se často neděje. I když je tady snaha to nějak substituovat showcase festivaly, tak [...] když se podívá člověk na jejich výsledky – jako nemálo českých umělců na nějakých showcase festivalech hrálo – tak to vlastně nic nezpůsobilo; vůbec nikomu to zásadně nepomohlo, až na pár jednotek nějakých hraní někde, ale minimálně úplně,” (I15).

“Nebo respektive to [showcase festival] často funguje tak, že si tam už jede zahraniční partner tu věc spíš ověřit. To byl případ té australské agentky, o kterém jsem již mluvil a která prostě potřebovala tu kapelu vidět naživo, ale už byla rozhodnutá, že s ní chce dělat,” (I12).

“Myslím si, že je fajn, že se dostane do zahraničí někdo, kdo by se tam jako jinými cestami nedostal. Ale já mám z toho prostě na druhou stranu pocit, že je to čím

dál tím uzavřenější společnost. Zahraniční úspěch je vlastně strašně relativní v tom smyslu, že ty kapely nakonec vlastně stejně hrajou zase jenom na těch showcase festivalech. Objednají si je jiní promotéři zase na jiný showcase festivaly. Všechno je to jako vydotovaný. [...] A potom, když je třeba někdy zabookuješ do klubu v Praze či Brně, tak na ně přijde dvacet lidí," (I22).

Kromě toho je hudebníky kritizováno i zaměření kanceláře na oblast populární hudby a začínající umělce:

"Diskurz těch lidí tam [...] je fakt na úrovni promotérů popových kapel. To je prostě parta, která se věnuje začínajícím kapelám. A my se jako bavíme o tom, co může Česká republika udělat pro to, aby její hudební kultura byla vidět ve světě. A to nejsou věci, který se dějí přes začínající kapely," (I6).

Mezi hudebními profesionály jsme zaznamenali i výhrady vůči samotné existenci exportní kanceláře v situaci, kdy v České republice chybí mezinárodně konkurenceschopný hudební průmysl:

"Export mám spojený spíš s nějakým průmyslem. Některé – například skandinávské – země jsou v tomto velmi úspěšné. Investují hromadu peněz do kultury. Pochopili, že to může být business a generovat to nějaké pracovní příležitosti a nějaké peníze. Ale u nás nevidím, že by někdo toto pochopil. [...] Takže mě by zajímalo, co a proč někdo chce exportovat? Co by měl být cíl? Má to být propagace České republiky? Nebo chceme opravdu dostat nějakého umělce do takového povědomí, aby se stal globální hvězdou a generoval peníze a inspiroval další? Co má být tím cílem? Říct si, že založíme exportní office, mi přišlo nedomyšlené," (I2).

V neposlední řadě hudebníky od spolupráce s exportní kanceláří odrazuje netransparentnost pravidel jejího fungování. Informanti poukazují na to, že není zřejmé, na jakou funkční dobu a kým je voleno vedení kanceláře. Rovněž poukazují na možný střet zájmů ohledně obsazování Dramaturgické rady, jejíž členové spolurozhodují o udělení podpory umělcům a současně působí jako manažeři některých hudebních skupin a interpretů žádajících o podporu.

4. NORMATIVNÍ ÚČINKY INSTITUCIONÁLNÍ PRÁCE ZAMĚŠTNANCŮ EXPORTNÍ KANCELÁŘE SOUNDCZECH

Výše uvedené bariéry spolupráce s aktéry hudebního sektoru a představiteli státu se pracovníci kanceláře snaží překonat institucionální prací zaměřenou na posílení normativních principů, na kterých je založeno fun-

gování exportní kanceláře. Přestože od založení kanceláře uplynulo již 7 let, zaměstnanci kanceláře se nadále podílejí na strategických typických pro zakládání institucí, jejichž cílem je zajistit zdroje, etablovat normativní struktury instituce a vytvářet kognitivní předpoklady pro její úspěšné fungování. Vysoké míře nejistoty, které zaměstnanci čelí zejména v oblasti financování a efektivity poskytovaných služeb, čelí snahou o mobilizaci politické a grantové podpory. Tato advokační činnost zahrnuje propagaci činnosti kanceláře a lobování za relokaci státních zdrojů pro podporu celého hudebního odvětví a snaha o sjednocení české hudební scény při jednání s představiteli vlády a jednotlivých ministerstev. Součástí advokační činnosti je rovněž snaha o získání kognitivní legitimacy (Suchman, 1995) ze strany zřizovatele, a to zejména prokazováním efektivity ať už prostřednictvím výročních zpráv o činnosti kanceláře či vyprávěním příběhů o podpořených českých umělcích, kteří uspěli se svou tvorbou v zahraničí.

V širším kontextu se zaměstnanci kanceláře podílejí ve vztahu k hudební scéně na změně kulturních a normativních asociací spojených s výkonem hudební profese, která vyžaduje profesionalitu, spolehlivost, dobrou sebeorganizaci, schopnost se propagovat, manažerské zastoupení, dlouhodobé a strategické plánování strategií, obchodní partnerství a řadu dalších mimouměleckých dovedností, pokud se mají čeští hudebníci prosadit v mezinárodní konkurenci. Ve vztahu k zástupcům ministerstev vedení kanceláře usiluje o redefinici hudebního odvětví jako kulturního průmyslu s ekonomicky zajímavým exportním potenciálem a pozitivními multiplikačními účinky pro české hospodářství.

Účinnost normativních strategií vyvíjených pracovníky kanceláře je nicméně závislá na spolupráci aktérů hudebního pole, a to jak umělců a hudebních profesionálů, tak i klíčových institucionálních aktérů. Pro navazování spolupráce se subjekty domácí hudební scény je klíčovým faktorem získání důvěry. Pracovníci kanceláře narážejí na neochotu aktérů tuzemského hudebního pole spolupracovat. Tato neochota pramení z přesvědčení, že zaměstnancům kanceláře chybí oborové vzdělání a že fungování kanceláře není dostatečně transparentní a efektivní.

V neposlední řadě se zaměstnanci kanceláře podílejí na organizaci vzdělávacích aktivit, jejichž cílem je budovat u potenciálních uchazečů grantové podpory klíčové profesní kompetence a znalosti, které fungují jako normativní vzorce chování, jak by se měl exportující umělec správně chovat, pokud chce uspět. Tyto kognitivní vzorce zvyšují současně pravděpodobnost, že grantová podpora přidělená žadateli bude efektivně zhodnocena.

Součástí institucionální práce je rovněž reproduktivní strategie zaměřená na udržování stabilního fungování kanceláře. Tato práce zahrnuje zejmé-

na zajištění zdrojů podpory proexportních aktivit, vytvoření pravidel pro udělování veřejné podpory, stanovení cílových skupin aktérů, kteří mohou žádat o podporu, nastavení mechanismů selekce vhodných kandidátů, komunikaci s podpořenými uchazeči a administraci a vyúčtování přidělené podpory. Tato reproduktivní strategie zapojení členů hudební komunity do proexportních programů kanceláře je zároveň ovlivněna potřebou kognitivní legitimizace kanceláře ze strany zřizovatele i cílové skupiny. Proto je šíře podpořených aktérů a zástupců rozmanitých žánrů co možná nejširší, a to na úkor výše přidělené finanční podpory na projekt. Související strategií, která posiluje legitimitu kanceláře, je zapojení podporovaných exportních aktivit do profesní rutiny hudebníků. Ukázkovým příkladem strategie zapojování je podpora vystupování umělců na zahraničních showcase festivalech jakožto běžné součásti profesní kariéry úspěšného umělce. Na druhé straně tato institucionální práce zástupců kanceláře zvyšuje vstupní náklady, které nesou aktéři českého hudebního pole, pokud se rozhodnou, že se v zahraničí prosadí individuálně, tj. nezávisle na exportní kanceláři:

“A pak, když vyrosteš, tak tam musíš mít v tom mixu všechno, co tam je. Musíš prodávat lístky, trička a mít partnery. A když jsou tam veřejný prachy, tak musíš mít i veřejný prachy. Jinak ti to v tom mixu chybí, ale ti ostatní to mají. Takže máš prostě o pár billboardů méně a už nestíháš tu soutěž. Takže už to tam přirozeně je a samo od sebe to nezmizí,” (I20).

Paradoxně proto činnost kanceláře usnadňuje některým (podpořeným) umělcům vstup na zahraniční trh, současně ovšem tento vstup všem ostatním hudebníkům ztěžuje tím, že zprostředkovaně zvyšuje jejich náklady na vstup na zahraniční trh v porovnání s konkurencí.

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INTERVIEW WITH MOHANAD YAQUBI

KRISTÝNA KOPŘIVOVÁ

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Mohanad Yaqubi (b. 1981) is a filmmaker, producer, and co-founder of Idioms Film (Ramallah) and Subversive Films, a collective focused on militant cinema. He produced *Infiltrators* (2013), *Suspended Time* (2013), *Pink Bullet* (2014), and co-produced films including *Habibi* (2010), *Though I Know the River is Dry* (2012), *Ambulance* (2016), and *Ouroboros* (2017).

His directorial debut, *Off Frame AKA Revolution Until Victory* (2016), premiered at TIFF and screened at Berlinale and over 50 festivals. His second feature, *R 21 aka Restoring Solidarity* (2022), premiered at IDFA and toured internationally.

Mohanad Yaqubi is currently a resident researcher at the School of the Arts (KASK) in Ghent, Belgium. This interview, conducted online on December 22, 2022, is part of the author's PhD research on the representation of Palestinian identity in art production.

KK: You were actively involved in Ramallah's art scene as a filmmaker, producer, and video artist before relocating to Brussels five years ago. How did you get started in filmmaking?

MY: I studied mechanical engineering, but in my third year, I took a black-and-white photography course. Around that time, the Second Intifada began, shutting down schools and universities. With a camera in hand, I started taking and developing photographs.

Friends encouraged me to pursue photog-

raphy as art. I applied for the Young Artists Award and won either second or third place. Suddenly, I was an artist. I missed my graduation while working on *Fix Me* (2004), my first short film about a photographer following a chair through a city, which marked my transition to filmmaking. Shortly after, we established Idioms Film.

KK: Idioms Film has grown into an established independent film company within Palestinian cinema. How has your rela-

tionship with the West Bank's audiovisual scene evolved, and where do you position your work within visual culture?

MY: Palestinian visual culture is highly fragmented; the West Bank and Gaza scene differ significantly from each other—and even more so from the diaspora and refugee camps. For the past five years, I haven't been closely connected to the West Bank audiovisual scene. Even before, my focus was less on film and video art productions and more on interpreting the visual language of our production. Over the last decade, my primary work lies in researching Palestinian militant cinema practices while continuing with production. Idioms Film production remains small-scale—providing consultations, equipment, and occasional support.

KK: Since relocating, do you feel entirely disconnected from the scene, or have your focus shifted toward militant cinema and archival work?

MY: My focus has shifted to feature production and archival research. With Relocating, I naturally became more engaged with Palestinians in the European diaspora. Over the past decade, many Palestinian refugees from Lebanon and Syria have emigrated due to war—and represented the displacement of Palestinian artists and intellectuals from the region.

This is different from Palestinians in Jordan, where Palestinians and Jordanians have largely merged, with about 60% of Jordanians being of Palestinian origin. For instance, *Farha* (2021), directed by Darin Sallam, is a Jordanian production. Sallam was born and raised in Jordan; the film was funded by Jordan and represented Jordan at the Oscars. Yet both the

story and her origins are Palestinian. It is the country of the production's company that determines its' origin.

This reflects a broader shift. Palestinian cinema once had a clear, ideologically driven focus. Today's landscape is more fragmented. I am not deeply familiar with the younger generation's work, particularly in visual art. I see myself as part of a transgenerational position—between the political committed filmmaking practices of the 1970s and 1980s, centered around classical national identity and struggle, and today's emerging filmmakers whose perspectives are shaped by a more complex 21st-century reality.

KK: You operate within an international network. Do you often experience that your identity is viewed through the lens of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

MY: In Europe, yes—but not in the Global South. At Documenta 15 in Kassel, we presented the *Tokyo Reels* archival project, which includes 20 films produced in Tokyo in the 1970s about the Palestinian struggle—its impact on community-building, education, healthcare, and more. It was interesting to see how surprised the German audience was that Israel was mentioned only three times across all twenty films.

In one film¹, a character says: "We differentiate between Jews and Zionists. We are not against Jews but against the racist Zionist state." Another Japanese film about the PLO office in Tokyo highlights: "Our struggle is not just armed resistance; the cultural and social struggles matter most against the fascist Israeli state." The issue lies with the character of the Israeli state, not with Israelis or Jews.

1 (1973-The Urgent Call-Ismail Shammout).

The archives give us the language and political clarity to confront these issues. It is not about demonizing people based on race or religion—it is a political struggle. I do not think Palestinians today mind living under Israeli rule—after all, who would not want access to social security? But the issue is that the system is racist, offering certain benefits only to certain people.

KK: As a producer, how do you navigate identity in collaborations? How do you approach co-productions? Are there any countries you would avoid?

MY: At Idioms Film, we have co-produced films with countries such as Sweden, Norway, Belgium, Japan, and Qatar. Since Palestinians don't have a state, we have a certain flexibility in choosing co-producers. I often tell producers—like a Turkish one I recently worked with—that co-production is not just about raising money but about solidarity, which is the real capital. It is not only about profit.

KK: There is a distinction. Some producers choose co-producers based on their countries' political agendas, avoiding certain states due to the geopolitical context (like Israelis in the Palestinian context), while others prioritize personal or project alignment over nationality. How do you approach this?

MY: Making a film is a political act, especially if you are Palestinian. No one expects us to create films solely for entertainment. So, working with an Israeli co-production does not re-

ally make sense because they have their own cultural and political agenda that often conflicts with ours. That does not mean we never work with Israeli producers — we do — but the condition is that we do not receive any funding from the Israeli state².

KK: When living in Europe, do people view your work primarily as created by a “Palestinian”? If so, how do you navigate that?

MY: Identity politics is everywhere. People instinctively categorize you: “*You’re from Eastern Europe? Where exactly?*”, and networks are usually formed around these labels. I always like to challenge these norms and yet, keep aware of their dynamics. I like to make people guessing: “*I’m Belgian.*” Really? “*No, I’m Palestinian.*” Actually, “*I’m Moroccan. My grandmother was Syrian.*” I enjoy playing with these identities as it reflects how we increasingly live in cosmopolitan societies where identity is fluid.

KK: There is tension between rigid political identities and cosmopolitanism. Palestinian identity is often overly politicized—framed internationally either as a victim needing Western support or as a Third World representative—views that can be beneficial for them but also reductive.

MY: Exactly. I am not affiliated with this institution in Brussels mainly because I am a Palestinian but because I am not white. It is a different layer of the same mechanism—being included to make the system appear more inclusive, representing the Global South in such a framework.

2 Idioms Film, among other Palestinian producers, follows the guidelines of the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions) movement, initiated in 2005 by Palestinian civil society to apply non-violent pressure on Israel through boycotts, divestment, and sanctions until it ends its occupation of territories captured in 1967, ensures equal rights for Palestinian citizens, and recognizes the right of return of Palestinian refugees under UN Resolution 194.

It goes back to what you mentioned—the NGO economy. That is what happened to the Palestinian struggle after Oslo. When researching the history of transnational solidarity movements in cities like Paris, London, Cologne, and Amsterdam, they were mainly connected to Global South solidarity networks. But once the peace agreements were signed³, the international community reshaped their identity, recasting Palestinian solidarity movements from political actors into human rights activists — and many of these movements fell into the trap of the neo-liberal victim economy.

Palestinians fell in this trap, becoming framed as victims dependent on Western aid, forgetting how to operate a struggle, letting some of the connection with African, Asian and Latin American connections. But many networks faded, leaving only the NGO structures on the basis of humanitarian aspects without any political goals.

KK: You mentioned the Oslo peace process and how Palestinians adopted then a victim image in relation to Western support. In 2014, you created *Suspended Time* (2014), a series by Palestinian filmmakers who reflected on the peace process two decades later.

MY: Yes, after twenty years of silence. It has been thirty years since the peace process began. *Suspended Time* captured the decay and erosion of memory it caused. However, we have yet to fully decolonize our mentality and society from that framework. Now, we feel it

is time to produce another anthology—something like *Non-Suspended Time*—to explore how to decolonize Palestinian space, memory, and society in order to move forward.

KK: Given how time has shaped your perspective, what do you feel is important to express about these agreements now?

MY: I am not sure. But now, after almost 30 years of signing this agreement, I would rather talk about it as a contract than a peace process. They tied one side (the Palestinians) to political and economical obligations in exchange for keeping the salaries flowing in. Peace is essentially dead, but the agreements remain, allowing the Palestinian Authority (PA) to access taxes and international funding from the EU and the US.

To get this funding, the PA must share security information: names, birth dates, and personal data. In the West Bank, no one even thinks about data protection. If you mention it, they look at you like you are crazy. This is the reality of “peace”?

Today, when I see *Suspended Time* again, it reminds me that we tried to create a cut with this agreement to halt the erosion of memory and identity. Looking back now, we can assess how this anthology reflects the end of that process.

KK: As a producer, you have personal motivations for a project, but collaboration brings diverse perspectives. How do you navigate your role?

The answer is perhaps to revisit the same filmmakers we have worked with over the past

3 The Oslo Accords, signed in 1993 and 1995 between Israel and the PLO, aimed to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through mutual recognition and the creation of the Palestinian National Authority, granting limited self-rule in parts of the West Bank and Gaza. However, they did not establish a Palestinian state and faced strong opposition from both Palestinian factions and right-wing Israelis.

twenty years and ask how their views have changed over the past decade. It is not about starting fresh, but about reflecting on how our relationships — with those filmmakers, with each other, with our spaces, and with our politics — have evolved.

KK: Especially since these filmmakers represent groups with distinct viewpoints...

MY: The keyword here is accumulation as a way to disrupt the cycle of ruptures. For me, as a Palestinian, this has always been a struggle. For Palestinians, Long-term planning has always been difficult because we were constantly moving. From 1948 throughout the '70s, '80s, and '90s, we did not have the luxury of staying put. Our bags were always packed, and with passports in hand to leave anytime.

Planning was short-term—like finishing the current school year—because you could never be sure you would stay in the same place or keep the same friends. This rupture may be less pronounced for Palestinians who were not displaced from their villages, yet instability still looms: siblings could be arrested, parents taken away. Even when physically rooted, these ruptures shape how we plan our time and how we perceive it.

KK: How do these ruptures, distorting the relationship with time and place, have shaped your work process?

Resisting rupture means fostering continuity—building communities around ongoing projects. This approach is not bound by conventional notions of time and space. It mirrors the Palestinian experience: those who stayed in one place lost their connection to time, while those who lost their place became more

in control of it. This disruption of place and time distinguishes Palestinian communities from other societies. For example, Egypt's collective aesthetics, reflecting a society rooted in the same place for 7,000 years, interconnects time and space, and creates a sense of stability. This is evident in their art and film scene. Egypt, one of the first Arab countries to absorb European modernity, has blended it with ancient traditions, maintaining a deep, continuous connection between culture, time, and space.

KK: So, your approach overcomes ruptures when planning projects as a series. What particular rupture has influenced you the most?

MY: I think back to my childhood in Kuwait before the Gulf War in 1990. I spent my first ten years there, already grappling with what it meant to be Palestinian. I often wondered why Palestinians were different from Kuwaitis or Egyptians, even though we all spoke Arabic. Then, suddenly, I had to leave—my first rupture. Another rupture came when I moved from Gaza to the West Bank in 1999, just as the Second Intifada began. For eight years, I could not visit my parents, nor they me.

KK: Your parents still live in Gaza. How do you manage to see them now?

MY: They come for visits to Belgium, and I visit them sometimes. If seen as a personal rupture, it is painful. But when viewed as part of a broader pattern, it becomes a reflection of settler colonialism, which forces perpetual displacement. This perspective opens up the possibility of change. In that light, striving to build a movement makes more sense.

This summer, I visited the West Bank, and the year before, I went to Gaza. I do not combine the trips, as one is through Egypt and the other via Amman. I prefer it this way—it feels more grounded. Having lived in the West Bank, I nearly forgot how living in Gaza feels. But when I visited last in 2021, I realized Gaza has its own distinct modernity, different from the West Bank.

KK: How so?

MY: The companies, products, food quality, and street signs differ from those in the West Bank. I noticed a different vibe in the universities. I used to think the West Bank was more liberal and open-minded, but during that visit I felt more politically liberated in Gaza. It is the only place where Palestinians can express political views without fear of arrest. In the West Bank, that is not the case.

Despite political differences, I felt a sense of unity in Gaza. Just in my family's building, where three other uncles live, flags of different political parties were hung from the balconies—Fatah, Hamas, and PFLP—something you do not see in the West Bank. People in Gaza are acutely aware of the siege they live under and work together to manage resources—organizing electricity schedules and sharing supplies. In the West Bank, people do not share this same awareness; they accept things as just how life is.

KK: You left Ramallah for Brussels nine years ago. Was it for a specific opportunity, or did you feel the need to leave?

MY: At the end of the day, Ramallah is small, and it became increasingly difficult to grow artistically and academically. Although I had

produced feature films, I felt I was no longer developing. Then, I had the opportunity to work as a researcher at the School of Arts in Ghent. While I was one of the few working with film archives in Ramallah, in Ghent I found a global community doing similar work. This shift allowed me to move beyond narratives of Palestinian victimhood from the Oslo era and explore broader themes: how people in struggle—not only Palestinians—create their own cinema, revealing patterns connecting Palestinian, Algerian, Cuban, and Chilean militant cinema globally.

KK: You teach found-footage filmmaking, do not you?

MY: Yes, I teach a course called “Film Units and Collectives” at the same time work on my research project *Imperfect Archives*, which is a title inspired by Julio García Espinosa's text *For an Imperfect Cinema* (1969). The idea is that imperfect cinema can only exist within imperfect, non-institutional archives. The memory of films and archives of the several transnational solidarity struggles such as Palestinian archives, , are not preserved in official cinematheques but in personal collections—holding posters, films, and materials from past liberation movements.

KK: Your upcoming found-footage film, *R 21 AKA Restoring Solidarity* (2022), explores Japanese archives of the Palestinian struggle. As it is your second archival project, did you choose found-footage out of necessity, or was it a deliberate creative decision?

MY: There are different motivations. Godard once said: “We live in a time of too many im-

ages,” so why create more? Another key question is whether political memory can exist without a political party. Many archives were produced by organizations like the PLO⁴, the Italian Communist Party, or the ICIAC⁵—most of which no longer function as they once did. So, what do we preserve exactly—the ideology, the memory or the practice of these filmmakers who used these structures to document their struggle?

Meeting revolutionary filmmakers while researching my first feature in 2010 was a turning point. Many had not been contacted in decades and shared invaluable materials I felt responsible for preserving. My work is not about rewriting history, but reshaping its representation. For instance, the Palestinian movements of the 1970s included secular Marxist factions—sometimes more progressive than their European Marxist-Leninist groups. Yet European audiences often reduce the Palestinian struggle to religious movements, like the Muslim Brotherhood.

KK: Your project connects Palestinians with various “others” facing similar struggles. After years of research, has your view shifted?

MY: My interest in archives emerged around the time of the Arab Spring. The movements that arose were difficult to fully grasp without connecting them to historical context. They operated reactively, focusing on the immediate moment rather than drawing from

past experiences—a lack of reflection contributed to their failures. Archives, whether cinematic or otherwise, serve as political tools, providing essential reference points for understanding and reflection.

Looking ahead, any new political movement from the region must link with both recent and older archives to ensure continuity. This is reflected in how Palestinian and Arab artists or filmmakers frequently call themselves “the first” to achieve something, as if history continually resets.

KK: When working on a found-footage feature film, do you feel more pressure to consider the audience, especially given the financial stakes and, for instance, workshops involved?

MY: With my latest film, *R 21 aka Restoring Solidarity* (2022), I did not participate in any film development workshops. I was only interested in how Japanese and Palestinian audiences would respond, so I only sought their feedback. If the film finds an international audience, so be it, but my primary goal was to explore why Japan had preserved twenty-five Palestinian films and archival material for decades.

The film became a kind of love letter to Japanese solidarity movement with Palestine—to acknowledge solidarity that has gone largely unknown by Palestinians. There have been many distant acts of support for Palestinians, like Japan’s. The more I examined them, the more interconnected I felt. Given our current

4 PLO – Palestine Liberation Organization: a political and paramilitary organization founded in 1964, unifying and centralizing Palestinian factions to represent Palestinian struggle for self-determination. Later, in 1974, recognized as their legitimate representative by the Arab League and UN (UNGA Resolution 3236), it later shifted from armed resistance to diplomacy, notably through the 1993 Oslo Accords with Israel.

5 Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos, a Cuban state institution dedicated to film production, promotion, and distribution.

political realities, I always remember what the filmmaker Masao Adachi⁶, once told me: “Japan will not be free until Palestine is free.”

KK: That is a powerful statement.

MY: It is. But look at Japan today—it recently increased its defense budget at the U.S.’s request. The film touches on this: Japan’s occupation didn’t truly end in 1960 with its defense agreement with the U.S. Even now, the U.S. controls its seas and airspace. In a way, Japan remains under a form of occupation, though less visible.

That made me think—Palestinian freedom is not just about Palestine. It is tied to dismantling a broader global power structure. Israel exists because of the American support; if that grip weakens, Japan, too, in some sense, could be free. It is a larger geopolitical

idea that extends beyond the Middle East.

KK: You talk about Palestine, freedom, and struggle—terms that carry many interpretations today. How do you personally define them?

MY: I am not sure what freedom truly means. I think I can travel and speak freely, but the core issue is injustice. It goes back to 1948, to the forced displacement of people that shaped entire generations to come. Exiled people had to reconstruct their memories, their bodies, their social behaviors severed from their history.

And this is not just about Palestine; it is happening everywhere. The real question is: When will we fully acknowledge it? And when we do, will we be able to rewrite history?

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⁶ Masao Adachi (足立正生), born May 13, 1939, is a Japanese screenwriter, director, actor, and former member of the Japanese Red Army. Active mainly in the 1960s and 1970s.

