

## SWITZERLAND

### Highly concentrated leading news media in austerity and downsizing mode

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#### Introduction

Switzerland, a small, landlocked country in the centre of Europe, enjoys a remarkably long and continuous tradition of independence, stability, and political neutrality. In early 2020, the Switzerland's population was 8.6 million residents, about 25 per cent of which were foreigners. Consequently, one key characteristic of this country is its cultural diversity. There are four official languages – German (primary spoken language of 62% of the population in 2018), French (23%), Italian (8%), and Rhaeto-Romanic (0.5%), which more or less also define the land's four different cultural mentalities. Therefore, issues related to the integration of a big and heterogeneous group of immigrants, and new refugees, often become a controversial topic in the politics of the country. Politically, Switzerland is considered a semi-direct democracy with strong federalism in addition to a high degree of autonomy in its 26 cantons and nearly 2,200 communities.

**Freedom in the World 2021:** status "free" (Score: 96/100, stable since 2017). In 2020, Switzerland ranked 12th among 210 countries for its political rights and civil liberties (Freedom House, 2021).

**Liberal Democracy Index 2020:** Switzerland is placed in the Top 10% bracket – rank 5 of measured countries (Varieties of Democracy Institute, 2021).

**Freedom of Expression Index 2018:** rank 1 of measured countries, up from 4 in 2016 (Varieties of Democracy Institute, 2017, 2019).

**2020 World Press Freedom Index:** rank 8 of 180 countries, down from 6 in 2019 (Reporters Without Borders, 2020).

The diversified structure of the Swiss society, with its high obligation for civic engagement, has been an important precondition for its differentiated media landscape (Bonfadelli, 2010; Künzler, 2013; Studer et al., 2014; Meier, 2016). It is shaped, on the one hand, by the Swiss Public Broadcasting Corporation SRG SSR, with its radio and television programmes in each of the three language regions (SRG SSR, 2020a) and, on the other, by a regionally based press, dominated by the three biggest publishing houses, the TX Group (former Tamedia AG), the NZZ Mediengruppe, and the newly created CH Media, a joint venture started in 2018 based on a partnership between AZ Medien and NZZ-Regionalmedien with head offices in Aarau. Meanwhile, the private commercial radio and television stations in the country are quite weak and mostly owned by the dominant publishing houses. Interestingly, there was also a merger in 2018, in the background, of Swiss news agency Keystone-SDA – a corporation with stocks by the Swiss media – and the Austrian Press Agency APA, which resulted in 40 job cuts across 150 full-time positions.

The Federal Constitution (FC) of the Swiss Confederation's Article 16 guarantees "freedom of opinion and information", namely of the media. Furthermore, the Constitution prohibits censorship and also guarantees editorial secrecy. Freedom of the press, the ability to gather and publish information and express opinions freely, is traditionally interpreted in Switzerland as protecting the right to establish newspapers or other such media outlets. The independence of the Public Broadcasting Corporation SRG SSR is specifically underlined in the RTVG, the Swiss Radio and Television Act. Swiss television and radio stations have the mandate to reflect and maintain the linguistic and cultural diversity of the country by providing specific programming.

Switzerland's media policy is governed by several national and regional institutions along with other stakeholders, who influence the norms and values of the Swiss media landscape. The Federal Council, the Swiss Parliament, the Federal Department of the Environment, Transportation, Energy and Communication (DETEC), the Federal Office of Communications (OFCOM), and the Independent Complaints Authority for Radio and Television (ICA), play a crucial role in media governance together with political parties, media organisations, and inter-trade organisations like Verband Schweizer Medien [Swiss Media Association] (VSM), who also have a say in governmental media policy strategies. Therefore, the nation's media political debate in the past 20 years has been strongly influenced by questions of press concentration and the future financing of the press, including indirect subsidies for distribution, direct subsidies, and financing, together with cost savings of the Public Broadcasting Corporation SRG SSR.

## *Covid-19*

Switzerland, like all other European countries, was hit by the Covid-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020. As a result, the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) quickly launched a large-scale information campaign. For example, through posters and advertisements, as well as online information in more than one dozen languages, strict social distancing rules were implemented. Meanwhile, it was only in August that wearing masks in public transportation was made compulsory for everyone. However, there were still no stringent rules for wearing masks while shopping in stores. As a result, from the start of the pandemic until mid-August 2020, Switzerland remained affected by the Covid-19 crisis with around 38,500 infections and around 1,720 deaths. The effects of Covid-19 were not only limited to patients, but also traders, shopkeepers, and the media industry. The media industry was severely impacted by newspaper bans in restaurants and loss of advertising. The Federal Council, therefore, formulated an emergency package for the media amounting to CHF 30 million by the end of May 2020.

From the beginning, Swiss federal spokesperson and FOPH official Daniel Koch updated the public about the Covid-19 situation almost daily, always in the main news of the public broadcasting corporation SRG SSR. And probably analogous to the rest of Europe, the Covid-19 crisis largely dominated media coverage, prompting an increase in the public's use of news (Mediapulse, 2020). In addition, early on in April 2020 (see Russ-Mohl, 2020), communication scientists in Switzerland like Stephan Russ-Mohl, Vinzenz Wyss, or Otfried Jarren were reasonably critical about the quality of media coverage. Among other things, questions were raised on the lack of transparent reporting, media's handling of figures, the focus on dramatic individual cases and fearmongering, and virologists as infallible media stars.

By the end of July, the first systematic content analysis of 22 leading news media from German- and French-speaking Switzerland in the period from 1 January 2020 to 30 April 2020, based on a representative sample of 1,448 articles from 28,695 articles on the Covid-19 topic, was published by the fög – Forschungszentrum Öffentlichkeit und Gesellschaft [Research Center for the Public Sphere and Society] at the University of Zurich. This concluded that performance of the Swiss media during the pandemic tended to be positive. There was diversity in topics discussed, and expert views were represented; however, dominance of men was observed. While the relevance of reporting was relatively high, a low level of thematic integration was a key shortcoming. Despite critical discussions about the government and authorities as well as a distance of the media from the measures prescribed by the authorities was observed, in some ways the media appeared to have behaved relatively uncritically, especially in the sensitive phase before the shutdown – in the opinion

of the fög – and possible developments were not contextualised enough. In addition, a problematic handling of figures and statistics was revealed, which had already been criticised by Klaus Meier and Vinzenz Wyss. These general findings on media performance differed by media type, with public broadcasting performing particularly well. Tabloid and commuter newspapers, on the other hand, were less diverse in their reporting, according to the fög's analysis, which revealed their tendency to convey bare numbers without classification and largely with an alarmist-dramatising stance in reporting.

From the perspective of media users, Mediapulse AG, which measures usage of television and radio in Switzerland, pointed out in a press release at the beginning of April 2020 that in the first two weeks of shutdown, significantly more people watched television, especially during prime time, and also for longer. Thomas Friemel from the IKMZ – Institute for Communication Science and Media Research at the University of Zurich, and his team, conducted a representative survey of around 1,000 people on information and communication behaviour during the Covid-19 crisis from 19–24 March 2020. According to their findings, the German-Swiss population attributed great relevance to the information both from the Federal Council and the FOPH, and from Swiss television, regarding the Covid-19 crisis. Interpersonal communication also played an important role, for example, via telephone or SMS, whereby social media was classified as not very relevant (see also Hargittai & Nguyen, 2020). From the respondents' point of view, the journalistic media offerings contributed the most with their information for orientation and ordering, and also helped to deal emotionally with the uncertainties during the pandemic. At the beginning of the shutdown, the German-Swiss population felt well or very well informed, and confidence in the Swiss public institutions was very high. Interestingly, a majority – especially the younger demographic – found that the Covid-19 crisis was over-addressed.

The two empirical studies of the situation in Switzerland concluded with good performance of the media, apart from certain shortcomings, and an intensive assessment by the people also evaluated it positively. Good journalism is still important and needed, especially in times of crisis, as the example of the Covid-19 pandemic illustrates (Brost & Pörksen, 2020; see also Sandhu, 2013; Winter & Rösner, 2019).

### *Leading news media sample*

The media indicators for the 2021 Media for Democracy Monitor (MDM) report are based on relevant statistical media data and current scientific findings on the news media landscape in Switzerland (for the previous report, see Meier et al., 2011). Furthermore, eight in-depth interviews were conducted

with leading professional heads and journalists of large publishing houses and the public broadcasting corporation SRG SSR (2020a). These were supplemented by one interview with the representative of the biggest journalists' union and several interviews with other media experts. They provide a more in-depth insight and a clear picture of the media's performance for democracy as well as the everyday routines employed in practice. We decided to focus on the German-speaking part of Switzerland, where the media had its highest audience reach and the largest publishing houses are located. Table 1 outlines the nine media practitioners interviewed.

**Table 1** Interviewees

Gender & role	Organisation	Media
Male editor	bz (CH Media)	Regional newspaper
Female editor-in-chief	20 Minuten (TX Group)	Daily free-sheet
Female editor	Tages-Anzeiger (TX Group)	Biggest regional paper
Male editor	NZZ am Sonntag (NZZ Media Group)	Quality Sunday paper
Male editor-in-chief	CH Media	20 regional papers
Female editor-in-chief	Swiss Radio DRS & SR	Public service broadcast
Male editor news office	SF DRS	Public service broadcast
Female editor	Swiss Radio DRS	Public service broadcast
Female vice president	syndicom (formerly Comedia)	Media trade union

### *Swiss news media and journalism in transition*

Digitalisation of media and journalism is discussed in an ambivalent way. Whereas enabling feedback, dialogue, and even participation by citizens is interpreted rather positively, increased speed of production, stronger reader orientation, and economic influences are criticised.

As a general entry into the expert interview, the responding journalists and media experts of Switzerland were asked to interpret and assess the ongoing developments of the Swiss media system and the future of its journalism (see also VSM, 2016). They mentioned positive issues as well as negative trends and challenges. Digitalisation is mentioned mostly in a positive context, namely enabling more feedback, direct contacts, dialogue, and participation by citizens in the process of newsmaking. Conversely, the pressures to react immediately, and the increased speed and complexity of the processes of newsmaking is criticised as a problem, especially jeopardising the quality of news. These tendencies are referred to mostly in relation to the intensified importance of the commercialised media logic in journalism (Umbricht & Esser, 2016; Fürst, 2018), because

of the economic press crisis and diminishing resources. In addition, positions on the quality of journalism varied. Some journalists recognised an increase of quality – for example, in the form of a more critical stance against politicians, authorities, and administration – whereas others observed tendencies of decreasing politicisation in media coverage (Tresch, 2009; fög, 2019). But online platforms and social media in news markets were judged in an ambivalent way (Klinger & Svensson, 2017; Cairncross Review, 2019). They tend to weaken the agenda-setting function of the classic media by delivering diverse topics and are used as (alternative) sources of information. Additionally, they exert pressure in the form of personalisation, emotionalization, and scandalisation by “shitstorms” and increasing harassment of journalists.

## Indicators

### *Dimension: Freedom / Information (F)*

(F1) Geographic distribution of news media availability 3 POINTS

News media are widely available in all language regions of Switzerland with no major restrictions, despite strong horizontal press concentration since 2000.

IN 2011  
3 POINTS

The media landscape is characterised by a high level of technical reach and, in principle, unlimited public access, disregarding costs of newspaper subscription and broadcast fees (see Indicator E5 – Affordable public and private news media). There are hardly any linguistic or regional, and only limited urban-country divides as far as the supply of newspapers is concerned, although broadband access to the Internet is partly restricted in remote areas. Each linguistic area is provided with its own media: private-commercial and public service radio and television programs, daily and weekly newspapers, as well as various periodicals (Meier et al., 2011). Extensive cable networks (e.g., by UPC) and Swisscom, together with mobile telecommunication networks by Swisscom and digital platforms (e.g., by UPC or Sunrise), allow most Swiss households to access programmes from neighbouring countries, sharing one of the country’s national languages. Increasing access to electronic media, particularly via the Internet, has further expanded the availability of news and information sources. This holds true even in 2020.

But since the 1990s, press concentration in the form of large-scale mergers into monopoly newspapers in central and eastern Switzerland has strongly increased (e.g., Bühler & Moser, 2020), combined with a background of declining readership of subscribed newspapers and advertising flows into Internet platforms. In addition, newspapers are increasingly now read online, for exam-

ple, via mobile phones, and television programs are watched via computers and not necessarily in real time.

Concerning broadcast media, in past years, the Swiss radio and television landscape has experienced some fundamental changes. In 2006, the Swiss Parliament adopted a new Federal Radio and Television Act (RTVG) to ensure the dominant role of SRG SSR. In parallel, the law supports local-regional, commercial licensed broadcasters with performance mandates. Ten years later, public service broadcasting came under political pressure, mainly because of the “No Billag” initiative, which called for the abolition of radio and television reception fees. However, in March 2018, 71.6 per cent of the voters said no to the initiative against SRG SSR.

The public broadcasting corporation SRG SSR is the most important producer of radio and television programmes. Institutionalised by law and financed by obligatory household charge fees, it is entrusted with the mandate to provide all linguistic regions with programmes of equal quality on a public service basis. Its programming mission, Art. 24 in RTVG (2006), states:

Comprehensive supply of the entire population and promotion of understanding, cohesion and exchange among the national regions, language communities, cultures and social groups through comprehensive, diverse and appropriate information on political, economic and social contexts, namely for the free formation of opinion, cultural development, education and entertainment of the public.

The SRG SSR operates between three and six radio stations in each language region in German, French, and Italian, with a total of 17 radio programmes. A full programme is also being produced for the Rhaeto-Romanesque regions. In each linguistic region, there are television studios in Zurich, Genf (Geneva), and Lugano producing seven television programmes, two for each region, and one in Chur for the Rhaeto-Romanic language (only a few hours per week). In addition, the German part of Switzerland is provided with a 24-hour information channel, repeating the latest news programmes initially shown on one of the two regular channels. Furthermore, 37 private radios with 149 programmes and 13 private television stations with 155 programmes exist in the local and regional markets (BAKOM, 2020a).

In addition, the SRG SSR produces and offers the widest broadcasts on both television and radio with market shares of about 38 per cent for SRF Television, compared with 11 per cent of the commercial local television stations, and a market share of 61 per cent for SRF Radio, while the commercial local radio stations in the German part of Switzerland (2019 data) possess 35 per cent. Of the Swiss population (15+), 60 per cent use television, 61 per cent listen to radio programmes, and 33 per cent use online supply every week, all provided by SRG SSR (2020b).

**Table 2** Number of broadcast media and programmes and market shares in per cent

Category	Number of programmes (2009)	Number of programmes (2019)	Market shares (per cent)
TV Public Broadcaster SRG SSR	8	8	2009: 34 (DS), 31 (WS), 34 (IS) 2019: 31 (DS), 27 (WS), 27 (IS)
Private TV broadcasters (with licence <sup>a</sup> & notified without licence <sup>b</sup> )	15 <sup>a</sup> 90 <sup>b</sup>	14 <sup>a</sup> 149 <sup>b</sup>	2009: 6 (DS), 1.7 (WS), 1.7 (IS) 2019: 10 (DS), 1.7 (WS), 1.5 (IS)
Radio Public Broadcaster SRG SSR	18	18	2009: 66.1 (DS), 67.3 (WS), 84.0 (IS) 2019: 60.8 (DS), 61.7 (WS), 73.6 (IS)
Private Radio (with licence <sup>c</sup> & services notified without licence <sup>d</sup> )	49 <sup>c</sup> 38 <sup>d</sup>	37 <sup>c</sup> 144 <sup>d</sup>	2009: 28.8 (DS), 22.3 (WS), 8.1 (IS) 2019: 35.6 (DS), 29.1 (WS), 20.9 (IS)
Online:- Schweizer Nachrichten SWI swissinfo.ch (in several languages)	1	1	–

Comments: Market Shares: people 15+, Mo-Su, 24h; DS = German, WS = French, IS = Italian part of Switzerland.

Source: Mediapulse, 2019a–c

In terms of press, Switzerland has renowned, high-quality elite newspapers such as the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung (NZZ)*, which is mainly read by economic elites. Popular media such as the tabloid newspaper *Blick* are read more by the rural population, while the free-sheet *20Minuten* has the highest reach and is aimed at young commuters in major agglomerations. As in most European countries, traditional regional press in Switzerland also came under severe pressure due to the launch of the free-sheet *20Minuten* in 1999 by Tamedia, for commuters, in the German-speaking Switzerland, followed by its introduction in Roman-die in 2006 and Ticino in 2011. Paradoxically, even high-quality newspapers such as the *NZZ* now publish advertisements as editorial articles, which are misleadingly referred to by the readership as “Publireportage” or “Sponsored Content”. Sponsored travel and car items have also increased because of the commercial pressure on newspapers in the small market of Switzerland. Processes of horizontal concentration (see Indicators E1 & E2 – Media ownership concentration national and regional level) have also been very strong in the



last 20 years. Today, there are only five media companies dominating the press market (all circulation numbers by WEMF, 2019; 1 April 2018–31 March 2019).

Tamedia, today named TX Group – the largest publishing company, with over 50 brands, 3,700 employees, and a business volume of CHF 1,080 million in 2019 – published the following regionally leading daily newspapers: *Tages-Anzeiger* (130,957); the Sunday paper *SonntagsZeitung* (146,126); the *Berner Zeitung* and *Der Bund* (119,700 total), both published in Bern, the capital of Switzerland; and *Basler Zeitung* (40,422). Tamedia also publishes *20Minuten* (424,502) in German and *20 minutes* (169,453) in the French-speaking part, a Monday-to-Friday daily for commuters, free of charge. The title *20 minuti* for the Italian-speaking Switzerland has a circulation of 32,192 copies. In addition, Tamedia, in 2010, bought the three leading daily newspapers *24Heures* (49,107), *Le Matin* (after 2018 online-only), and *Tribune de Genève* (31,282) in the French-speaking part of Switzerland with approximately 3,600 employees and sales payment media approximately for CHF 570 million (2018).

Ringier AG produces the daily tabloid newspaper *Blick* (107,119), the evening free-sheet *Blick am Abend* (2008–2018), and the Sunday newspaper *Sonntagsblick* (129,715), together with 30 magazines, comprising about 550 employees and a total business volume of CHF 1,004 million in 2018.

CH Media produces different regional newspapers, which – before 2018 – were published by AZ Medien in the region of Aargau, Solothurn, Basel-Land (Basel country), and owned by Peter Wanner. It was integrated in the form of a joint venture in 2018 with the NZZ-Media Group and its regional titles like *Luzerner Zeitung* (110,081 total) and *St. Galler Tagblatt* (109,077 total), totalled to about 20 local newspapers with a central editorial office in Aarau, about 2,000 employees and a business volume of CHF 448 million in 2019.

The NZZ Media Group with its flagship *NZZ* (96,109) is a highly regarded national daily newspaper, and its Sunday counterpart *NZZ am Sonntag* (110,815) has a partly separate editorial staff. In addition, it owned several regional newspapers, now integrated into the joint venture CH Media, which has 780 employees and a business volume in 2019 of CHF 231 million.

Somedia, the former Südostschweiz Media House by Hanspeter Lebrument, publishes several regional and local newspapers in the Cantons Graubünden (Grisons), Glarus, and St. Gallen (St. Gall), namely the *Südostschweiz* together with the *Bündner Zeitung* (73,252 total), and *La Quotidiana* in Rätoromansch (romansh) language (3,917).

There are also local free papers. Christoph Blocher, a well-known right-wing conservative SVP (Schweizerische Volkspartei [Swiss People's Party]) politician and former Federal Councillor, bought the Zehnder publishing house in 2018, which issued 25 local-regional free papers with a total circulation of approximately 835,000 examples.

The five big media companies mentioned above, together with further titles, produced and distributed a total of 312 newspapers (including local non-dailies)

in 2009, and 269 in 2019, with a total circulation of 9.2 million in 2009 and 5.9 million in 2019. Switzerland is still one of the richest countries in terms of number of newspapers published in proportion to its population and geographical size (VSM, 2019). However, many titles are virtually identical in terms of foreign and domestic reporting. Newspapers are also widely available in all regions: 221 titles with a total circulation of 4.8 million in the German part, 35 titles with a circulation of 94,000 in the French part, and 11 titles with a circulation of 172,700 in the Italian part of Switzerland in 2019. More than half of the cantonal capitals and almost all major cities have at least one regional newspaper, although 12 cantons do not have their own daily newspaper, but only a local editorial office, such as Appenzell Outer Rhodes, Basel-Country, Glarus, Lucerne, Nidwald, Obwald, Schwyz, Solothurn, St. Gall, Thurgovia, Uri, and Zug.

**Table 3** *Leading regional newspapers in the 26 cantons*

Newspapers	Canton	Characteristics	Editorial office	Owner
Aargauer Zeitung	Argovia	CH Regional Media <sup>a</sup>	Aarau/Baden	CH Media
Appenzeller Zeitung	Appenzell OR	St. Galler Tagblatt <sup>a</sup>	St. Gall	CH Media
Appenzeller Volksfreund	Appenzell I.R.	–	Appenzell	Print by Appenzeller Volksfreund
Basellandschaftliche Zeitung	Basel-Country	CH Regional Media <sup>a</sup>	Aarau/Baden	CH Media
Basler Zeitung (BaZ)	Basel-City	Tages-Anzeiger <sup>a</sup>	Basel	TX Group
Berner Zeitung	Bern	Tages-Anzeiger <sup>a</sup>	Bern	TX Group
Bund <sup>b</sup>	Bern	Tages-Anzeiger <sup>a</sup>	Bern	TX Group
Bieler Tagblatt (German)	Bern	Berner Zeitung <sup>b</sup>	Biel	W. Gassmann AG
Journal du Jura (French)	Bern	–	Biel	W. Gassmann AG
Freiburger Nachrichten (German)	Freiburg	Berner Zeitung <sup>a</sup>	Fribourg	Paulus Druckerei → TX Media
La Liberté (French)	Fribourg	–	Fribourg	Saint Paul Holding SA
Tribune de Genève	Geneva	–	Geneva	TX Group
Südostschweiz Glarus	Glarus	Südostschweiz <sup>a</sup>	Chur	Somedia Chur
Südostschweiz	Grisons	Main edition	Chur	Somedia Chur
La Quotidiana (Romantsch)	Grisons	–	Chur	Somedia Chur
Le Quoditien Jurassien	Jura	–	Delémont	Editions D+P SA
Neue Luzerner Zeitung	Lucerne	Main edition	Lucerne	CH Media
ArcInfo (until 2018 L'Express)	Neuchâtel	–	Neuchâtel	ESH Médias
ArcInfo (until 2018 L'Impartial)	Neuchâtel	–	Neuchâtel	ESH Médias
Neue Nidwaldner Zeitung	Nidwald	Neue Luzerner Zeitung <sup>a</sup>	Lucerne	CH Media
Neue Obwaldner Zeitung	Obwald	Neue Luzerner Zeitung <sup>a</sup>	Lucerne	CH Media
Schaffhauser Nachrichten	Schaffhausen	Der Landbote <sup>b</sup>	Schaffhausen	Meier + Cie AG Schaffhausen

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Neue Schwyzer Zeitung	Schwyz	Neue Luzerner Zeitung <sup>a</sup>	Lucerne	CH Media
Solothurner Zeitung	Solothurn	CH Regional Media <sup>a</sup>	Aarau	CH Media
St. Galler Tagblatt	St. Gall	Main edition	St. Gall	CH Media
Il Corriere del Ticino	Ticino	–	Muzzano	Società editrice Corriere del Ticino
La Regione	Ticino	–	Bellinzona	Giacomo Salvioni Editore
Thurgauer Zeitung	Thurgovia	St. Galler Tagblatt <sup>a</sup>	St. Gall	CH Media
Neue Urner Zeitung	Uri	Neue Luzerner Zeitung <sup>a</sup>	Lucerne	CH Media
24 Heures	Vaud	–	Lausanne	TX Group
Walliser Bote (German)	Valais	–	Visp	Mengis Druck + Verlag
Le Nouvelliste (French)	Valais	–	Sion	ESH Médias
Neue Zuger Zeitung	Zug	Neue Luzerner Zeitung <sup>a</sup>	Lucerne	CH Media
NZZ-Group	Zurich	–	Zurich	NZZ-Gruppe
Tages-Anzeiger	Zurich	–	Zurich	TX Group
Zürcher Regionalzeitungen	Zurich	Tages-Anzeiger <sup>a</sup>	Winterthur/ Stäfa	TX Group

<sup>a</sup>Strong content syndication: newspaper is subsidiary and only produces regional section and takes over culture, foreign politics, national politics, economy from the main edition of its newspaper.

<sup>b</sup>Content syndication: newspaper relies on content of another newspaper insofar as it prints a selection of articles from its “mother” newspaper/main edition. The newspaper Der Bund consists of 60 per cent of articles from Tages-Anzeiger.

Source: Künzler, 2013: 74–78; Schweizer Medien, n.d.

Nonetheless, the number of newspapers and the total circulation has decreased in the past decade by about a third. Furthermore, big publishing houses are in possession of different newspapers in different regions. This diminishes the diversity of newspapers, as they share most of the international and national politics sections and only provide the bare minimum on exclusive local or regional content (Meier, 2017; Studer, 2017). Table 3 illustrates that only a few publishing houses control the leading newspapers in the 26 cantons like TX Group, Ringier Axel Springer, NZZ Media Group, and CH Media in the German part of Switzerland. The total number of “independent” titles, meanwhile, are about 35 (VSM, 2019).

Today, all press titles are also present on the Internet. This also applies to broadcasters. In addition, there are usually smaller local-regional news media with an online presence only, such as *tsüri.ch*, *bajour.ch*, and *zentralplus.ch*, or national news platforms such as *infosperber.ch* or *watson.ch*.

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## (F2) Patterns of news media use (consumption of news) 2 POINTS

The Swiss population still uses traditional media such as the press, television, and radio to inform about news, but the Internet and social media have become the main source of information, especially for young people.

IN 2011  
3 POINTS

Media ownership and access to it are prerequisites of media use. In 2019, 92 per cent of the Swiss households have been equipped with one or more television receivers (2009: 95%) and 69 per cent had one or more radio receivers (2009: 93%); 93 per cent of all households owned a computer (2009: 87%), 91 per cent a smartphone, and 47 per cent a tablet. In 2019, 93 per cent had access to the Internet (2009: 85%). As many as 47 per cent of the people surveyed lived in a household with a subscribed newspaper. This was significantly less than the 65 per cent who subscribed to newspapers in spring 2009 (Bonfadelli & Fretwurst, 2009; Fretwurst & Bonfadelli, 2019). Thus, ownership of media and media access are at a very high level in Switzerland, although there are still age-, education-, and income-related gaps in access to and use of the Internet and social media (Latzer et al., 2020).

Concerning general media use, for television, in 2009, citizens (3+) spent 145 minutes watching television every day in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, and 161 and 188 minutes in its French- and Italian-speaking parts, respectively (Monday–Sunday). This represented a daily reach of about 70 per cent, according to the data measured by Mediapulse. In 2019, the daily reach of television decreased slightly, especially in the German- and French-speaking parts of Switzerland, but increased somewhat in the Italian-speaking part. This represents an overall decrease in daily television hours across all language regions. The drop of 20 per cent was more in the German- and French-speaking parts compared with 13 per cent in the Italian part of Switzerland (see Table 4). Based on a representative sample of personal interviews in 2019 (Bonfadelli & Fretwurst, 2009; Fretwurst & Bonfadelli, 2019), 62 per cent of viewers said they used SRG SSR’s public television programmes at least several times per week or almost daily – this amount had decreased from 77 per cent in 2009; whereas only 30 per cent viewed the programmes of the private regional television stations regularly in 2019, compared with 46 per cent in 2009.

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**Table 4** *Reach and usage of Swiss broadcasting television and radio programmes, by region*

	German		French		Italian	
	2009	2019	2009	2019	2009	2019
TV daily reach (%)	67	63	68	66	70	73
Radio daily reach (%)	91	83	89	80	90	87
Newspaper daily reach (%)	41	56	49	57	38	48
Internet daily reach (%)	29	68	37	78	27	66
TV daily use (min.)	145	113	161	138	188	170
Radio daily use (min.)	127	102	113	83	115	101
Newspaper daily use (min.)	30	37	34	38	30	40
Internet daily use (min.)	35	97	49	154	31	94

*Comments:* Monday–Friday. Age: 12+ (2009), 15+ (2019)

*Source:* Mediapulse 2009, 2019a–c

The market share of television by the public broadcaster SRG SSR was about a third in 2009 and decreased only slightly to 31 per cent in 2019. Almost two-thirds of the time spent by Swiss inhabitants in front of the television was devoted mostly to entertainment programmes by foreign television providers. Furthermore, only very few Swiss people watch television programmes from other Swiss language areas. The market shares of the private Swiss television stations still remained fairly low. In the last ten years, while it increased steadily from 6 to 10 per cent in the German-speaking part, it decreased slightly from the already low 1.7 per cent in 2009 to 1.6 per cent in 2019 in the French-speaking part, and from 1.7 per cent in 2009 to 1.5 per cent in 2019 in the Italian part of Switzerland for the only private station, Tele Ticino (Mediapulse, 2009, 2019).

In terms of radio, the daily reach in all language regions is even higher than television. However, it dropped between 2009 and 2019 from 91 to 83 per cent in the German part, from 89 to 80 per cent in the French part, and from 90 to 87 per cent in the Italian part of Switzerland (see Table 4). The time spent with radio today is about one and a half hours per day, but that decreased in the last ten years as well from 127 to 102 minutes in the German part, from 113 to 83 minutes in the French part, and from 115 to 101 minutes in the Italian part of Switzerland.

Contrary to television viewing, the radio programmes of SRG SSR predominated radio listening with a market share in 2009 of about two-thirds in the German and French part and with 84 per cent in the Italian part of Switzerland. But that saw a decline too in the last few years to 61 per cent in the German and French part, and 74 per cent in the Italian part of Switzerland in 2019. The private Swiss radio stations have a higher market share compared with the only

minor significance of the private Swiss television stations. It rose from 28.8 per cent in 2009 to 35.6 per cent 2019 in the German part, from 22.3 per cent in 2009 to 29.6 per cent in 2019 in the French part, and even more in the Italian part of Switzerland, from 8.1 per cent in 2009 to 20.9 per cent in 2019, mostly by the local radio station 3iii.

In terms of press, the largest daily newspapers in Switzerland (see Table 5) show a fall in circulation and readership in the last ten years since 2010 for almost all titles. In a representative survey conducted in 2009 (Bonfadelli & Fretwurst, 2009), 55 per cent of the interviewed people said they were reading a newspaper without free-sheets and 24 per cent with free-sheets on a daily basis. That survey also showed that the Swiss spent 37 minutes per day reading print media. In the same follow-up survey in 2019, only 30 per cent reported reading a newspaper on a daily basis, and only 13 per cent were reading free-sheets daily. More men than women and the older, more educated population read newspapers more frequently. In addition, newspaper reading in 2019 was highest in the Italian part of Switzerland (35%), followed by the German (31%) and French (27%) parts.

**Table 5** *Leading Swiss daily newspapers, circulations and readers*

Language region	Newspaper title	Circulation		Print readers		Reach print (%)	Unique users of website per week (%)
		2010	2018/19 <sup>a</sup>	2010	2020-1 <sup>b</sup>	2018-1 <sup>a</sup>	2020-1
German	20Minuten D-CH	494,368	424,592	1,315,000	1,183,000	27.1	31.9
	Blick	214,880	107,119	628,000	426,000	9.5	29.4
	Tages-Anzeiger	203,636	130,957	472,000	361,000	7.6	12.7
	AZ Aargauer Zeitung (GES) <sup>c</sup>	192,234	70,258	391,000	204,000	7.7	–
	Berner Zeitung & Bund (GES) <sup>c</sup>	181,705	119,700	353,000	312,000	6.7	4.5 / 3.0
	Luzerner Zeitung (GES) <sup>c</sup>	127,244	110,081	271,000	271,000	6.1	5.8
	NZZ	125,228	104,460	246,000	239,000	4.8	18.1
French Romandie	20Minutes	207,112	169,453	461,000	496,000	30.8	11
	24 Heures	78,964	49,107	231,000	164,000	9.8	5
	Tribune de Genève	54,068	31,282	140,000	97,000	6.6	4.5
	Le Temps	44,450	33,508	132,000	111,000	7.0	5.4
Italian Ticino	20Minuti	–	32,192	–	86,000	30.3	1.8
	Corriere del Ticino	37,092	30,962	123,000	98,000	33.8	1.9
	La Regione	32,479	27,794	103,000	95,000	31.0	1.1

<sup>a</sup> Circulation number reached with several subsidiaries

<sup>b</sup> Total number of print readers of media brand

<sup>c</sup> (GES = total edition)

Source: WEMF, 2019; circulation and print readers 2010 from Künzler & Kradolfer, 2012: S. 26

The loss of press advertising during the Covid-19 crisis, coupled with increased commercial pressures, stimulated parliamentary debates about an extension of governmental press aid. As a consequence, the Swiss Federal Council and the parliament are planning at the moment to increase the existing subsidising of the postal delivery of newspapers as indirect press aid.

In terms of online use, it is not surprising that the daily reaches, shown in Table 4, and the duration of daily use of the Internet have risen sharply since 2009: between two-thirds and even three-quarters of the respondents in French part of Switzerland are online every day, around 90 minutes, whereas over two-and-a-half hours in the Romandie.

Concerning news media use, Switzerland has a high level of interest in national and international news in general, with 42 per cent people having very strong interests and 46 per cent with rather strong interests (Fretwurst & Bonfadelli, 2019). Men, the older, and the more educated people expressed higher interest in daily news. Consequently, Werner A. Meier and colleagues (2011: 294) concluded in the 2011 MDM report: “Swiss citizens are generally well informed on political issues due to regular public debates on referenda”. It’s not necessarily because these political topics were covered and discussed by the Swiss news media. The 2011 MDM report also stated: “Radio and television, as well as newspapers are the main sources of information for Swiss citizens. However, the Internet has also turned into an important source of information” (Meier et al., 2011: 294). The Internet and social media were used by 63 per cent of citizens for functions like “socialising & casual news consumption” via WhatsApp and Facebook and by 39 per cent for “entertainment & news casually”. Another 39 per cent also gathered “news and information” via YouTube videos (fög, 2019: 12).

To sum up, the increasing importance of Internet platforms like Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter has fundamentally altered news consumption in the last few years. And reciprocally, the usage of traditional media brands like *NZZ* or *Tages-Anzeiger* has decreased and is obviously substituted by social media, especially among younger people. While interests and attention to news were still high in other European countries, with the exception of Southern Europe, social media was the more preferred news source over traditional media.

The comparison of empirical audience data between 2009 and 2019 documents these striking transformations (fög, 2019: 31–32). Over the years, the importance of traditional information media has gone down. The usage (often or very often) of television to gather information decreased from 75 per cent in 2009 to 50 per cent in 2019, for subscribed newspapers from 56 to 32 per cent, and for information of the free-sheets from 55 to 40 per cent. This loss of importance of the classical media was compensated for by a significant increase of digital news media: 52 per cent in 2009 to 61 per cent in 2019. With 70 per cent usage of social media as a news source in 2019, the Internet

was now the most-often used for information gathering. Interestingly, only 15 per cent use blogs as information sources (fög, 2019: 10). In the World Internet Project – Switzerland (Latzer et al., 2020), 85 per cent people said they were using the Internet to search for news. To sum up, social media seems to be the most-common news source today. In addition, the usage of varied forms of media and online channels for news was also noticeable in so-called media repertoires. There was an increase of the “News Deprived” from 21 per cent in 2009 to 36 per cent in 2019. It was at 56 per cent in the age group 16–29, and the so-called global surfers increased from 17 to 25 per cent. For them, online and social media had become the most important source of news.

However, the Covid-19 crisis and the consequent lockdown in Switzerland from 16 March 2020 stimulated the use of broadcast news significantly. The reach of prime time television news by the SRG SSR increased from 37 per cent (2–15 March 2020) to 45 per cent (16–29 March 2020), and daily television consumption rate also jumped from 148 minutes to 179 minutes (Mediapulse, 2020).

In assessment, it can be said that, with the exception of Southern Europe, news use is still high in both Switzerland and most European countries. Around 80 per cent of the adult population are interested in and regularly use daily news. The older generation is still strongly oriented towards the traditional media. Television remains the leading medium, followed by radio and daily newspapers, with the importance of the press, in particular, declining in all countries. Meanwhile, the news content of these leading media organisations is increasingly accessed online or via smartphone by most users. The change in the media is particularly evident among young people between the ages of 15 and 25. On the one hand, interest in the traditional news media has declined and, on the other, the news is being used most by the young generation via social media (e.g., fög, 2019; Fretwurst et al., 2019).

In terms of trust in media and quality assessment of news media, surprisingly, the shift in news usage from traditional media to the digital public sphere have not impaired trust in the media. Disinformation or scepticism seemed to not be a problem in Switzerland until recently (Newman et al., 2019). Overall, 47 per cent of people trust the news and 55 per cent the “news I use”. However, only 17 per cent trust social media as reliable sources of information. The “Brand Trust Scores” are highest for the news produced by SRG SSR, followed by the quality newspapers *NZZ* in the German part of Switzerland and *Le Temps* in the French part. Only 27 per cent of the representative survey have stated they have come across “news with purposely forged facts” until now (e.g., Arlt, 2018).

In addition, two representative standardised opinion surveys asked media users in 2009 and 2019 to assess the quality of media used, based on different indicators (Bonfadelli & Fretwurst, 2009; Fretwurst et al., 2019). In general, the radio and television news of the SRG SSR got significantly better values



than the private local radio programmes, and the private regional television programmes got the lowest scores. For 80 per cent or more, public radio and television programmes were professional and credible, and about two-thirds considered them balanced. Nevertheless, in 2018, 55 per cent of media users surveyed thought fake news was a problem in general (Fretwurst et al., 2018), whereas two-thirds considered fake news to become a major problem in the future (see Indicator F10 – Misinformation and digital platforms).

*Heinz Bonfadelli*

### (F3) Diversity of news sources

2 POINTS

The diversity of news sources has become smaller because of media concentration, especially since 2000.

IN 2011  
3 POINTS

While news sources could mean sources used in news coverage or the handling of news sources in the editorial offices, it should also be kept in mind that in view of the increasing search for news and their use via search engines on the Internet, it would also be necessary to analyse how diverse the news sources found in this way are.

For a long time, news agencies such as the Schweizerische Depeschagentur (SDA) or Deutsche Presse-Agentur in Germany, on the one hand, and correspondents of leading media organisations, on the other, were the most important sources of news. Leading media organisations in Switzerland still rely on a variety of news sources. However, it must be mentioned that journalists are increasingly using the Internet for their stories and neglecting investigations outside the newsroom.

Switzerland has had only one national news agency since 2010, the SDA. It sells material to most media organisations in three languages. In 2018, the SDA also integrated the picture agency Keystone, but reduced its staff due to declining revenues. According to our interviewed media experts, Keystone-SDA has lost ground as a leading news source; for example, CH Media has even cancelled its SDA subscription. And agency texts marked with the acronym SDA are usually only placed as isolated short messages or used as a trigger for additional research, besides original and named reports and interviews as well as contributions and comments from guest authors.

In addition, the concentration of Swiss media into three leading print media houses, – Tamedia (TX Group), NZZ Media Group, and the new CH Media – together with staff reductions over the last twenty years, has led to reports from the same media company being taken as a reference or source. And the strengthening of the international cooperation of the leading Swiss press with foreign newspapers such as the *Tages-Anzeiger* with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*,

or the *NZZ* with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in Germany, led to reduced diversity of news sources. Furthermore, the introduction of so-called integrated newsrooms also stimulated the use of external sources of information for multiple print titles.

Diversity, thus, suffers from cooperation between various newspapers and their news editors. Over the years, content syndication has also become commonplace at different levels. Newspapers take over entire sections or single articles from other newspapers. At the level of national news and more so in international news, performance of most newspapers has declined. Readers receive the same news about national or international politics in almost all newspapers. This reduction in diversity in media content was measured by an “Analysis of Unique Items” that said only 62 per cent of the national political news articles of the twelve main newspapers analysed in the German part of Switzerland were “unique” (38% of articles analysed had appeared in at least two newspapers) (fög, 2019: 20).

Today, only a few publishing companies can afford regional offices in Switzerland as well as foreign correspondents. The public broadcasting corporation SRG SSR, however, still maintains their regional offices and, along with quality newspaper *NZZ*, continues to rely on foreign correspondents.

Meanwhile, the working pressure and constraints have increased dramatically in the current media crisis (Puppis et al., 2014; Hofstetter, 2017). This forces journalists to opt for the growing supply of public relations (PR) material from different stakeholders more easily. Thus, powerful actors from politics and business bring their interests into the media without difficulty (e.g., Grosenbacher, 2010: 133f.).

Although supply of PR material has grown exponentially in recent times, most journalists interviewed, presumably also for self-protection, said they believed this had limited or no influence on their own journalistic works, and that they would themselves be very critical of PR material. However, it is indeed a problem that the increasing sponsored content in the form of so-called “Publireportage” or “Sponsored Content” is regularly produced and published in many newspapers as a source of revenue. Moreover, external comments from outside stakeholders are increasingly being placed in leading news media.

Similar trends have also been observed in our international comparison. In general, diversity of news sources has decreased. Moreover, importance of news agencies in small and medium-sized countries has declined slightly since our interviews, and cooperation and exchange between syndicated leading news media have intensified. It should also be noted that the content of news agencies is usually not taken “one-to-one” but are often used only as triggers for additional original research.

*Heinz Bonfadelli*

(F4) Internal rules for practice of newsroom democracy 2 POINTS

The newsroom practices, especially of Swiss leading newspapers, are not guided by clear and explicit democratic structures. And journalists have only limited influence regarding the selection of the editor-in-chief.

IN 2011  
1 POINT

It is assumed that democratic freedom is greater if journalists can independently decide on editorial matters such as selection, agenda-setting, and interpretation and framing of issues. Our interviews reflect a mixed picture. On one hand, there is no direct pressure on journalists working in the newsroom; however, on the other, there are no clear democratic structures in most editorial offices, and the editor-in-chief is nominated and appointed solely by the owners of the newspapers.

Although journalists in newsrooms can decide how political topics are to be presented, interpreted, and evaluated, they usually take a neutral stance according to the professional understanding of their roles, or otherwise must agree with the editor-in-chief. There is no newsroom council in any of the selected media organisations. The Swiss Broadcasting Corporation SRG SSR has a formal editorial statute, which was formulated in 2019 by employees of SRG, ORF, ARD, and ZDF (AGRA, 2019). Pietro Supino and Res Strehle of the Tamedia Group formulated *Guidelines for Quality in the Media* in 2017. Currently, the NZZ is revising editorial guidelines, based on an older version prepared by its former editor-in-chief Hugo Bütler from 1998 (Atasoy, 2019). While these documents focus on basic principles and minimum standards for journalism, they say little about internal practices in newsrooms. Moreover, the importance of these principles in daily journalistic work remains unclear.

For the media analysed, the nomination of the editor-in-chief is exclusively in the hands of management. In some cases, the acting editor-in-chief holds informal discussions with the heads of other editorial departments; however, this does not seem to have any influence on the management's final decision. Some interviewees stated there were no formal procedures or company rules to ensure the participation of journalists in decision-making processes. At least, the general opinion of newsroom journalists is taken into account when a new editor-in-chief or a new newsroom boss is nominated. However, past experience has shown that editors-in-chief who take over the job against the will of the staff have a hard time succeeding. There is, so to speak, an informal democratic practice, but no formal bottom-up democracy.

Also, leading news media organisations in other European countries usually have no formal rules regarding democratic practices in newsrooms. Media professionals can (co)decide on the selection and interpretation of the news in editorial conferences. However, there are exceptions. For example, in Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands, the decision-making processes are documented in editorial statutes. But like in Switzerland, there is no formal co-determination

anywhere. In practice, a prior hearing is usually held on the appointment of the editor-in-chief.

*Heinz Bonfadelli*

(F5) Company rules against *internal* influence on newsroom/editorial staff

2 POINTS

IN 2011  
2 POINTS

The media representatives of the leading Swiss newspapers attach great importance to separating business-entrepreneurial decisions and journalistic work processes. In practice, this hardly ever succeeds, as business decisions have a major impact on the daily work of the editorial staff and editorial cultures.

According to their own statements, all leading Swiss media organisations fundamentally strive to separate their economic objectives from journalistic services. Even though there are no formal rules on the separation of editorial and entrepreneurial functions, all those surveyed paid attention to a more or less rigorous separation and denied any “toxic” interference from owners, shareholders, or boards of directors. For the respondents, journalistic principles always came first.

Although publishers and the extended chief editorial staff met regularly, this exchange was not seen as interference, but as a legitimate perception of entrepreneurial leadership and responsibility. Nowadays, the editor-in-chief seems to be more involved in economic and strategic management than in the past. At the level of editor-in-chief or journalistic management, “cooperation” with owners, shareholder groups, advertising departments, and “commercial editorial departments” is, therefore, almost constitutive.

In any case, entrepreneurial decisions often have a major impact on the organisation of editorial work, especially in the case of nationwide cost-cutting measures in the face of rapidly increasing declines in advertising revenues. Thus, all media workers are constantly confronted with the precarious economic conditions and must consider their consequences in their daily work. The rapid announcement of short-time working by all leading publishers during the shutdown imposed due to Covid-19 drew attention to these dependencies. There are also publishers who explicitly expect media workers to make not only journalistic but also entrepreneurial considerations at work. Not just publishers but media professionals, too, would have to share responsibility for their jobs.

The journalistic director of CH Media and head of over 500 media workers in 11 cantons consults their publisher before taking important editorial and personnel decisions. The publisher is the most important co-owner of his media group, with over 50 per cent of shares, and is also the chairman of the board of directors. The journalistic director is also on the management board and

is confronted with development of the advertising market. This cooperation is intended because as a member of the management board, the journalistic director also bears financial responsibility.

At the middle and lower employee level, media professionals work without direct interference from the management, the owner, or the advertising department; possibly, however, with a personally adjusted “pair of scissors” in their heads in accordance with the “prevailing” editorial culture, which can be different in every media organisation. In everyday work, there are constant negotiation processes between pragmatic, entrepreneurial, and socio-political desires or necessities. Media workers are anything but independent, but are primarily wage dependent, and just like the media company itself, they are very strongly and diversely socially embedded in society. A very experienced journalist told us that he usually calls his own publisher and asks for advice when working on a problematic story in which his own company plays a significant role. In the *NZZ am Sonntag*, too, media representatives maintain informal contacts with management, boards of directors and, if necessary, shareholders, who are widely spread.

The public service provider SRG SSR has a better line of separation between management and journalistic work than in commercial print and broadcasting media. The editorial boards are comparatively less involved in strategic decisions by the eight-member executive board of the SRG Directorate-General, the highest operational management body, which currently comprises seven men and one woman. However, when it comes to cost-cutting measures, their staff are also affected to a great extent by “centralised work locations” and “optimised” work processes.

All wage-earning media workers must first adhere to the respective local working conditions and corporate publishing objectives. They are confronted with specific dependencies that the respective management has decided on and over which they usually have little influence. The media professionals carry out professional journalism primarily on behalf of their media organisations. They have very little operational co-determination, let alone democratic participation. Only after the media professionals have formally and informally adapted to editorial-cultural practices can they even think of practising professional journalism on behalf of civil society.

*Werner A. Meier*

(F6) Company rules against *external* influence on newsroom/editorial staff

1 POINT

IN 2011  
1 POINT

There are at least some informal rules in media companies to deal with external advertising influences. At the same time, however, problematic forms of advertising, such as “native advertising”, have increased.

Publishing houses do not usually publish their earning figures advertising sales, sponsorship, and subscriptions. However, one can assume that the sale of subscriptions is currently higher than the revenue from various forms of advertising. Andreas Häuptli, managing director of the publishers’ association VSM, recently drew attention to a rampant decline in advertising, speaking of a decline in advertising by half in April and over 40 per cent in May 2020. He said that even in June 2020, around a quarter of revenues had not been received. In July 2020, it was 7 per cent less than in the previous year (Schweizer Medien, 2020).

At SRG SSR, however, revenues are reported in the annual report. Annual revenues amount to around CHF 1.65 billion. While 77 per cent of SRG’s revenues come from reception fees (household tax), 23 per cent comes from commercial revenues. With a good fifth of its budget, the SRG SSR also has a veritable management problem with the collapse in advertising revenues.

As advertising revenues have fallen sharply everywhere – not only for daily newspapers, but also for regional radio and television broadcasters and the volume of regional and local advertisements – advertising and advertising boycotts have lost much of their explosive power. The big debates about advertising boycotts seem to be over – boycott threats have lost their horror. There are, however, cases where major advertisers are angry with the editorial staff for reporting. From a commercial point of view, such incidents must be taken seriously in the editorial office, and advertising clients must be told why the editorial office has reported about their company in this form. The extent to which commercial enterprises or advertising clients of various origins succeed in influencing the reporting remains unclear, because neither the editorial staff nor any of the companies involved have an interest in transparency and public debate (Lauerer & Keel, 2019). In any case, most daily newspapers depend on individual large advertising customers in the food sector. These represent a cluster risk for the daily press.

On the other hand, publishing supplements and “sponsored content”, “Publireportage”, “native advertising”, and “paid posts” have increased. The publishing houses feel responsible for maintaining profitability and viability of their companies with more or less problematic forms of advertising, despite reduced advertising shares, often against the will of the media professionals in their own companies. It can be assumed that the publishing houses make customer-oriented offers in order to create a correspondingly attractive advertising environment. Even if advertising revenues fall, structural problems

remain: the more daily news media are compromised by economic interests in their publishing activities and tasks, the more their journalistic credibility and performance suffers. In any case, the impact of native advertising on digital journalism is likely to increase further (Porlezza, 2017).

Dependence on readers and the advertising market does not mean publishers and editors must take certain advertisers into account. However, in the case of news media, financed exclusively by advertising, consideration must be given, and good relations with the advertising clients must be maintained. The compulsive adherence to old and new forms of advertising financing can also be taken as an indicator that even after 20 years of declining advertising revenues, publishing houses have still not succeeded in developing a new business model compatible with consumers, citizens, and a democratic society.

*Werner A. Meier*

(F7) Procedures on news selection and news processing 2 POINTS

News selection and news framing became more audience oriented. But there is variation according to the type of media, for example, public versus private broadcast or elite versus popular versus free press.

IN 2011  
2 POINTS

The selection of news in Swiss media is still based on the professional routines of individual journalists, more than on formalised guidelines. As our interviews emphasised, and also highlighted by the editorial statutes, news selection is still oriented towards social relevance of topics. In 2020, however, news selection to a certain extent is more tailored according to expected audience needs (Umbricht & Esser, 2016). For example, due to online click rates (Hofstetter & Schönhagen 2014), newsworthy topics, or “shitstorms” on social media, news selection is more focused on personalisation (Vogler et al., 2019). And concurrent to other European countries, news selection takes place in the newsroom’s daily editorial meetings. When interpreting news, namely the way in which an event or topic must be framed, leading media professionals have “the last word” after interviews, but they cannot determine how their journalists would interpret a particular event.

Basically, the difference is based on media types. The selection of news is influenced by the characteristics of the media, such as elite press as opposed to tabloid or free commuter press (e.g., Engesser et al., 2014). Especially those with a tendency towards “boulevard” journalism, such as *Blick* in Switzerland or the free-sheet *20Minuten*, choose content according to the perceived entertainment-oriented wishes of their audiences. But the journalistic selection also differs between the press and the public broadcaster SRG SSR, because not every topic on the political agenda is equally suitable for every medium. The selection and interpretation of topics is also influenced by the political

position of a newspaper, for example, the selection of topics of the *NZZ* as an elite newspaper committed to liberalism is not the same as that of the politically slightly left-wing *Tages-Anzeiger*.

On the basis of our interviews with journalists, it can be said that all leading news media have at least one editorial meeting every day, in which the main topics are selected and defined. This selection is made according to the medium and its readership, viewers, or listeners. Public service radio and television must fulfil their public service mission. When it comes to politically controversial (voting) issues or elections, however, all media seem to try to report neutrally or at least without bias by looking at and presenting both sides, namely pros and cons, according to the comments of our interviewees.

Recent findings based on empirical content analyses show that Swiss media tend to focus on the powerful. Established performers from politics, business, and culture get significantly more space in the media (Tresch, 2009). This is legitimate in that they are usually relevant in society or in the specific discourse. But journalism for minorities, for example, in the form of advocacy for weaker or marginalised groups, is rather rare. The left-wing weekly *Die Wochenzeitung (WOZ)*, or the new online magazine *Republik*, remain exceptions in this respect.

The processes of news selection in the Swiss media are largely in line with the leading news media in the other European countries. In these, too, news selection tends to follow informal rules or editorial meetings, and there are usually no formal rules in editorial statutes or so-called stylebooks, which play a role in the selection of news. The pressure to respond to “breaking news” due to online information or social media, as well as the importance of click rates, have increased in most media landscapes around the world.

*Heinz Bonfadelli*

## (F8) Rules and practices on internal gender equality 2 POINTS

Gender equality has improved significantly, but there are still more male journalists working in the politics department and especially in higher positions in newspapers.

The federal constitutional mandate for equality (Art. 8(3) Federal Constitution) requires both legal and actual equality between women and men, particularly in the areas of family, education, and work. The requirement of equal pay for work of equal value is also explicitly enshrined. The *Federal Act on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men* (Equal Opportunities Act, GlG 2020) puts the equality article into concrete terms and aims to promote actual equality in working life. It prohibits all discrimination on the basis of gender and for the entire duration of employment in both the private and public sectors.

In our study, none of the five female journalists complained about discrimination. Individually, they all asserted themselves and achieved their goals, despite



all male-dominated networks. However, the editor-in-chief of public broadcasting in German-speaking Switzerland sees the following difficulties: “Where a woman sits down, a man goes. Women must “be better” and be willing to take responsibility”.

Although the will to promote female media workers is present in the leading publishing houses, only the public broadcaster SRG SSR has concrete measures and ambitious plans. “We want 50 per cent women. We will achieve this in the next five years”, the editor-in-chief said. All media, not just the tabloid *Blick*, have “a women’s problem”. The publishing house Ringier has, therefore, launched an initiative “EqualVoice”, with four main goals. “We let more women have their say, we make strong women visible, we make children and careers compatible, and we want more female journalists in the newsrooms” (Blick, 2019). Specifically, project teams are to be put together in each editorial office of the group in order to implement this in the daily work of the newsrooms.

The efforts described are more than justified, if one consults the relevant literature. In 2015, 39 per cent of journalists who took part in the survey were women (Dingerkus et al., 2018). In comparison with previous studies, the proportion of female journalists in Switzerland has continued to increase over the years. In 1980, the proportion of female journalists in the two regions covered by this study was 17 per cent. In 1998, their share rose to 32 per cent and in 2008 to 35 per cent (Keel, 2011). However, in the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) study, which was conducted almost simultaneously, the authors conclude that the proportion of women among media professionals has fallen by around 5 per cent compared with 2010 and still amounts to just under 30 per cent (GMMP, 2015). But there is still something like male dominance in the newsrooms of leading publishing houses. About 69 per cent of all newspaper journalists are men, and three out of four management positions in the Swiss media industry are occupied by men. On average, women earn CHF 700 less than men for the same work experience; in management positions, the monthly wage difference averages CHF 1,400. In the editorial departments of the daily news, politics, and business, the proportion of female journalists is around 30 per cent, while more than two-thirds of the news written are written by men. This proportion has increased compared with 2010 (GMMP, 2015).

Furthermore, the proportion of women in radio and television is higher than in newspapers, namely 46 versus 38 per cent. An above-average number of female journalists work in the low-paid online sector. As far as academic education is concerned, three of four women have a university degree, while only two of three men have an academic education (Hanitzsch et al., 2019).

In Hanitzsch and colleagues’ most recent publication (2019), these male authors come to a contradictory conclusion. Female journalists – who make up the majority of the new generation of journalists and start out better educated and enter the profession faster – are still underrepresented in newsrooms. On

average, only four of ten media workers are female, and they are over-represented in those departments that tend to be lower in the editorial hierarchy (e.g., education, science, service, lifestyle, health, and religion). Not only do women journalists have fewer opportunities for advancement than men, they also earn less when they take on leadership positions. However, many of them are lost to journalism because they leave the profession due to domestic responsibilities and are unable or unwilling to return to work, either full-time or part-time. Only a minority of women are willing or able to take up leading positions in editorial departments.

In connection with the national women's strike in Switzerland in 2019, young women working in the media sector articulated five demands: first, more women in leadership positions, more gender justice, and thus more journalistic power; second, equal pay; third, better flexibility for taking care of family and career; fourth, protection against harassment; and fifth, no sexism in reporting.

On the basis of the responses of four male editors-in-chief and the female editor-in-chief of tabloid online-news platform *blick.ch*, whose responses were collected and presented by the media platform *persönlich.com* (Widmer, 2020), it can be stated that the demands made, in their deliberately abstract form, are accepted by all editorial heads. (Which editor-in-chief can seriously imagine campaigning for poorer wages for even fewer women and for the incompatibility of work and family life?) Equal pay, protection against harassment in the workplace, and the compatibility of family and career seem to be well on the way, while the editor-in-chief's editorial team is quickly reaching its limits in terms of argumentation in fulfilling the first and last demands. Without concretising company-specific objectives and making promises, all editors-in-chief are trying to put their own efforts to date in perspective and promise improvement on a case-by-case basis.

Arthur Rutishauser, editor-in-chief of Tamedia Publication in German-speaking Switzerland, promised improvement: "The proportion of women in management is still only 30 per cent in the newsrooms. We must clearly improve". Relatively helplessly, the respective editorial heads are confronted with the rather cursory representation of women in the media. Pascal Hollenstein, journalistic director of the CH Media, is at least reasonable: "We are aware that it is more difficult to find a female audience for products that are heavily male-oriented. Under these circumstances, how should – and at best, how can – the visibility of women in reporting be increased?"

A survey conducted by the magazine *Edito* (1/20) of the Professional Association of Media Professionals and the Media Trade Union revealed that selected newsrooms of leading media have 16–38 per cent women in management positions. The *NZZ* is at the lower end, while the *NZZ am Sonntag* from the same publishing house is at the top. The largest commuter newspaper in Switzerland, *20Minuten*, has a 33 per cent share of women in management positions and

a 47 per cent share in editorial positions. In the politics and business editorial department of SRF, the proportion of women in management is 28 per cent and in the editorial department as a whole 38 per cent.

Last year, Nora Bader and Andrea Fopp interviewed female journalists and asked them the following question, among others: “Does gender play a role in their professional lives?” The majority of the women interviewed stood by the spoken word, but a few completely rewrote the text or withdrew from the interview shortly before publication – probably for fear they would ruin their reputation in the media industry if they spoke plainly (Bader & Fopp, 2020: 19). In their book, they published 15 interviews, and in their introduction, they drew a conclusion under the title “Welcome to the shark tank”:

We have drawn the following conclusions: newsrooms are places of power struggle. Men are constantly fighting over who is the boss or the silverback in the pack. Accordingly, editorial meetings are rarely about who has the best ideas or does the most careful research, but rather about who roars the loudest, because the impostor syndrome is particularly widespread in journalism. As a woman, every now and then you feel compelled to shout: “Hey, buddy, if you want war, let’s make war!” (Susan Boos)

A latent sexism, especially disparaging slogans and abusive touches, apparently belong to the media industry. Tamed journalists found out in a survey in 2019 that half of the 458 female journalists who responded had already experienced sexual harassment and assaults from work colleagues or interview partners at work – for men, the figure was 11 per cent. If a woman defends herself against such “work culture”, she is quickly considered hysterical, humourless, or bitchy, and her promotion is a long way off. As a woman, one should not be “too sensitive” or make “politically incorrect” remarks. This is obviously also part of newsroom culture.

Where promotion is important, men are clearly in the majority. Around 70 per cent of political and business journalists are male; these hardcore departments are the powerhouse of journalism, with their topics considered the most relevant and their journalists the most competent and ambitious. Publishers also like to give editor-in-chief positions to well-connected political and business journalists. From an experienced domestic editor of *Weltwoche* – a woman – this means: “Come on – what are you waiting for? Why don’t you write about finance, social security, and armaments policy and don’t let yourself be pushed into the lifestyle league!”

When it comes to overcoming unequal power relations, only a few of the few successful media women plead for structural reforms in the fight against manifest and latent discrimination. One of them is Susan Boos, a long-standing member of the chief editorial staff of the weekly *WOZ*: “It can’t be right that women should simply have to adapt to male structures. Our lifetime is too

good for that” (Bader & Fopp, 2020: 28). Patrizia Laeri of the SRF business editorial team also criticised the structural conditions. “The incentives in the workplace are wrongly set” (Bader & Fopp, 2020: 28). She complained that working hours in the hard-core departments of politics and business are often particularly unfriendly to families. Even if it is not only about equal career opportunities, but also about diverse reporting, this includes topics that deal with women and primarily affect women.

Although most publishing houses and public broadcasters make efforts to achieve equality in newsrooms, the media industry and their trade associations are ultimately rather indifferent to gender equality and equal career opportunities. The disinterest of publishing houses and media politics is still so pronounced that reliable and comparable figures on the listed demands of media women are still missing.

*Werner A. Meier*

## (F9) Gender equality in media content

1 POINT

Women have received more media coverage in the last decade, but men are still more prominent, especially in the political news sections of the Swiss media.

Similar to editorial and management positions, women are clearly under-represented in reporting. Women are not very visible as active subjects, and with age, they disappear from reporting. According to the GMMP study, 76 per cent of the people mentioned in daily news are men and only 24 per cent are women. In traditional print media, mentions of women were at 23 per cent, still slightly lower than in electronic media. In the *NZZ*, the newspaper by and for elites, the proportion of women dropped to 13 per cent. On Twitter channels, on the other hand, women and men are mentioned about equally often. There are also differences between the language regions. In French-speaking Switzerland, women are mentioned more often (30%) than in the German-speaking (20%) or Italian-speaking (18%) parts of the country. Women are mentioned or quoted below average in economic, political, and public affairs topics and in their role as experts, commentators, or activists. Following the spectacular women’s strike, political scientist Fabrizio Gilardi of the University of Zurich analysed the elections to the National Council and Council of States in Switzerland in October 2019 through 54,000 articles in 84 media titles. He found a double disadvantage, as only 41 per cent of the electoral lists were held by women, and in terms of journalism, they received 32 per cent of the newspaper articles. In other words: the “democracy-relevant” newspapers do not correct the under-representation of women, but rather reinforce it. In concrete terms, for the FDP (liberal party) women this means:

In the FDP, for example, 42 per cent of the candidacies are female, but only 30 per cent of the mentions of FDP candidacies in the media are from women. Men are therefore taken up, named and quoted significantly more often. If we exclude party president Petra Gössi from the FDP, the proportion of female nominations drops to 22 per cent, just under a fifth. This figure is only undercut by the SVP, where women are mentioned in only 17 per cent of media reports (and then it is often Magdalena Martullo-Blocher). (Gilardi, 2019; see also Fiechtner et al., 2016)

The hypothesis that male journalists prefer men and powerful women, while female media professionals do not mention women more often than men, is a bold one.

Especially with regard to gender equality, the conclusions of the GMMP study are not very optimistic. The 2015 results show that leading news media still convey a very traditional image of the sexes. Women who appear in the news are often portrayed not in their professional but in their family roles. Only in 3 per cent of news are role models presented atypically, while in 97 per cent of news, traditional role models are transported (GMMP, 2015). What is striking is the discrepancy between the high employment of Swiss women and their role as employees, which is hardly ever seen in the media. Only in articles on celebrities from the media and sports do women make up an above-average proportion (GMMP, 2015). According to our conclusion, the “glass ceiling” is still a reality and can probably only be broken in the particularly resilient Swiss media structures through targeted control measures within and outside media organisations.

*Werner A. Meier*

(F10) Misinformation and digital platforms  
(alias social media)

2 POINTS

Misinformation and false information have been recognised, and most editorial offices defend themselves with special internal units or collaboration with external fact-checking organisations.

In mid-July 2020, a flyer similar to official publications of the Federal Office of Public Health (BAG) appeared. It claimed, among other warnings on a red background, that wearing masks is promoting the transmission of Covid-19 by the multiplication of bacteria and viruses in the lungs (e.g., Büchi, 2020). This example shows that wrong or false information, called “fake news” or disinformation to the public, has also become a problem for leading media organisations and their media creators since the advent of social media.

In the end of 2019 and beginning 2020, the Association of Swiss Media VSM launched an information campaign in the newspapers of its members, with the big red title “Fake News? Not in the Swiss press”. The reasoning for fake news-free Switzerland was as follows: “Our editors analyse current events, check sources, interpret events, provide background information and help you to form your own opinion. Credibility is our number one priority – with no alternatives: so that you can distinguish lies from facts”.

In the meantime, communication science has also begun to deal with this phenomenon (e.g., Zimmermann & Kohring, 2018). The already extensive literature shows that the term encompasses various phenomena and contains different aspects: Is the dissemination of fake news conscious and intentional, especially with the intention of deception? Are the claims objectively false with or without intention to be true, or just twisted claims? Is it about current topics or about historical “lies”?

Against this background, the journalists of leading news media were asked in our interviews how they could defend themselves against misinformation, for example, with a special editorial unit to combat misinformation or by working with external fact-checking organisations.

All media professionals interviewed were aware of the problem and stressed the importance of avoiding misinformation as gatekeepers. As a result, various editorial offices have institutionalised teams for fact-checking information and its sources, or in the event of uncertainty, the parties sit together with the department’s management or editor-in-chief. In addition, as a rule, no information is published without explicitly mentioning one or two existing independent sources. This applies not only to text information, but also to images or videos and especially to messages from social media. But automated or algorithmic tools do not seem to be used yet.

Also, in an international comparison, in most of the countries involved in the MDM project, false or “misinformation” is recognised as a problem and appropriate measures are being taken against it, with the exception of Iceland, Austria, and Italy, where the phenomenon appears to be of rather minor relevance and no defence mechanisms have been institutionalised. In most editorial offices, therefore, the verification of supposed facts, often by specialised experts or even special departments such as public broadcasting in Greece, has become institutionalised. But it is only in various countries, such as Finland, Belgium (Flanders), and Portugal, that independent organisations have emerged which have been specialised in fact-checking. And in the Netherlands, algorithmic tools appear to be used by some media to verify online comments.

*Heinz Bonfadelli*

(F11) Protection of journalists against (online) harassment 2 POINTS

Online harassment of journalists became a problem in the last years, but Swiss journalists are protected by assistance, for example, by specialised internal (legal) centres.

In the past few years, critiques, threats, hate speech, and even personal and physical harassment of journalists have increased in most countries, including Switzerland. The harassments are not only by rude people on social media, but also by authoritarian politicians, like former American president, Donald Trump. In Germany, for example, 60 per cent of 322 interviewed journalists reported such incidents in 2019 (Hildebrand, 2020). Moreover, the Covid-19 crisis was used by autocratic regimes to restrict press and media freedom. For this reason, the editors-in-chief and journalists were asked about the kinds of protective measures that were being taken by editorial offices and publishing companies against such types of (online) harassments.

In general, the situation vis-à-vis this is not too bad in Switzerland. However, there have been at least two publicly known cases of personal attacks, one against the chief editor of the political weekly magazine *Weltwoche* and the other against a journalist of Radio Télévision Suisse (RTS) in Geneva, both in 2019. Other incidents of cyberstalking have also been reported by our interviewed journalists, like an incident involving a female journalist by the Albanian community.

It was mentioned in our interviews that such incidents would usually be discussed with the superiors of the directly concerned journalists, who would be provided with assistance. Furthermore, most print media organisations have a legal department or at least a specialised service dealing with social media. And on the national level, there exists a centre for complaints by the Swiss Press Council. To conclude, at least at the moment, personal harassment of journalists in Switzerland seems to be not a major problem (so far), compared to staff reductions in most editorial offices, especially due to the ongoing the Covid-19 crisis through the beginning of 2020.

*Heinz Bonfadelli*

## *Dimension: Equality / Interest Mediation (E)*

### (E1) Media ownership concentration national level 2 POINTS

Only a few media companies dominate the print media market in the four language regions, while the public service broadcaster SRG SSR leads the electronic sector in all language regions.

IN 2011  
2 POINTS

At the national or linguistic-regional level, three-and-a-half private-commercial media companies dominate the print media market, namely Tamedia (TX Group) (Zurich), Ringier (Zurich), CH Media (Aarau), and the NZZ Media Group (Zurich). CH Media is a merger of AZ Media Group and NZZ Media Group in the field of regional media. In contrast to this, the public broadcaster SRG SSR dominates the radio and television sector in all four language regions of Switzerland.

At the national level, many forms of media concentration have been observed for some time: the concentration of ownership (declining number of independent media houses), journalistic concentration (many newspaper titles are mainly supplied by a mantle or central newsroom), multimedia concentration (media houses produce newspapers, radio, television, and online offerings in the regions), and circulation concentration (the declining newspaper circulation is spread over a shrinking number of titles. This trend seems to be heading towards a two-tier newspaper landscape. Few daily and weekly newspapers with regional and local language coverage serve the economic centres and agglomerations, while free-sheets and small paid local newspapers try to fill the remaining gaps. In addition, for about 30 years now, concentration has progressively become both horizontal and also across media genres. All dominant media houses usually have cross-media portfolios. Only Tamedia (TX Group) sold its radio and television stations to prevent jeopardising its dominance in the print sector through antitrust regulations. A summary of the online platform *Republik* shows that since the 1990s, large mergers and sales have been taking place in waves. With the launch of several free commuter newspapers distributed at the turn of the century, traditional regional newspapers came under massive additional pressure due to their modest market power. The big winner in the commercial competition is Tamedia (TX Group), which dominates not only the Zurich region, but also the Bern and the attractive Lake Geneva regions, from an entrepreneurial point of view. It is progressively becoming the largest commercial media group. At the end of 2017, NZZ Media Group and AZ Media Group announced an intention to merge their regional media businesses. The new group CH Media started its publishing activities in autumn 2018, following an examination by the Competition Commission. Its centralised newsroom serves more than 20 regional media houses across 13 cantons to position itself as the second-



strongest force, despite massive job cuts. In terms of domestic business, a third dominant place is occupied by the Ringier Group, which discontinued its commuter free newspaper *Blick am Abend* in late 2018. The Covid-19 crisis has not only intensified the advertising crisis of daily newspapers and regional Sunday newspapers, but has also jeopardised commercially successful publications such as *20Minuten Friday* or even *20Minuten*. The Table 6 lists the most important media companies in the three main language regions.

The city of Zurich prominently stands out as the journalistic and economic media capital of Switzerland. This orientation is reinforced by the SRG SSR, which also has a strong presence in the city in the broadcasting sector. Additionally, Tamedia (TX Group) is also the only commercial media company active in all language-regional markets, especially with its free commuter newspaper *20Minuten* (*20Minutes*, *20Minuti*).

In French-speaking Switzerland, TX Group has an even larger market share than in German-speaking Switzerland. Its dominance is concentrated in the large cities in German- and French-speaking Switzerland, including agglomerations such as Zurich, Geneva, Basel, Bern, Lausanne, and Winterthur, especially in the daily newspaper and online media business. Although Ringier no longer runs any regional newspapers, it does have four strong media brands throughout German-speaking Switzerland, namely the tabloid *Blick*, the weekly *Sonntagsblick*, *blick-online*, and the magazine *Schweizer Illustrierte*, which also deals with some politics. TX Group and Ringier have mutated into digital groups and earn more income from commercial services than from journalistic news media. CH Media, the joint venture of NZZ Media Group and AZ Media Group, has its economic and journalistic focus primarily in regional newspapers outside the major centres, and exclusively in German-speaking Switzerland. The market share of CH Media is 19 per cent (fög, 2019). With the selling-out of its regional newspapers, the NZZ Media Group has further lost market share and can only rely on its two renowned newspapers *NZZ* and *NZZ am Sonntag*. The other groups, Somedia, Editions Suisses Holding (ESH) and Gruppo Corriere del Ticino, are only prominent regionally, namely in the Cantons of Ticino, Neuchâtel and Valais, and Grisons. Since all major media in Switzerland are considered corporate media, centralisation has become even more pronounced. All media genres listed reinforce tendencies of media concentration and in no way constitute a corrective, even though the latter would be absolutely necessary from a federal perspective. This renders a lack of structural diversity and alternatives in the various media arenas in the language regions and cantons acutely problematic.

**Table 6** Private corporate media in the language regions

Company	Media
German-speaking Switzerland	
TX Group HQ: Zurich CN: Zurich	<i>Daily newspapers with impact on language region:</i> 20Minuten (DS); Tages-Anzeiger (ZH) <i>Daily newspapers with impact on region:</i> Berner Ztg (BE); Der Bund (BE); Basler Ztg. (BS/BL) <i>Weekly newspapers &amp; magazines:</i> Sonntagszeitung (DS); Finanz und Wirtschaft (DS) <i>Online media:</i> 20minuten.ch (DS); tagesanzeiger.ch (DS)
Ringier HQ: Zurich CN: Zurich	<i>Daily newspapers with impact on language region:</i> Blick (DS) <i>Weekly newspapers &amp; magazines:</i> Sonntagsblick (DS); Schweizer Illustrierte; Handelszeitung (DS) <i>Online media:</i> Blick.ch (DS) <i>Regional radio stations:</i> Radio Energy (BE); Radio Energy (ZH) <i>Regional TV stations:</i> Blick TV (DS)
CH Media HQ: Aarau CN: Aarau	<i>Daily newspapers with impact on language region:</i> Aargauer Zeitung (AG); St.Galler Tagblatt (SG); Luzerner Zeitung (LU) <i>Daily newspapers with impact on region:</i> Baselland. Ztg. (BL); Solothurner Ztg (SO); Thurgauer Ztg. (TG); Urner Zeitung (UR) <i>Weekly newspapers &amp; magazines:</i> Schweiz am Wochenende (DS) <i>Online media:</i> watson.ch (DS) <i>Regional radio stations:</i> Radio 24 (ZH); Radio Argovia (AG); Radio Pilatus; Radio FM1 <i>Regional TV stations:</i> Tele Züri (ZH); Tele 1 (LU); TVO (SG); TeleBärn (BE); Tele M1 (AG)
NZZ-Group HQ: Zurich CN: Zurich	<i>Daily newspapers with impact on language region:</i> NZZ (DS) <i>Weekly newspapers &amp; magazines:</i> NZZ am Sonntag (DS)
Somedia HQ: Chur CN: Chur	<i>Daily newspapers with impact on language region:</i> Südostschweiz (GR); La Quotidiana (GR) <i>Daily newspapers with impact on region:</i> Südostschweiz (GL); Bündner Tagblatt. (GR) <i>Online media:</i> Suedostschweiz.ch <i>Regional radio stations:</i> Radio Südostschweiz <i>Regional TV stations:</i> TV Südostschweiz
French-speaking Switzerland	
TX Group CN: Lausanne	<i>Daily newspapers with impact on language region:</i> 20Minutes (VD); 24 heures (VD) ; Tribune de Genève (GE) <i>Weekly newspapers &amp; magazines:</i> Le Matin Dimanche (WS) <i>Online media:</i> lematin.ch
ESH Médias HQ: Neuchâtel	<i>Daily newspapers with impact on language region:</i> Le Nouvelliste (VS); Arcinfo (NE) <i>Daily newspapers with impact on region:</i> La Côte (VD)
Ringier CN: Lausanne	<i>Daily newspapers with impact on language region:</i> Le Temps (VD) <i>Weekly newspapers &amp; magazines:</i> L'illustré
Italian-speaking Switzerland	
Gruppo C. del Ticino HQ: Neggio	<i>Daily newspapers with impact on language region:</i> Corriere del Ticino <i>Online media:</i> ticinonews.ch <i>Regional radio stations:</i> Radio 3i <i>Regional TV stations:</i> Teleticino
TX Group	<i>Daily newspapers with impact on language region:</i> 20Minuti

Comments: HQ = headquarters, CN = central newsroom.

The 2019 Yearbook *Quality of the Media* speaks of an increase in structural and content-related media concentration, caused by editorial cooperation within and between the remaining media houses. With declining revenues, media groups are looking to achieve economies of scale and scope, as well as efficiency gains. Increased cooperation is also intended to reduce the economies of scale of the globally active tech platforms in the advertising market (fög, 2019). Consequently, media concentration is increasing in all language regions. Specifically, the market shares of the leading media houses are growing, the number and significance of independent providers is declining, and the number of titles is decreasing (fög, 2019).

In the press market of German-speaking Switzerland, media concentration (CR3) grew by 27 percentage points from 2001 to 2018 to a market share of 83 per cent. In French-speaking Switzerland, it grew by 10 percentage points to 90 per cent (CR3) from 2001. The dominant players are Tamedia Publications (TX Group) with 69 per cent, the ESH with 12 per cent, and Imprimerie Saint-Paul with 8 per cent market share. In Ticino, the CR3 concentration rate in 2017 was around 61 per cent (fög, 2019).

Due to the widespread establishment of centralised newsrooms, concentration of media content, measured in terms of the share of independent media contributions (one-offs), is also declining. In the German-speaking media arena, the share of one-offs has fallen by 7 percentage points within one year and still amounted to 74 per cent in 2018 (fög, 2019). Particularly problematic from a Swiss perspective is the result that, of all the subject areas examined, political reporting is the least diverse.

According to the 2019 Yearbook, the quality of media content will remain stable over the years as media content changes, namely with regard to a factually balanced reporting style, editorial input, and transparency of sources. In contrast, however, daily titles lose quality in terms of relevance and also, especially, diversity. Soft news are gaining in importance, the variety of reporting is significantly decreasing, and the “provision of context” is decreasing. Above all, explanatory, background information on politics has decreased significantly over the years, while opinion journalism has increased (fög, 2019). The authors of the Yearbook argue that the ongoing cost-cutting measures increases the danger of opinion journalism, which is cheaper and quicker to produce, being expanded within the media arena and that tedious, time-consuming journalistic research will diminish. This assessment also coincides with the *Tamedia Quality Report*, where Strehle writes that resources are at a critical point in the entire media industry (Strehle, 2018).

Although different in methodology, the Media Monitor Switzerland (Thommen et al., 2019) attempts to capture key consequences of media concentration: Is the free formation of opinion in Switzerland under (increasing) pressure? Which media offerings and which media groups have a particularly strong influ-

ence on the formation of opinion among Swiss citizens (Publicom, 2019)? The press release of Federal Office of Communications (OFCOM) results show that television continues to dominate opinion formation in Switzerland, followed by radio, print, online, and social media. The dominance of television is particularly pronounced in French- and Italian-speaking Switzerland, where television has a much greater power of opinion than radio and the press. In German-speaking Switzerland too, television is the most important medium; in comparison with Latin Switzerland, however, radio and the press play a greater role. However, the study itself contradicts this interpretation of the results. In the Media Monitor Switzerland, opinion power is understood merely as an auxiliary construction that does not claim to measure the intended or unintended influence of all 176 media brands on individual opinion formation comprehensively and precisely. It is merely an approximation of opinion power as an estimate of the opinion-forming potential of media offerings and providers (Publicom, 2019). In this sense, the study lacks quantifiable and verifiable credibility and allows no more than a rough estimate of a controversial and highly diffuse impact potential of media brands on opinion formation.

*Werner A. Meier*

(E2) Media ownership concentration regional (local) level 1 POINT

The strong concentration of newspapers at regional level has increased significantly. Moreover, almost all private regional radio and television stations are owned by the dominant media groups. IN 2011  
1 POINT

There is a strong concentration of newspapers at the regional level. The publishing houses have divided regional markets among themselves, and there is hardly any competition. Only in the Italian-speaking part and in the greater Zurich area do several publishing houses compete with each other. The SRG SSR is legally not permitted to promote competition in regional and local journalism. The region belongs to the commercial media companies. While politics continues to be organised at the three levels of the confederation, canton, and communes and more or less successfully evades centralisation by the confederation, a majority of the cantonal capitals no longer have their own local newspaper, let alone several independent journalistic offerings to develop a cantonal perspective. The central editorial offices of the leading regional group newspapers are located in Zurich or in Aarau. The eleven cantons of Argovia, Fribourg, Geneva, Grisons, Jura, Neuchâtel, Schaffhausen, Ticino, Vaud, Valais, and Zurich have a daily newspaper on site, while the remaining 15 (half) cantons of the two Appenzell, the two Basel, Bern, Glarus, Nidwalden, Obwalden, Lucerne, Zug, Schwyz, Solothurn, St. Gall, Thurgovia, and Uri have to be satisfied with a small regional newsroom on site.

Since Switzerland is quadrilingual (German, French, Italian, and Romansh), regional and linguistic markets play prominent roles. The comparatively large number of regional newspaper titles, regional television stations, and radio stations conceals the fact that most daily newspapers are owned by two to three media houses.

In German-speaking Switzerland, TX Group publishes the daily commuter newspaper *20Minuten*, financed by advertising money and distributed free of charge. This commuter free-sheet is by far the newspaper with the highest circulation in Switzerland. Moreover, in the three most-populous cantons, Zurich, Bern, and Vaud, its regional newspapers *Tages-Anzeiger*, *Berner Zeitung*, and *24heures* dominate. Ringier publishes the daily tabloid *Blick* and on Sundays, *Sonntagsblick*. The CH Media publishes a large number of regional newspapers in the Swiss Mittelland (Swiss midlands) (including the *Aargauer Zeitung*, *Luzerner Zeitung*, and *St. Galler Tagblatt*). The NZZ Media Group focuses on the publication of the elite and quality newspapers *NZZ* and *NZZ am Sonntag*. The publishing house Editions Suisses Holding dominates cantons of Valais and Neuchâtel with its titles *Le Nouvelliste* and *Arcinfo*.

In the broadcasting sector, the degree of concentration can be calculated on the basis of reach for the three language regions (audience market shares). In general, the audiovisual media market in Switzerland is dominated by the programmes of the public broadcaster SRG SSR. The combined market share of the public service radio stations in German-speaking Switzerland is 61 per cent, a number identical to western Switzerland, and in Italian-speaking Switzerland, almost 74 per cent (SRG SSR, 2019). In contrast to the television sector, foreign radio stations are of little relevance.

SRG SSR's television programmes compete with numerous foreign stations that share one of Switzerland's national languages. Around 31 per cent of total airtime (24 hours) is attributable to Switzerland's public service channels, while 61 per cent is broadcast by foreign channels (SRG SSR, 2020a). However, the advantage of SRG SSR lies in its Swiss perspective and provision of domestic information. In addition, there are no private-commercial television channels at national level. Over the past 20 years, private-commercial television channels have only been able to establish themselves at regional level with limited commercial success.

In German-speaking Switzerland, the two leading public television channels SRF1 and SRF2 achieve an audience share of 28 per cent (for 24 hours). The private-commercial regional stations achieve 8 per cent, while foreign stations have a share of 61 per cent (SRG SSR, 2020a). The two leading SRG SSR television channels also have the highest reach in French- and Italian-speaking regions (RTS 26% and RSI 24%). Foreign stations from France and Italy follow in the next place (SRG SSR, 2020a).

Taken together, citizens in the three language areas considered at the national level in Switzerland can choose from newspapers, public and private radio and television programmes, and a number of freely accessible online media. However, the decentralised mode of production and the different sensibilities of the respective language groups prevent a comprehensive homogenisation of content and programmes at national level. This also applies, in a limited manner, to the free commuter paper *20Minuten*, which dominates the respective newspaper and online market in two of three language regions.

Nevertheless, from the point of view of the Federal Council, indirect funding is necessary on the basis of the current media development in the regional and local area. Thus, the Federal Council has proposed an expansion of indirect press subsidies for regional and local newspapers, from CHF 30 million to CHF 50 million. This will also subsidise the distribution of titles with a circulation of 40,000 copies or with a header of more than 100,000 copies. This is where the TX Group and the CH Media benefit most. This is compounded by the fact that emerging online media will find it difficult to transcend an absent legal framework, for which changes will be difficult to manage. In this regard, backward-looking but well-established measures may well be easier to adopt than new and promising ones. Such a press subsidy is also controversial insofar as both the TX Group and the NZZ Media Group are concerned. Both have simultaneously paid dividends to their exclusive shareholders and received state funds for short-time work. According to a press release by the union Syndicom (2020), it is therefore “absolutely irresponsible and cynical of a company to simultaneously pay CHF 37 million in dividends to shareholders, introduce short-time working to maintain jobs and to impose redundancies [translated]”.

These incidents have also caused irritation among publishers. The conflict of objectives is most obvious at the TX Group, because this diversified group has been making high profits for decades but has concurrently implemented staff cuts and centralisation towards its newsrooms. The message to politicians and the public is: we are only prepared to continue the newspaper business if politicians and newspaper readers are prepared to co-finance the publication of a newspaper in such a way that corporate profits are secured for the TX Group in the long term. With the bridging aid for the media provided by the Swiss parliament as support during the Covid-19 crisis, this should be even easier to achieve.

*Werner A. Meier*

(E3) Diversity of news formats

2 POINTS

The diversity of different media products as well as different formats of news presentation is still sufficient. But there are clear tendencies towards a stronger orientation on reader interests, with more tabloidisation of news, especially in the print media.

IN 2011  
2 POINTS

The Swiss news media landscape is still rich in news formats, especially in the press, but as well in the public and commercial broadcast programmes, and new with the increased diversity of online media formats. Besides the multiple types of news media, there are different forms of news presentations as well. So, at first glance, Switzerland's media landscape still is diverse with its public and private television channels and radio stations as well as still many newspapers (daily, tabloid, and weekly). However, a closer look reveals several dysfunctional tendencies, both in the press and in the private broadcast sector.

The format structures and content of the public and private broadcast channels has been observed and analysed in a regular way by research studies executed for the Federal Office of Communication BAKOM (Brändli et al., 2019; Göfak, 2018; Grossenbacher et al., 2018, 2019). And the fög – Forschungszentrum Öffentlichkeit und Gesellschaft [Research Center for the Public Sphere and Society] (fög, 2019) analyses and provides accounts of the quality of the Swiss media regularly in its yearbook *Quality of the Media*.

In comparison with the situation about ten years ago (e.g., Kradolfer et al., 2010), we must state that the diversity of news formats and news content has decreased significantly, not least because the traditional quality press has come under heavy pressure. But together with public radio and – with some distance – public television, the traditional newspapers provide the public with all relevant information required for a democracy. They continue to try and sustain their public service to politics, economy, and culture. But, in this endeavour, they struggle to compete against the solely commercially aligned free-sheets, tabloids, and commercial radio, television, or online media, which all focus on individual interests, sports, human-interest, and showbiz. Furthermore, they very successfully reprocess issues from politics, economy, and culture in a personal and emotional way (Kamber & Imhof, 2010). The abolishment of the traditional news sectors leads to an “all-round journalism” that very often neglects quality criteria. The core sectors such as politics and economy have lost importance in favour of human-interest topics.

On the one hand, the share and significance of news compared with non-news content varies between the different media, and on the other, the news is also presented in a variety of formats like neutral information, reportages, features, and interviews. In addition, new online editions of most Swiss newspapers are available, and most public and private broadcasters disseminate their content online. Online news coverage, thus, occurs in various formats: news articles



can be read on websites, live radio streams can be listened to, and television programmes can be viewed online – or downloaded as podcasts.

Conversely, certain news-related online media have entered the Swiss news market, like *watson.ch* with news and entertainment for young people, the non-profit Internet-papers *infosperber.ch* or *JOURNAL21*, locally oriented *Tsiiri.ch* started in January 2015, or *higgs.ch*, a non-profit independent website with science-topics, founded by the science journalist Beat Glogger in January 2018, financed by crowdfunding.

Table 7 presents the structure of topics in different types of newspapers in the three language regions. The significance of the topics from politics, economy, and culture is highest in the elite and quality press with an amount of 60 per cent and 50 per cent, respectively, and lowest in the boulevard and free press with about 25 per cent, whereas sports and human interest with amounts between 40 per cent and 50 per cent have the highest priority in the popular and free press. But there are differences between the three language regions.

**Table 7** Topics in newspapers of the three language regions, 2016–2018 (per cent)

Newspaper	Politics	Economy	Culture	Sport	Human Interest
Elite Press: NZZ	38	11	13	26	13
Quality Press: Tages-Anzeiger	33	10	6	28	23
Tabloid Press: Blick	13	11	4	54	17
Free-sheet: 20Minuten	12	9	2	44	32
Elite Press: Le Temps	48	19	11	12	9
Quality Press: 24heures	31	15	9	31	14
Free-sheet: 20Minutes	22	11	5	19	43
Regional Paper: Corriere del Ticino	23	13	8	44	13

Comments: n = 48,257.

Source: fög, 2019: 81

Besides these differences in topics between media and regions, pressures towards presenting news in personalised and emotionalised story formats to attract reader interest has considerably increased in the last years (Vogler et al., 2019). While factual and objective news reporting and transparency of sources remain almost stable at a high level, there is a loss concerning societal relevance and diversity of topics (Vogler et al., 2019). Traditional “media sections”, observing and discussing media quality from a critical stance, have been increasingly eliminated. In addition, content media concentration occurs as articles in regional newspapers are taken over from the central news-office: only 62 per cent of articles dealing with politics in the newspapers of the German part of Switzer-



land have been unique in 2018 (Häuptli & Vogler, 2019b). Further, there is a strong tendency of the press, especially in the German part of Switzerland, to focus on events in the same language region: 82 per cent of the articles therein are region-specific. This tendency is relatively weaker in the French-speaking part at 63 per cent, and significantly lower in the Italian-speaking part at 49 per cent (Häuptli & Vogler, 2019a). To summarise these tendencies, decrease in the quality of news provided by Swiss newspapers in the last decade has been, at best, moderate.

**Table 8** *Public television programme formats in the three language regions, 2017 (per cent)*

SRG TV programme content 24 hours	German		French		Italian		SRF info
	SRF 1	SRF 2	RTS 1	RTS 2	RSI 1	RSI 2	
Journalistic content	49	12	33	40	45	27	78
Thereof news	6	1	18	14	26	12	39
Fictional entertainment	18	53	44	15	34	19	0
Nonfictional entertainment	10	2	4	2	7	5	0
Sport	0.5	18	4	19	2	26	16
Diverse: children, religion, etc.	1	0	0	17	3	6	1
Trailers	14	11	9	3	4	14	3
Advertising & sponsoring	8	4	6	4	5	3	2

Source: Göfak Medienforschung, 2018

Table 8 presents the structure of the programme content of the six television programmes of the Public Service Broadcaster SRG SSR in the three language regions (German, French, Italian) and the information channel SRF Info in German language only. About a third of the programmes consist of journalistic content, but the share of news varies in the three language regions between 6 per cent in the German part and about 35 per cent in the French and Italian region. SF info in German language consists mostly of information (78%) and news (39%), whereas the other main programmes deliver fictional and nonfictional content as well. The share of journalistic content with about 70 per cent and 40 per cent news during evening prime times are provided by the 14 regional television programmes. This seems to be significantly higher in comparison to the public television programme, but with many repetitions (Brändli et al., 2019).

Regarding the public radio programmes, *SRF1* transmits in the German language its first channel: 27 per cent information, including, for example, the programme ECHO DER ZEIT with background information and analysis on current topics, 39 per cent is regular news several times a day, and 53 per

cent is music, of which 32 per cent comprise Swiss titles (Grossenbacher et al., 2018). In addition, the 33 private local radio stations broadcast during prime time mainly music (67%) and short local and regional news (16% by service mandate, 12% by commercial radio) (Grossenbacher et al., 2019).

*Heinz Bonfadelli*

#### (E4) Minority/Alternative media

2 POINTS

Swiss linguistic minorities are well served by the Swiss mass media. The public broadcaster SRG SSR guarantees that all official languages and cultures are covered with information. And some alternative media exist as well. But there is still almost no special media for minorities with migrant backgrounds.

IN 2011  
2 POINTS

An essential feature of Switzerland is its ethnic and linguistic diversity. Multilingualism dominates and determines the media landscape. Daily and weekly newspapers, magazines, radio, and television programmes are available not only for the dominant German-language region, but for the small French, Italian, and Romansh parts of Switzerland as well. The national broadcaster SRG SSR (2020a) is obliged by law to provide programmes that reflect and preserve the linguistic and cultural diversity of the country, and radio and television programmes are produced in all four official languages. Its six studios in Zurich, Bern, Basel, Geneva, Lausanne, and Lugano and four regional studios in Aarau, Chur, Lucerne, and St. Gall produce 16 radio and 7 television channels.

In order to finance radio and television in the four language regions, SRG has to compensate for costs so that equivalent and high-quality programmes can be broadcast in all parts of the country. 73 per cent of the fee revenue comes from German-speaking Switzerland, which receives only 43 per cent of it. French Switzerland receives 33 per cent, Italian Switzerland 22 per cent and Rhaeto-Romance Switzerland 2 per cent of the revenues. All language groups benefit by the financial compensation, except the German-speaking Switzerland, which acts as a donor region.

In contrast to the plentiful news offerings for its language communities, Switzerland still does not have a policy on how to provide media services to its significant community of immigrants. SRG SSR is making some efforts in this regard. However, the importance this leading media conglomerate attaches to this issue is quite inadequate. A recent study shows that only 6.4 per cent of all media contributions (SRG SSR radio and television programmes as well as private-commercial radio programmes) deal with minorities with a migrant background (Bonfadelli, 2017).

Minority, alternative, and community media, non-commercial and participatory, comprise a heterogeneous field of public service from the bottom. They are

important as platforms for the expression, discussion, and exchange of generally marginalised segments of a society (Retis, 2019). There are alternative, non-profit-oriented media products in Switzerland, for example the left-wing weekly WOZ, with a paid circulation of around 18,000 copies, or radio stations such as the non-commercial *Radio LORA* or *Radio RaBe*. Journalists working for such alternative media do so for deep (uniform) wages. Alternative media will struggle even harder if it is not subsidised in the current Covid-19 crisis. In January 2018, the digital magazine *Republik*, which deals with reports from politics, business, culture, and society, was founded by six former press journalists and financed by crowdfunding. The journalistically demanding and elite platform is financed by around 18,650 subscribers (January 2020) and crowdfunding. Just one to three posts are posted online at 5 o'clock in the morning.

Although people with a migrant background make up almost 35 per cent of the Swiss population, there is almost no print media in their languages of origin (e.g., *La pagina* in Italian or *Arkada* in Turkish), but only several Internet platforms, such as *africalink.ch* for migrants from African countries, *albinfo.ch* for migrants from Albania, *arkadas.ch*, a platform combined with a newspaper for migrants from Turkey, *www.espanoles.ch* in Spanish, *www.brasilflashtv.com* in Portuguese, and *www.chevere.ch* in Spanish, for migrants from South America. The Internet platform *migesmedia.ch* of the Swiss Red Cross connects and lists the migrant media in Switzerland. Several empirical studies on migrants and the media in Switzerland document how migration and migrants are only a peripheral issue in the Swiss media (Bellardi, 2016). It is, therefore, not surprising that migrants do not get involved in the mainstream media.

From an international perspective, it can be said that there are print and radio offerings for minorities to varying dimensions in almost all European countries, but hardly in Iceland, Belgium (Flanders), Italy, or Portugal, and is usually only a niche phenomenon with a limited reach, as in Switzerland, which occupies a medium position. Finally, public service broadcasting is obliged to offer programmes for (linguistic) minorities in all countries as well as in Switzerland. There are also media platforms for minorities on the Internet. But minorities, and especially immigrants, tend to have little presence in mainstream media coverage, except in the context of elections or political conflicts.

*Heinz Bonfadelli*

(E5) Affordable public and private news media

3 POINTS

IN 2011  
3 POINTS

Switzerland is one of the richest countries in the world, and its mass media is relatively cheap and affordable for almost everybody. But “over-information” on the Internet is a factor for certain people, who don’t want to pay anymore for journalistic media products.

According to the Federal Statistical Office, Swiss households spent an average of CHF 254 per month in 2008 to meet their information and communication needs, CHF 183 for content and CHF 71 for devices (4.8% of total consumer spending). In 2016, media spending rose only slightly to CHF 300 (263 for content and 37 for devices), adding up to 5.6 per cent of consumer spending. Low-income households proportionately spend more on communication and information than higher-income households.

An annual subscription to a daily newspaper costs about CHF 570. And the Swiss billing company Serafe AG collects the obligatory licence fees for public service radio and television, which amounts to CHF 365 per year per household (combined fee). The monthly subscription fee for cable television costs about CHF 40, depending on the provider (e.g., UPC or Swisscom). Moreover, depending on the provider as well as capacity, the monthly cost for access to broadband Internet is about CHF 60. According to this, a full supply including radio, television, Internet, and cable television costs approximately CHF 120 per month.

Taken together, in 2017, private households in Switzerland spent CHF 15.8 billion for culture, including media. 13.5 milliards of the total costs fall upon content and services (print & audiovisual content, Internet, museums, libraries, theatre, concerts) and CHF 2.2 billion for equipment. And the biggest share with CHF 7.4 billion were the costs for the Internet, mostly subscriptions including television and telephone.

To conclude, the news media in Switzerland – press, television, and radio – as in most European countries, are still affordable for a majority of their consumers.

*Heinz Bonfadelli*

(E6) Content monitoring instruments

1 POINT

IN 2011  
1 POINT

Efforts to monitor the media in Switzerland on a regular basis are institutionalised in OFCOM. Supervision is carried out on a regular basis, but of the broadcasting media.

The media industry itself has a news archive in which all published newspaper articles are accessible online for a fee. This documentation makes it possible to quantitatively record thematic focuses of the media at certain points in time.

As far as daily newspapers are concerned, there is no publicly accessible data that might allow monitoring. The media industry focuses almost exclusively on usage, reach data, and circulation data according to Verband Schweizer Markt- und Sozialforschung [Association of Swiss Market and Social Research].

Tamedia (TX-Group) has additionally published a quality report on its media in 2017 and 2018. For reasons of feasibility, according to the author and former editor-in-chief of the *Tages-Anzeiger* Res Strehle, monitoring was limited to “a deep drilling in the journalistic offering of individual deadlines” (Strehle, 2018).

The Federal Office of Communications OFCOM may only deal with radio and television programme services. It commissions long-term programme analyses and studies on the power of opinion (including Publicom, 2019).

SRG SSR publishes statistics on its radio and television programme services in its annual report, which provide an overview of the programme content broadcast during the reporting year, represented in hours. It documents the diversity of content and shows the main focus areas of the respective radio programme services (66% music, 15% current affairs and information, 5% culture and education, 1% sport, 7% moderation, and 5% other). In the case of television, 37 per cent constituted current affairs and information, 23 per cent films and series, 14 per cent culture and education, 12 per cent sport, 3 per cent children’s programmes, and 11 per cent entertainment and other programmes. The categories are published in great detail in the annual report, broken down by individual radio and television stations. The online programme statistics only show reach figures. SRG SSR’s audience councils also monitor individual programmes and public debates. These are more or less independent advisory bodies which – in the individual language regions – focus on protecting values laid down by the political, legal, and social structures of a democratic society. In fact, the Audience Council in German-speaking Switzerland, comprising a total of 26 members divided into individual working groups, conducted 21 programme observations – mostly of specific programmes – in the past reporting year (SRG SSR, 2019).

The fög – Research Center for the Public Sphere and Society at the University of Zurich was set up with the aim of systematically observing and analysing communication events. Communication events are topics that vie for attention in public communication. Such communication events are investigated because fög considers public communication to be the most important medium for both steering and integrating our society. Since 2010, fög has been producing a yearbook entitled *Qualität der Medien* [Media quality]. According to its own statements, the aim of the yearbooks is to strengthen quality awareness on the part of the audience, media professionals, publishing management, and publishers (Imhof, 2010). Specifically, the reporting quality of professional information media and their resources, the journalistic diversity or media concentration, and the changed media consumption are key areas of analyses (fög, 2019).

Expectedly, all large companies, associations, and administrative units monitor the coverage of daily and specialist media in order to proactively influence the media coverage or to counteract undesired media publicity. There are a number of specialised firms which, by means of strategic consulting and public relations work, try to achieve the sovereignty of interpretation in specific problem areas and decision-making powers in the interest of wealthy clients. The aim is to create such content and messages in fragmented sub-publics with which their clients are heard and associated. This media work is, above all, about attracting the attention of media professionals: what exactly does the strategic consultant as an intermediary mean by this, Andrés Luther recently explained in an interview in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung NZZ* (Scheu & Schoenenberger, 2020: 14):

We absorb the momentum, react and achieve impact with controlled explosions. [And] if a situation develops and it has a certain relevance, if it is clear that journalists are interested and if, in addition, there is a possibility that they lose control of the sovereignty of interpretation – then I have a chance. I am in contact with journalists, I know who is interested in what, what the positions are. At the right moment, I give them the topic.

*Werner A. Meier*

(E7) Code of ethics at the national level

1 POINT

Although there is a code of ethics formulated by the Swiss Press Council, it has only a limited effect in the everyday life of journalists.

IN 2011  
1 POINT

The Swiss Press Council monitors compliance with the code of ethics applicable to all media professionals, specifically the “Declaration of the Duties and Rights of Journalists”. The Press Council comments on questions of journalistic professional ethics, either on its own initiative or in response to complaints. The barriers to entry are low: any person can lodge a complaint; the procedure is free of charge. The Press Council judges these through the code of ethics drawn up by the professional associations themselves. In its decision, the Press Council assesses and justifies whether and why a journalistic report in the press, radio, television, or Internet has violated the journalist’s code of ethics – or not. The decision can be taken note of – or ignored. No sanctions are provided for.

In addition, the Press Council drafts protocol statements and guidelines for the “Declaration of the Duties and Rights of Journalists”. The code consists merely of ethically binding “shall” norms and is not a legal norm. Compliance with these rights and obligations is voluntary for media professionals and publishers and cannot be enforced by any legal means.

At company level, there are also editorial statutes and publishing guidelines that are set by media companies. Compliance with these guidelines is legally binding as part of the employment contract. In practice, therefore, there are significant differences in form and content between the code of ethics, editorial statutes, and publishing guidelines. For example, media professionals can neither demand a collective agreement or the fulfilment of working conditions from media companies that enable or at least facilitate media-ethical action, nor can they claim demands that impinge on individual employment relationships. This voluntary self-organisation of the media industry seems to have little effect in day-to-day business, even though the code has been in force for over 40 years.

In a longer academic article, Silke Fürst and Philomen Schönhagen (2018) conclude that the self-regulation of the Swiss media is incomplete and does not meet the current challenges. This assessment comes as no surprise, because this is what the industry wants. Press codex, editorial statutes, and journalistic guidelines are primarily a business management and control instrument.

Against the background of the freedom of the press and economic freedom granted to the media, binding management, and control measures in the interest of the public and democracy are not binding on media companies. Self-organisation measures predominantly aim to protect the company's own business interests and optimise internal management. To speak of self-regulation in this context is inappropriate because the rules are developed under the company's own direction, are voluntary and non-binding – and compliance or non-compliance is largely without consequences. Readers and media consumers are promised compliance with certain media-ethical standards and journalistic quality, but citizens cannot participate in the negotiation processes and are left out. Participation and pluralism also fall by the wayside. Press codex cannot fulfil many goals and expectations at all, not least those that communication science brings to the media. This raises questions on why an undemocratically established public sphere should be able and willing to provide media and infrastructures that are appropriate for democracies.

In any case, the press codex has not played an important role in the looming financing crisis of journalism; it has barely strengthened the social legitimacy and credibility of the media or promoted the independence of journalism, or even improved the business model of commercial media. Further, it is unclear whether the press codex is capable of fulfilling an alibi function or is suitable as a public relations instrument. Currently and in the past, the press codex has always been, and continues to be, helpless in the face of business challenges. For Fürst and Schönhagen, therefore, the press codex is far from suited to provide answers to problems that have arisen in the course of the growing media concentration since the 1970s (Fürst & Schönhagen, 2018).

*Werner A. Meier*

## (E8) Level of self-regulation

2 POINTS

Although there are many measures and instruments for corporate and editorial self-organisation, they contribute little to media accountability of companies and journalists.

IN 2011  
2 POINTS

As already stated in the previous section, there is an ethical code, editorial statutes, and publishing guidelines, but in practice, these elements of self-organisation primarily serve the interests of the industry and the concerned company. Nevertheless, they provide direct and indirect information about the status of accountability of media companies and journalism.

According to the 2011 publication *Mapping Media Accountability* (Fengler et al., 2011), media accountability to society is primarily based on measures and instruments that are initiated and accounted for by the industry and individual publishing houses themselves. In the Swiss context, these include:

- Press Council and Code of Ethics of the industry
- editorial statutes in media organisations and on news platforms
- journalistic guidelines of editorial offices and media organisations (Code of Conduct)
- readership reactions in the media and on platforms
- industry and corporate communications: media releases, in-house magazines, organisational charts, quality reporting, portfolio, annual reports, annual reports, letters to shareholders, et cetera
- ombudsperson offices of media organisations and news platforms
- media journalism (including media and journalism criticism) in daily news media
- industry magazines (e.g., “Schweizer Journalist”) and industry newsletters (e.g., newsletter of the VSM)
- news archives
- fact-checking organisations in media organisations and on news platforms

All these corporate measures and professional arrangements enable media organisations to articulate and justify their privileges and claims to power in business, politics, and society. The extent to which these activities not only promote self-organisation but also strengthen the accountability of media and journalism would need further examination in detail. In any case, the accountability of the media is not a matter of course and cannot be left to the industry. Civil society and the state are also called upon to do the same.

*Werner A. Meier*



## (E9) Participation

2 POINTS

As a consequence of social media, the leading Swiss news media created possibilities for feedback, but still hesitate to incorporate the participation of media users actively in the news process.

IN 2011  
1 POINT

The newspaper section “Letters to the Editors” has existed for a long time and served as a feedback tool by readers. This traditional way of giving feedback still has weight, although it is subject to newsroom selection. But today, most letters to the editor are actually “e-mails to the editor” and this feedback possibility exists on most online sites of newspapers. But journalists often complain about the bulk of emails or online comments, which are very often written in a sloppy, non-reflexive way. With it, letters to the editor have experienced degradation. And today, the Internet, and especially the possibilities offered by Web 2.0, intensifies the interactivities with the audience and transforms the contours of participation. Social media platforms are used more and more as a “loudspeaker”, mostly by dissatisfied news users, and are – quite often – a form of journalistic harassment. But journalists observe it, use it as a source, and collect comments on popular topics to re-use in new articles. The audience – in rare cases – may thus influence the news selection (Keel et al., 2010).

But further reaching participation of the public in the process of journalism is still quite rare: a frequently employed possibility is the print of pictures or videos of so-called reader reporters by newspapers, for instance, in how the weather report of the Public Broadcasting SRG SSR is curated. The free paper *20Minuten* is an exception, where feedback of the public to controversial topics is often actively asked for and integrated in its news stories.

Nevertheless, a bulk of journalists express the importance of getting feedback and having civil society (or at least their audience) involved, but without possible interference. So, usually in the morning, the editorial staff is deciding, for example which reader stories, often emerging from strokes of fate, would be presented. Besides, further possibilities are used by media corporations today like invitations for readers or pupils to visit the editorial office, lectures by experts for the readership – for example used regularly by the *NZZ* – reader conferences, street interrogations, or online surveys about reader opinions towards controversial topics – often used by *20Minuten*. But public involvement still has low priority, and a so-called open newsroom still does not exist in the Swiss media. At least, in the *Handbook of Quality in the Media* by Pietro Supino and Res Strehle, published by Tamedia in 2017, “interactivity with readership” is a topic that is regarded to be of value by digitalisation. They emphasise, in an idealistic way, that the roles of journalists and readers would move towards being defined in a new way, and journalism would then change from didactic to dialogic communication. Therefore, the significance of the readers as suppliers of topics might potentially increase in future.

*Heinz Bonfadelli*

## (E10) Rules and practices on internal pluralism

2 POINTS

Media organisations strive for pluralism. Their editorial statutes should ensure that different views are brought to bear and reported from different perspectives. However, the diversity in newsrooms leaves much to be desired.

IN 2011  
2 POINTS

The concept of media pluralism encompasses many aspects, namely defining editorial freedoms and ensuring that measures are taken to give citizens access to different sources of information and references, so they can form their own judgement without the unfair influence of opinion-forming and opinion-determining organisations and service providers. In particular, public broadcasting is obliged to reflect a broad and diverse spectrum of political views and opinions and take into account interests of social minorities. While, in the second half of the last century, pluralism was guaranteed by a large number of economically and politically independent newspapers, their numbers sometimes dwindled into diversity. This is no longer guaranteed today due to the centralisation of media production. In addition, omnipresent social media offers little independent and enlightened journalism. The process of concentration of ownership makes a need for internal pluralism more pressing. Rules and practices of internal pluralism show the extent to which newsrooms are aware of the democratic value of internal pluralism and how leading news media operates with, and for, internal pluralism. From the perspective of democratic equality, different views and opinions should be represented, generally irrespective of the requirement for the newsroom to follow a particular editorial mission statement. The question of representation of all residents and citizens in media and journalism is primarily a question of democracy, especially direct and indirect equality of access. The lack of diversity in sources, perspectives, gender, and origin is particularly evident in Switzerland, where there has been a long period of labour and refugee migration. The high proportion of inhabitants with a migration background and the growing pluralisation of life courses are in stark contrast to media workers in leading positions, who appear as extraordinarily homogeneous. In addition, journalistic work in newsrooms also tends to have a homogenising effect. Professional success and advancement primarily result from adaptation. In any case, the diversity debate does not yet seem to have really arrived in journalism and the media industry.

It is clear from the interviews that media organisations willing to address a population as broadly based as possible are striving for pluralism. Conversely, the editorial staff is also willing to link this internal pluralism with a certain profile. However, editorial offices barely possess the instruments, measures, and routines to instrumentally ensure such diversity. Here too, daily pragmatism dominates. The extent to which diversity can spread depends very much on the entrepreneurial will to take it into account in personnel decisions.

Diversity, then, should not only be pursued in terms of personnel but also sources of information. Media professionals, with the exception of specialists designated as part of the editorial team, are generally not in a position to judge the positions of experts and other persons providing valid information. The experts are not independent, but, due to their epistemological backgrounds, hold certain positions and interests in their professional, scientific communities, even if they do not like to admit it. Anyone who has been an expert once has a good chance of being asked to be an expert again. As a rule, media professionals are happy if they have found someone willing to distinguish themselves as an expert. With those willing to be designated as such, despite not possessing diverse epistemological exposures, a problematic role of “expert bureaucracy” is complicated for the media workers by the Covid-19 crisis. Although media professionals in Switzerland are well trained in their profession, the socio-cultural and socio-structural homogeneity of specialists and experts in newsrooms precludes a holistic view in adequate scientific coverage of current topics and issues.

*Werner A. Meier*

### *Dimension: Control / Watchdog (C)*

(C1) Supervising the watchdog “control of the controllers” 1 POINT

There is no external “control of the controllers”; at most there is individual ethical self-control in newsrooms. The judgements of the Press Council in this regard on the basis of the Code of Ethics are generally without consequence at both the corporate and editorial levels. Media criticism and media journalism barely take place anymore.

IN 2011  
2 POINTS

Institutions in Switzerland that monitor and analyse the performance and role of the news media are the Federal Department of Environment, Transport, Energy, and Communications and the OFCOM, also responsible for monitoring the performance of Swiss radio and television. As an external supervisory body, OFCOM accompanies the development of radio and television in Switzerland on the basis of the law on radio and television. It does not carry out any research of its own, as it is not allowed to systematically observe or directly control media content. Therefore, OFCOM regularly awards research contracts worth millions of euros to commercial and public research institutes in order to survey and examine current media developments in radio and television.

SRG SSR is legally obliged to outsource audience research to the independent research foundation Mediapulse, which is responsible for what is ultimately unbiased and neutral audience research. This also includes the measurement of television audience figures, regardless of the broadcasting technology used.

There has been a sharp reduction in media criticism. In contrast to the printed press, SRG SSR continues to strive to address current events in the media landscape on its radio and television channels. This is all the more in the public interest as the Federal Council seeks to increase financial support for the commercial daily press. Although the publishers also regard subsidiary media funding as a problematic encroachment on entrepreneurial freedom of the media and the press, they do not oppose the Federal Council's funding programme in view of the promised financial support.

Corporate and editorial self-control as a form of quality control is a little more than a crutch for the lack of "control of the controllers". The self-organisation of the media's ethical responsibility or journalistic quality control in everyday work is divided into two levels. In editorial offices and publishing houses, internal guidelines are issued by the company, for example, in the form of editorial statutes. At the industry level, a press codex "Declaration of the Duties and Rights of Journalists" has existed since the 1970s.

The Swiss Press Council is responsible for self-regulation of professional ethical standards. According to its own information, the Press Council has made 83 decisions in 2019 – more than ever before in its over forty-year history. However, a record of 127 complaints were received in 2017, 115 in 2018, and 126 in 2019. Of these, six complaints were fully upheld in 2019.

By joining sponsorship of the "Swiss Press Council" foundation, both publishers and radio and television broadcasters, including SRG, as well as professional associations and trade unions recognise the Swiss Press Council as a "body of self-regulation for the editorial section of the media" (Schweizer Presserat, 2020). The competence of the Swiss Press Council extends to all forms of distribution, all media, and also to journalistic content published individually, for example, in the form of a blog, an online platform, or when media professionals express their professional opinions via Twitter or Facebook.

Markus Spillmann, former editor-in-chief of the *NZZ* and current president of the "Swiss Press Council" foundation board, addresses at least three fundamental problems in the 2019 issue, namely a structural deficit in the financing of the Press Council, a gap between aspirations and reality, and incomplete self-regulation. He also notes that the Press Council's judgments and rulings are hardly taken into account in everyday editorial work and that the Press Council is not present in the general public (Schweizer Presserat, 2019). The President of the Press Council, also a former editor-in-chief from Geneva, criticises the unwillingness of media professionals to admit their own mistakes and errors. In addition, a majority of editors usually footnote their guilty verdict at the bottom of the column or leave it out altogether.

Probably the biggest problem of the Code of Ethics and the Press Council is that its regulations are not legally binding. For example, a journalist can be dismissed for an article not complying with internal rules, even if they did not

violate the Code of Ethics. Furthermore, the personal and institutional proximity of representatives of leading media to elites from politics and business is not problematised (e.g., Krüger, 2013). Some time ago, Federal Councillor Ueli Maurer described the media as courtesans who would always move close to power (Maurer, 2013). In addition to power-centred and elitist journalism, even simple-minded, fondness-serving, uncritical, trivialising, or missing contributions are unenforceable or media ethically reprehensible.

*Werner A. Meier*

(C2) Independence of the news media from powerholders

2 POINTS

IN 2011  
2 POINTS

For the leading media, pressure from external interest groups is part of their daily business. But regional and local media also have to cope with this challenge.

Our current findings and statements from interviews show that media professionals try to play down or justify the influence of external stakeholders. According to their statements, they feel pressured by both politics and business. At the same time, they confirm they can successfully resist this pressure and underline their independence and autonomy. However, a critical look at the interaction between media organisations and powerful stakeholders does reveal some dependencies. Even seemingly powerful and independent media organisations are instrumentalised by stakeholders, or can be instrumentalised from outside out of self-interest. Moreover, the question remains open as to the role and status of the media in Swiss society in general and Swiss democracy in particular: whether, or to what extent, media organisations and media professionals themselves represent a power factor – possibly illegitimate.

The attitude of journalists is contradictory and unclear. On the one hand, they complain about the intrusive attempts of political personnel to gain the attention of the media. On the other hand, they also report a dependence on “good stories” from representatives and decision-makers in politics and business. They are even prepared, on a case-by-case basis, to engage in campaign journalism or to jump on such campaigns as free riders. Such actions cause a stir, promise controversy, and, moreover, are well received by the public. Furthermore, media professionals often seem to have a close relationship with certain power circles. At any rate, the president of the Swiss Press Council criticises this in the current annual report and states that proximity to the economic and state power centres is not conducive to the credibility of journalism (Schweizer Presserat, 2019).

Ideally, powerful stakeholder groups in the close and wide environment of editorial offices such as business enterprises, political parties, business asso-

ciations, trade unions, the national churches, and so on, have no influence on editorial decisions that are made on a daily basis. From the perspective of media professionals, any representatives who are on the board of directors of public and private media organisations will be wary of interfering in the day-to-day business of publishing. However, this division of labour is dissolved, where private-commercial media companies such as Ringier, NZZ Media Group, TX Group, and CH Media are concerned. Individual board members, including the executive committee as publisher, co-owner, or consultant, indeed do exert influence on journalistic decisions. Mr. Wanner and Mr. Supino are chairmen of the Board of Directors and CEOs in their respective media groups and exert a strong influence on the editorial departments. Both are also active in leading positions in the VSM. While the NZZ Media Group and CH Media are almost exclusively active in publishing, the TX Group and Ringier are actual digital groups and realise their profits primarily outside of journalistic media. Moreover, the Ringier Group and the newspaper *La Liberté* have well-known owners or business partners from other economic sectors such as insurance companies, banks, infrastructure facilities, and so on. In addition to pressures built into them, external influence on editorial offices, and media content from stakeholders – for example, from corporate communications and public affairs activities – is also part of everyday experiences of business. Nevertheless, the determined silence of companies and service providers often has an effect. Even scandalous stories can often be thwarted without major reputational damage. Additionally, disrupted communication between stakeholders and media organisations can easily be absorbed by another media organisation. The former editor-in-chief of the *NZZ am Sonntag*, for example, complains in his media-critical column that an incumbent member of the cantonal government has succeeded in bringing about an image correction in several of Zurich’s leading media, even though she has recently come under considerable pressure as cantonal health director (Müller, 2020). In any case, the *Schweizer Illustrierte* was close at hand when the magistrate brought out the yoga mat in the cafeteria and, in the wake of her teacher, threw herself into the warrior-2 pose (Ogul, 2020). *Sonntagsblick* from the same media company doubled one day later and the editor-in-charge described the government councillor as a “media professional” and a “media whisperer”. For political journalist Reza Faki (2020), these “awards” are proof that she possessed the necessary strength to hold the highest political office of a Federal Councillor.

The problematic aspects of this mutual instrumentalisation are usually played down or considered “courant normal” by both the media professionals themselves and political staff. Manifest attempts at influence from outside – in whatever form – can draw attention to an already existing “embedding” and “accompaniment” and at the same time strengthen the position of the medium itself in the struggle for attention and power. This kind of “coopera-

tion” of mutually coordinated interventions in everyday work is constitutive to all intermediary organisations. For commercial and public media companies, business models are based to varying degrees on advertising and sponsoring is an additional factor, and accordingly entails more-or-less drastic guidelines and dependencies that significantly structure the “embedding”. It is not the journalistic independence of the newsrooms that ensures the media companies’ sustainability, but their finely balanced economic and political integration into society with its many and varied mutual contacts, controls, and dependencies.

All leading public and commercial media groups are economically and politically embedded. All major media groups are part of the Swiss economy and politically close to the economic liberal policy of the political party FDP. During the loosening of the Covid-19 crisis, the chief editors of all leading media outlets, from the *Tages-Anzeiger*, *Blick*, and *NZZ* to the CH Media, argued for the economy and against restraints by the federal authorities.

Media professionals not only work and interact in a private environment, but are primarily embedded in a media organisation, in political, economic, and sociopolitical structures. In the course of their professional activities, they must face – even fulfil – the often-contradictory demands of information sources, their editorial management, and colleagues, or the business and production conditions of their specific media organisation. Media workers move between autonomy, influences, and dependencies, both on the cognitive and the acting level in the role of the wage-earners. The autonomy of media workers is estimated to be highest for the specific presentation of a story, with 86 per cent. However, the setting of topics is also determined by the editorial management, and full autonomy falls to 78 per cent (Lauener & Keel, 2019). Depending on the type of media and hierarchy level, the perceived autonomy can decrease. And what about the perceived influences from outside?

At the individual level, more than half of the media professionals surveyed attributed the greatest importance to journalistic ethics (61%), time pressure (54%), access to information (51%), personal values and convictions (50%), and available resources (50%). Editorial guidelines and superiors were still considered to be very strong influences by 31 per cent and 27 per cent, respectively, among those surveyed. Colleagues in the company (20%), management (11%), and owners (7%) were even less likely to be organisation-related influences. Business influences with regard to audience research and market data were rated as very strong by only 13 per cent of those surveyed. The influence of entrepreneurial profit expectations was rated as extreme and very strong by only 9 per cent of the respondents (Lauener & Keel, 2019). The influence of public relations, political, and economic interest groups is relatively a lot less than the business influences. Influences of private and professional reference groups amounted to 13 per cent for feedback from the public, 12 per cent for



competing media, 10 per cent for friends, acquaintances, and relatives, and 4 per cent for colleagues from other media (Lauener & Keel, 2019).

Overall, the current survey results show that a clear majority of media professionals in Switzerland enjoy a high degree of autonomy according to their own perceptions. They feel they are guided above all by professional and personal convictions, and are influenced by editorial structures, time, and financial resources, and challenges in accessing information.

This individual, subjective view of journalists, thus, is in contrast to the results of scientific research and parts of the public debates, especially in the times of Covid-19. It can be assumed that neither all influences were perceived, nor all perceived influences were articulated, by the media workers. Many perceived influences are also seen as coherent, legitimate, and constitutive for everyday work; these are by no means only problematic as regards autonomy. In many cases, media workers are not only employed as henchmen, they also see themselves as henchmen in the service of their own interests and those of third parties.

There are also political actors – as one editor-in-chief in public radio experienced – who assume that they have a “right to an antenna”. Ironically, in times of the currently raging pandemic, the Swiss Federal Council does indeed have the right, in a state of emergency, to make announcements and recommendations in public broadcast under its own direction, albeit separately from SRG SSR programming.

*Werner A. Meier*

### (C3) Transparency of data on leading news media

1 POINT

Detailed information on the ownership structure and decision-making processes of private commercial media organisations is not available. Only listed companies must meet minimum transparency requirements.

IN 2011  
1 POINT

Although media professionals constantly demand transparency from authorities, administrations, and corporations, media organisations themselves are very reluctant to disclose documents and data on key aspects regarding themselves. These concern ownership, key business figures, competitive conditions, wage structures, quality management and quality controls, compliance with media ethical standards, editorial statutes, equal wage and equality of opportunity, forms of advertising and advertising partnerships, jobs, corporate governance, offer or page and programme statistics, judgments of the press council, and so on. A somewhat exaggerated formulation can be observed: everything we know about media is from the media corporations and their associations. All public data sources such as usage data from radio, television, newspapers, and online portals, circulation, and reach figures for newspapers are developed and



produced by industry representatives. The preparation and modification of key figures is carried out in print or in consultation with dominant industry interests.

Not just media journalism, but also media politics as well as communication and media science, rely in their publications and recommendations primarily on data produced and authorised by media companies. The Federal Council's advisory body, the Federal Media Commission (FMEC), consists mainly of members of media organisations and their associations, whose knowledge, views, and insights tend to put industry interests first. In addition, communication and media studies, in particular, attempts to expand the publicly accessible knowledge that can be viewed and collected by means of content analyses, structural data, or audience surveys. However, this can only be achieved selectively since representatives of media groups are themselves usually the information providers, and lack of transparency is part of the business model. The *Medienmonitor Schweiz*, a research project commissioned by OFCOM to assess the Swiss media landscape with regard to free formation of opinion, for example, does not record the ownership structure and the composition of the board of directors (Publicom, 2019).

Questions from the scientific community or media professionals whose answers are considered problematic from an entrepreneurial point of view remain unanswered or must, at best, be judged cautiously and critically. Although media professionals complain daily about companies and state administrations unwilling to provide information, the industry itself practices a rigorously restrained disclosure policy. Conversely, the few stocks of knowledge that are generated outside of corporate control are also prone to errors and, from an entrepreneurial and journalistic insider's point of view, can easily be criticised and delegitimised. After all, since 2010, the *fög* has succeeded in publishing a yearbook on the quality of media, which has been criticised by the industry in recent years. However, research with a social science orientation is usually only taken note of by the industry if its results do not contradict the interests of the media industry or can be exploited in a journalistic way. The editor-in-chief of the high-reach commuter newspaper, for example, emphasises that his paper *20Minuten* has not only become the largest private medium, "but according to a study by the Federal Office of Communications, has also become the most important for the formation of opinion in Switzerland" (Looser, 2020).

Knowledge about the media controls the industry and not politics or science. For example, both the Federal Council and the Parliament are currently putting together a package of measures to benefit newspaper publishers worth CHF 220 million without first clarifying the market and competitive situation. This obscures which regions have sufficient, insufficient, or even no journalistic coverage by classic daily newspapers or advertising-financed free-sheets, not to mention the journalistic performance of digital news media in the region. The media journalist Nick Lüthi (2020) commented sceptically on the project:

In general, there seems to be a lack of relevant expertise in Parliament. This also became apparent during the debate on emergency aid for the radio industry. Even proven and self-proclaimed media politicians are not sufficiently aware of the market reality. It is, therefore, not surprising that, in cases of doubt, politicians rely on the tried and tested – in other words, on those media that regularly report on them. This is not a media policy suitable for the future.

*Werner A. Meier*

#### (C4) Journalism professionalism

2 POINTS

IN 2011  
2 POINTS

Journalists have a high level of education and professional skills, but many do not have enough direct experience, for example, of (local) politics. Journalism professionalism is being challenged as well by increased working pressure and decreased resources, for example, for investigations.

Although journalism in Switzerland is an “open” profession with no formal requirements, the educational background of Swiss journalists has improved steadily. Almost 70 per cent of the journalists surveyed in 2015 had an academic degree, of which half had received their degree in journalism, communications, or a related field (Dingerkus et al., 2018). They had taken advantage of educational opportunities in journalism, such as those at the Institute for Applied Linguistics at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences ZHAW in Winterthur, the HTW Chur with a BA in Multimedia Production, or the Media Education Centre MAZ in Lucerne, with its diploma course in journalism. Still, journalists themselves complained about their colleagues, not least because experienced and older journalists had to leave their job in their last years, or more journalists switched to better-paid jobs in corporate communication. Several journalists in our study complained that there existed no conceptions, incentives, or obligations for further journalistic education in most editorial offices. At least, in the 2012–2016 Worlds of Journalism Study, Swiss journalists had a mean of 16.6 years of professional experience, and 58 per cent of surveyed Swiss journalists reported that “Journalism Education” has become stronger in the past five years.

In 2019, there was a short controversial public discourse about a possible future certification of journalists in Switzerland, initiated by the Federal Media Commission EMEK under guidance of former university professor Otfried Jarren (Altwegg, 2019). The underlying idea was to create a quality label for journalistic texts, largely because a loss of monopoly in producing and disseminating media texts based on journalistic quality is under severe threat by the new social media. Of many discussed problems, a main question was: who would decide over the award of this label? As an alternative, it was suggested that it would be better if the media itself would inform its public actively and

in a more transparent way about how their journalists work, as a guarantee of the quality of its journalistic products. Thus, the discussion ended as abruptly as it had started.

Yet, journalists cannot be made the only ones to blame. Under constraints caused by today's media crisis, the quality of journalism inevitably suffers. As a consequence of increased economic pressures in editorial offices of most newspapers, journalistic staff and budgets have been shortened; there is less time for investigations production of journalistic contributions, competitions between media houses have increased, and the significance of so-called click-rates have progressively gotten stronger (Puppis et al., 2017). But despite these negative tendencies, job satisfaction of journalists remained stable at a reasonably high level (Dingerkus et al., 2018). To conclude: professionalism can be better safeguarded if resources are assured.

*Heinz Bonfadelli*

### (C5) Journalists' job security

1 POINT

IN 2011  
2 POINTS

In the wake of the general media crisis and the Covid-19 crisis in spring 2020, job security was not guaranteed, and journalists lost their jobs. Such uncertainties are greater in commercial media than in public broadcasting.

Job security in journalism is not an issue that the Association of Swiss Media (VSM) deals with. In the wake of a media crisis that has been making itself felt for more than a decade, with a steady decline in advertising revenues, job security for media workers has also declined. In 2010, the union Comedia reported 1,465 media workers as unemployed. Reorganisations, job cuts, and centralisation of reporting are decimating both employed and freelance media workers. The latter, in particular, receive fewer orders and lower compensation. But even the trade union has no current data on the length of time spent in the profession. In German-speaking Switzerland and Ticino, there are no regulations on dismissals at sectoral level, as there has been no collective labour agreement since 2004.

In the opinion of the interview participants, the situation at the public broadcaster SRG SSR is still satisfactory with regard to job security. However, the days of people having a secure job at SRG until retirement are over. There is, however, a collective labour agreement [Gesamtarbeitsvertrag] which provides a certain degree of protection for all employees. In any case, the SRG also carries out redundancies, or forces employees over 60 to take early retirement, or even leave the profession.

Some time ago, Vinzenz Wyss surveyed the job security of media workers in an essay on the how Swiss journalism was becoming precarious. While SRG

SSR employees overall scored 2.3 in 2008 (1 = satisfied; 6 = dissatisfied), print journalists represented a figure of 3.5, and online media 4.2, both significantly less favourable (Wyss, 2012). Looking at the current industry reports, job security is likely to decline even further in the future. The long-standing problem of financing journalism has prompted much of daily media to reduce its output. The industry itself assumes that the number of media companies in Switzerland will fall or stagnate over the next five years and that media offerings produced by these companies will decline (UVEK, 2020). Overall, the majority of respondents assume that the number of employed media workers will “decrease slightly or sharply” (UVEK, 2020: 10). UVEK also sees strongly disruptive tendencies towards the Swiss media system and especially daily newspapers. These include a sharp decline in advertising revenues and print circulation. As a result, further title mergers, editorial mergers, and job cuts are likely to occur, from which the diversity of content and journalistic opinion is likely to suffer (EMEK, 2020).

*Werner A. Meier*

## (C6) Practice of access to information

2 POINTS

Journalists in Switzerland generally have free access to most public information held by government and administration, but not to companies and associations. There are still restrictions and obstacles.

IN 2011  
3 POINTS

Media workers inclined to conduct research or slip into the role of a “watchdog” must have free access to state sources in order to, if need be, exercise proper and independent control and criticism of the government and administration. Federal law on the principle of publicity in the administration has been in force since 1 July 2006. In principle, this gives media professionals, but also private individuals and industrial and service companies, access to all documents of the federal administration under the heading of “good governance”. The purpose of the Public Disclosure Act [Öffentlichkeitsgesetz] is to promote transparency with regard to the mandate, organisation, and activities of the administration. The focus is on access to official documents. In 2019, a total of 916 requests for access were submitted or assessed to authorities and administrative bodies, 44 per cent more than in 2018. Of these, 542 cases (59%) were granted full access to files, and 171 cases (19%) partial access. In 86 instances (9%), access was refused (Lobsiger, 2020: 65). In 36 cases, according to the administration, there were no available documents.

According to the current annual report of the Federal Data Protection and Information Commissioner (FDPIC) for the period from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, a paradigm shift is clearly visible, insofar as the principle of public access being implemented successfully by most federal authorities: “Complete

access to the desired documents prevails, and the number of requests for access is increasing significantly”. In addition, verbal mediation negotiations have proven to be successful, as 61 per cent of cases were concluded amicably (Lobsiger, 2020: 64). However, the number of pending cases also increased, which indicates sluggish conciliation negotiations (Lobsiger, 2020). In 31 cases, those seeking access were charged a fee. The total of all fees amounted to CHF 18,185, which represents an increase of 15 per cent over the previous year and amounts to about CHF 586 per request (Lobsiger, 2020). Since the National Council’s State Policy Commission has decided to waive fees in future and to make access to documents free of charge for media professionals, a successful revision of the law should remove another obstacle to the desired transparency.

Even if it can generally be stated that the federal departments and administrations have opened up their communication channels in recent years and are less inclined to take a defensive stance, there are still major differences among the media representatives surveyed regarding their current assessment of the accessibility of information. For one group of media professionals, it has become more difficult, cumbersome, bureaucratic, expensive, and legally complex to obtain information. The other group of media professionals considers the situation to be more comfortable and less restrictive than in the past, especially when the position and interests of the administration in terms of transparency or secrecy are also taken into account in the assessment.

In mid-2020, two cases that became public indicate there were still major obstacles for media professionals in research in specific instances. In 2015, journalists of the weekly newspaper *WOZ* wanted to receive the names of all arms exporters from the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (Seco). Seco refused to hand over the requested documents as a defensive reflex and did not even clarify whether the arms companies concerned had even claimed an interest in secrecy with regard to the requested documents. With the help of a lawyer, *WOZ* had to go through all instances, which made the proceedings extremely lengthy. In the meantime, Seco argued that this would not only endanger Switzerland’s international relations, but would also annoy many affected countries who wanted to keep their arms procurement secret. This also applied to Sweden, claimed Seco (Susan Boos, 2020). All data relating to Sweden were generally accessible on an Internet platform of the Swedish administration and were anything but secret. After the Federal Supreme Court finally ruled in favour of the *WOZ* in 2019, the documents arrived at the editorial office in June 2020, with a delay of five years, so to speak. In addition, the newspaper had to pay a fee of CHF 5’458.00

In the second example, in November 2018, the Zurich cantonal social welfare office had awarded contracts of almost CHF 120 million to external service providers for the care of asylum seekers. A few weeks later, the online magazine *Republik* submitted a request for a review. The social welfare office was to

disclose all newly concluded as well as expired service contracts with external service providers (Hanimann, 2020). After the social welfare office refused to grant access, *Republik* went to the administrative court and was proved right in essential points. Nothing in the Administrative Court's ruling is yet final, as the Federal Supreme Court will be called upon if necessary.

From a democratic political perspective, these examples are problematic in several respects. They make it clear that administrations occasionally succeed in precluding “unpopular” stories from appearing, or at least delay them in such a way that they can only appear at great cost to media companies. Weighing the merits, this suggests that the administration tries to favour private-sector interests over public interests, which leads to a problematic dilution of the Public Disclosure Act. In the opinion of the FDPIC, the Federal Administration attempts to circumvent the Public Information Act by means of exception regulations. Specifically, the Federal Council wants to keep a list of companies that are excluded from public contracts due to corruption or cartel agreements under lock and key. The administration argues that the access applications would only aim to obtain sensitive economic data from third parties and would not focus on the activities of the administration (Lobsiger, 2020). The Federal Office of Public Health also wants to keep public law on the negotiation of price and reimbursement models between pharmaceutical companies and health insurance companies in compulsory health insurance secret in future. Here, too, the Federal Council argues that if the actual prices were disclosed, the pharmaceutical companies would no longer be prepared to negotiate such pricing models. In addition, the Council points out that the majority of applications are not submitted by citizens but by pharmaceutical companies, in order to gain access to business information of competing groups (Lobsiger, 2020).

The handling of the Public Disclosure Act by authorities, the media, and corporations thus continues to remain controversial. In exceptional cases, the administration continues to exercise secrecy and dispute it in elaborate arbitration proceedings. Sometimes, the duration of resolving such disputes makes the withheld information lose significance. The increasing juridification, too, does not represent a relief for media professionals. Indirectly, however, the application of the Public Disclosure Act also draws attention to the fact that democratically relevant economic organisations such as media, technology, infrastructure, or pharmaceutical companies are able to keep their “business secrets” under lock and key in order to exploit their market power in an unregulated, uncontrolled, and non-transparent manner.

*Werner A. Meier*

(C7) The watchdog and the news media's mission statement

2 POINTS  
IN 2011  
2 POINTS

The mission statements or editorial statutes of the media contain hardly any reference to the role of the media as democratic “watchdogs” in the interests of civil society and are of little importance in the everyday work of media professionals.

In his book on the development of journalism in liberal, deliberative, and participatory democracy, the American communications scientist Seong Jae Min distinguishes three journalism models, each with a dominant objective (Min, 2018). Of these, in the “trustee” model of liberal democracy, information is at the centre. The professional journalist primarily provides the inhabitants with information on self-organisation and self-management and works on behalf of civil society. Such a focused role of journalism is controversial in Switzerland.

According to Drüeke (2018), the “guardian role” of media is emphasised, since control is seen as central to the media, along with information and transparency and thus legitimisation of political processes. Publicity is produced in different ways: from “below” –from the perspective of the governed, in which the attitudes and opinions of citizens are presented – or from “above”, in other words, the fulfilment of the provision of information from the perspective of the governed. In these production mechanisms of publicity, the media are central as critical observers (Drüeke, 2018). To put it bluntly, this means that media professionals act as watchdogs who warn civil society as soon as important decisions are pending, or something gets out of hand. The concept of watchdogs in the form of investigative journalism, and at the same time as a central public task of media, is not based on a uniform understanding of what functions and forms such watchdog media have and what is meant by them (Drüeke, 2018).

The role of the press as a permanent observer of the state executive, legislative, and judicial branches is also a widespread notion in Switzerland as the stronghold of an economic liberal democracy. It is based on the assumption that the media and media professionals are autonomous and have sufficiently institutionalised and legitimised powers to act as a quasi, fourth power in the state, keeping the other three powerholders in check in certain areas with regard to their accountability and their potential for abuse of power. This takes the form of neutral and systematic reporting and discussion of democracy-relevant issues, events, procedures, and trends, so that civil society can deal with all risks and damage that has occurred in good time. As attractive as this narrative may be, the fact is that the self-proclaimed journalistic watchdogs exercise their autonomy in very different ways. There are watchdogs who observe from places where there is little to see and observe. Other watchdogs, on the other hand, reject this role because they neither want to do investigative work nor “bark” or “bite”. There are also media organisations that do without expen-



sive watchdogs altogether or use them as “attack dogs”, not always in the interest of civil society but also in their own corporate and political interests, or even, in the interests of third parties. In which or whose interest watchdogs are renounced and where the watchdogs are used observe, bark, attack, or bite often remains in the dark.

If one dares to compare these role models with the understanding of the roles of privately organised newspaper journalists and SRG radio journalists in Switzerland, the majority of media professionals here favour the following role models: “Reporting things as they are” (94% and 91%), “being an impartial observer” (82% and 86%) and “classifying and analysing current events” (83% and 95%). “Communicating political information” as a role perception is affirmed by 71 per cent of newspaper journalists and 79 per cent of radio journalists. 58 and 55 per cent, respectively, want to “give people the opportunity to articulate their views” and also pursue participatory objectives. 53 and 60 per cent want to “communicate the world in stories as storytellers”.

Taking note of these results of a relatively recent survey of media professionals, one finds that the role of observation, depiction, mediation, analysis, and classification continues to dominate in Switzerland. Discursive and participatory understanding of roles follows at a distance. In contrast, only 52 per cent of newspaper journalists want to “control the government”, compared to 45 per cent of SRG radio journalists (Hanitzsch et al., 2019: 312). Only a minority of press journalists (39%) and radio journalists (37%) want to “control the economy”. The watchdog model mentioned at the beginning only enjoys support among a minority of the media professionals surveyed. The investigative, power-critical watchdog function, as a professional role model, does not seem to show promise in gaining a majority.

*Werner A. Meier*

## (C8) Professional training

2 POINTS

Supply of professional training offerings in journalism is not a problem in Switzerland, but there are no specified or even obligatory strategies and concepts in most media and editorial offices. As a consequence, professional training is a discretionary matter and its attendant demand seems to be quite moderate.

IN 2011  
2 POINTS

Today, there is no longer a general lack of professional (in-service) training opportunities, for example, in investigative skills or data journalism, for Swiss journalists, as was stated in the 2011 MDM report (Meier et al., 2011). Instead, there are many professional training possibilities provided, for instance, by the Media Education Centre MAZ in Lucerne or the Zurich University of Applied Sciences ZHAW in Winterthur (see also Indicator C4 – Journalism profes-



sionalism). The main problem seems to be that professional further education for working journalists is not required or encouraged in most editorial offices. Education and advanced training in journalism is, therefore, left to individual discretion.

Only the public broadcaster SRG SSR runs an in-house training centre. SRG SSR puts effort into their professional training programme and calls upon its employees to benefit from internal and external programmes during their whole careers. Big publishing companies like Ringier AG also offered internal courses for their employees, but these have been cut back due to either lack of resources or need (see Meier et al., 2011). TX Media at least provides expert tools dealing with journalistic practices like interviewing, computerised data analysis, and investigative or data journalism. Furthermore, it offers an attractive three-week in-service training at the Columbia University, New York. But among the journalists interviewed, one was severely critical of this and stated the possibility of more men than women receiving this opportunity, and also that the selection criteria was not transparent.

Taken together, there exists in most media or editorial offices no concrete management policy or institutionalised concepts for further professional education or advanced training in journalism, even though there exists an abundance of possibilities and offerings. Therefore, here to, individual motivation is more crucial and instrumental.

*Heinz Bonfadelli*

### (C9) Watchdog function and financial resources

1 POINT

IN 2011  
1 POINT

For a long time, leading daily media were financially successful. For some time now, there has generally been less staff available for traditional reporting, but with the creation of research desks, there are now slightly more resources available for research and investigative journalism.

A central issue in this examination is to assess the extent to which media professionals are able and willing to assume their role as a “fourth power”: criticism and control of illegitimate power by means of appropriate research. The perception of the media as watchdogs or “attack dogs” fighting against abuse of power and corruption has long been a part of journalistic self-image. However, there is no distinct culture of investigative journalism in Switzerland.

It seems undisputed, though, that sustaining journalistic quality is predicated on meticulous research and requires careful and elaborate work. This places limits on research in everyday professional life. Every newsroom must think carefully about how to use the scarce resources available. It is true that research techniques have been developed and furthered in newsrooms. How-

ever, the companies, associations, and administrative offices with important information at their disposal also make efforts to preclude journalistic access and possible scandal in the event of unpleasant or problematic incidents. In addition, state institutions and private-sector organisations try to develop and maintain a positive public image by means of media monitoring and continuous public relations. Due to the growing importance of social media, not only business enterprises, associations, and administrations, but also civil society groups have begun to communicate more directly with their customers instead of maintaining a dialogue via the daily news media.

On the basis of our discussions with media professionals, investigative and research journalism in Switzerland did not reflect a daily struggle against the illegitimate exercise of power by outstanding institutions and organisations in a liberal society. Investigative journalism critical of power cannot be seen as the measure of an average standard, but has a permanent, if not prominent, place in newsrooms. Daily journalism in particular focuses on topics that are on the agenda of political, economic, cultural, and social institutions and organisations and are usually produced about, through, and even within them. Additional research by media professionals often does not always serve as checks of power, but also maintains and asserts it. Economically and socially well-established institutions and organisations often find allies in newsrooms who willingly and uncritically convey messages to their “clients”, as they are not able or willing to take their own journalistic or foreign view of the topic. However, since editorial offices are only occasionally able to present or critically address all stakeholders with their objectives and interests, the challenges for less-prominent groups having a voice or receiving attention have become even more acute. In other words, the growing organisation of civil society means that less journalistic personnel and less journalistic spaces are available.

It is true there is a certain journalistic and entrepreneurial desire to do more investigative work, devote more time and professional resources to important stories that can become scandals, and make big impacts in the public eye. However, most editorial offices have neither sufficient personnel nor financial resources for long-term and sustainable investigative journalism. After all, the *Tages-Anzeiger* and SRG SSR have permanently established research teams, while the CH Media dispenses with this measure. Overall, however, availability of reporters with the necessary resources and indispensable know-how over time, and who also enjoy the institutional backing to carry out investigative journalism effectively and efficiently, is likely to decline.

*Werner A. Meier*

## Conclusions

Our interviews, together with the existing communication research and media data from Switzerland, show a mixed picture. Compared to the 2011 MDM report, the existing Swiss quality media still seem to be only “a reduced protective forest” for democracy in Switzerland (Meier et al., 2011). Most indicators remained stable between 2011 and 2021: eleven with 2 points, five with 1 point, and only two with 3 points. But five indicators worsened: patterns of news media use (F2), diversity of news sources (F3), and practice of access to information (C6) went from three to two points; and supervising the watchdogs (C1) and journalists’ job security (C5) went from two points to one. Only two indicators improved: internal rules for practice in newsroom democracy (F4) and participation (E9), but these too only slightly – from one to two points.

To conclude, Swiss news media in 2021 faces manifold threats and challenges. Besides the already existing strong press concentration in 2011, one of the unsolved questions is how to ensure quality journalism for the future (Ruoff, 2019) in the face of advertising flowing to the big digital platforms like Google, Facebook, and YouTube as giant international competitors on the one hand, and former print media subscribers getting information in the social media more and more on the other. But there seem to be at least some rays of hope: gender balance in newsrooms has increased somewhat, and investigative reporting together with the control function of the media has been evaluated highly by the interviewed Swiss journalists. Measured by the MDM indicators, the Swiss newsprint media, and especially the Public Broadcasting SRG SSR, perform still important functions for the participatory democracy of Switzerland.

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