

How Finnish News Media Defend Their Boundaries in the Age of Digital Platforms



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Abstract This chapter discusses the strategies that Finnish professional news media have used in recent years to defend their boundaries both as businesses and societal institutions in the age of digital platforms. Based on interviews with chief editors and media experts, we distinguish five central strategies for business survival. Furthermore, we discuss how the Finnish news media have responded to the pressures caused by the digital information environment.

Keywords News media business · Journalism · Platforms · Digital information environment

1 Introduction

The process of platformization entails the penetration of infrastructures, economic processes, and governmental frameworks by digital platforms in different economic sectors and spheres of life (Poell et al. 2019). This chapter focuses on the effects and dependencies that globally operating, large platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Google, Twitter, and TikTok, have caused among Finnish journalistic media.

First, in Finland and elsewhere, digital platforms have negatively affected the advertising revenues of the news media, which has forced the latter to rethink and recreate their business models and journalistic products. Second, the news media need to compete for consumer attention with the platforms and the players that operate on them. Third, the news media depend on platform technologies for studying consumers' behaviors through user analytics. The digital and hybrid media environment, with its competing content producers, has also undermined the news media's position as dominant and reliable sources of information. This is the case even in Finland, where the public still highly trusts the news media.

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In this chapter, we will discuss the effects of digital platforms and the hybrid media system on Finnish news media and the coping mechanisms that the media have adopted in the past years. What are the news media doing to maintain and defend their boundaries both as businesses and as societal institutions? We will try to answer this question based on the findings of interviews conducted with Finnish news media editors and other media experts as well as current research.

2 The Finnish Media System and the Research Setting

Comparative studies have found that the Finnish media system is part of the Nordic media welfare states (Syvertsen et al. 2014), which are characterized by both a democratic corporatist media system (Hallin and Mancini 2004) and a social-democratic welfare state ideology (Esping-Andersen 1990). This Nordic media welfare model includes strong state support for universally available and accessible communication systems (linked to subsidies to both public-service and private operators), institutionalized editorial freedom, and self-regulation of the sector. The public-service media have been at the forefront of serving the needs of different groups in society (Syvertsen et al. 2014). In international comparisons, Finland has been constantly found to be a model country for high media freedom and high societal trust (e.g., OECD 2021; RSF 2023).

However, in the present era dominated by digital media and global influences, it is unclear how well the Nordic media model still correlates with Nordic media realities. Finland has been rapidly moving toward liberalization and competition-based funding models. Furthermore, the state's direct media subsidies to private news media have not been as generous as in other Nordic nations. According to some scholars (Ala-Fossi 2020; Ala-Fossi et al. 2023), competitiveness in Finland has been prioritized over democratic media policies.

The Finnish news media field includes the public-service broadcaster *Yleisradio* (*Yle*), which serves both nationally and locally; *Yle* also offers online and on-demand news and video services. In terms of commercial news media outlets, there are national channels (*MTV News*); national, regional, and local newspapers; news magazines; and the news broadcast by commercial radio stations. In this study, the term "national news media" refers in particular to the largest outlets: *Yle*, *MTV*, the newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*, and two national tabloids, *Ilta-Sanomat* and *Ilta-lehti*. In Finland, regional news media include provincial and small-town newspapers as well as the local newsrooms of the national media. Most news media in the country are historically either regional or local (Hellman 2022). Altogether, approximately 250 newspapers are published in Finland (Uutismedian liitto 2023). There are also digital-native news outlets, but they are still few in number and targeted mainly at specific audiences.

As was the case elsewhere, in the 2010s, the initial phase of digitalization caused the Finnish news media to start struggling. The revenues from advertising and subscriptions started decreasing. The country's news media lost about 35% of their

market share in digital advertising between 2010 and 2020, whereas in 2019 Google's and Facebook's share of the money spent on digital advertising was already 54% (Ala-Fossi et al. 2020.) At the same time, some 1,000 jobs were cut in journalism (Honkonen 2019).

As part of this study, we interviewed chief editors of national and regional news media (N = 11) as well as other media experts (N = 14).¹ The semi-structured interviews were conducted online in the late autumn of 2021 and the winter of 2022. The questions concerned journalism's role in society and its current challenges, the changed information environment and news media's role in it, the economic aspects and difficulties of news media businesses in the era of platformization, and media policy. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 min. The conversations were audio-recorded, transcribed by an external company following a confidentiality agreement, and coded using the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti. The initial round of coding was done thematically based on the themes of the interview and then developed iteratively during the coding process. In the second round of coding and reading, the focus was on the most prominent codes and their content. In this chapter, we concentrate on the themes that highlight what measures have helped Finnish news media to sustain their businesses and journalistic products in the age of digital platforms, how they reflect on their relationships with competing content producers and audiences, and how they maintain and defend the boundaries of journalism.

3 Defending the Boundaries of the News Media Business

Based on the interviews with the chief editors, we were able to distinguish five prominent strategies adopted for maintaining profitable news businesses and succeeding in the competition for audiences and consumer attention. The five strategies are as follows:

1. Investing in digital news media products to attract new subscriptions.
2. Seeking growth in digital advertising.
3. Minimizing the costs of printed media products (especially printing and distribution).
4. Saving on production costs by merging with other media businesses (takeovers) and through consolidation.
5. Creating shared efforts among news media to confront the platforms.

These strategies are not used equally by all the outlets. Bigger companies are better able to create long-term strategies, whereas smaller ones are typically more reliant on general developments or external changes in the media business landscape (Lindén et al. 2022). National media are possibly large enough to survive on their

¹ We conducted interviews with the chief editors of *Helsingin Sanomat*, *Iltalehti*, *MTV News*, *Yle*, *Long Play*, *Hämeen Sanomat*, *Kainuun Sanomat*, *Kaleva*, *Karjalainen*, *Keskisuomalainen*, and *Lapin Kansa*. The media experts were from different government ministries and advocacy organizations operating in the field of media and journalism.

own, while the only option for a regional or sub-regional outlet might be to merge with a bigger company. Internationally, the largest news media might even be able to negotiate with digital platforms on terms of use and compensation for news content. These negotiations are not feasible in Finland as the market for Finnish-language media is limited. In our discussion, we concentrate on national and regional media, which somewhat limits our conclusions because local media are also facing major challenges due to their heavy dependence on printed products. We will also not discuss Finland's digital-native news outlets.

3.1 Investing in the Duality of Digital News Media Products and Digital Advertising

In Finland, the main challenge in news media product development has been how to attract consumers who are generally interested in the news but are not very willing to pay for it. Only a fifth of consumers pay for digital news content, and most of those who engage only with free content are not willing to pay for it in the future (Reunanen 2021: 24–25).

The established options for news media operating online are to either offer free content funded by digital advertising income or seek growth in digital subscriptions. This duality is not surprising as news journalism has always been based on the double market of selling news and advertising space (Picard 1993).

In our interviews, the representatives of the national media told us that income from digital advertising is growing and that they saw great potential in it. Currently, national media outlets are getting the biggest share of digital news media advertising (Arola 2020). They have also heavily invested in the development of their own digital news products.

All the national news media have news apps in addition to news websites. The content of *Yle* and *MTV* is free of charge. The content of the tabloids is mostly free, but some news items are accessible only by paying (*Iltalehti*) or signing in as a user for free (*Ilta-Sanomat*). *Helsingin Sanomat*'s content is partly free and partly behind a paywall for users with a digital subscription. Furthermore, the national media are constantly developing paywall strategies and finding ways to customize content to appeal to new digital subscribers. For example, the “diamond stories” of *Helsingin Sanomat* or the “plus content” of *Iltalehti* (both are usually in-depth feature stories or news analyses) are only accessible if one has a digital subscription, including a trial one. Magazine content from the media group that owns the newspaper or the tabloid is also sometimes offered to subscribers for free.

Finland's regional news media also adopt the dual strategy of increasing digital subscriptions and developing digital advertising. Although the national media take the biggest share of advertising, regional media outlets are still competitive when it comes to regionally targeted ads. These outlets have also invested in the development of digital news content, apps, and user analytics. All of them have a hard paywall;

almost no news items can be read without an active subscription. This possibly irritates potential readers and directs them to free content—for instance, the local news of the public broadcaster *Yle*. However, there are few other options, as paying customers are vital for the continued existence of regional news media. ‘Paywall’ was criticized as an excessively negative concept by our interviewees, as readers have always had to pay for subscriptions.

Competition with free content was also taken as a positive challenge. In a nutshell, the news content produced needs to be of such quality that the reader is willing to pay for it and subscribe to the newspaper. If the content is not good, there is no point in producing it. Regionality and locality are the core elements that help the regional media to succeed in the market. The goal is to get close to the readers, and this is achieved with the help of user analytics. The interviewees believed that the need to develop local content also protects the regional media from becoming too one-sided or monotonous as a result of media concentration. Readers are simply uninterested in reading content that is not uniquely local. It is also still possible to make a profit with advertising that focuses on regional and local markets. Locality is a dimension where digital platforms do not enjoy a great competitive advantage as they do not have the capability to produce local news content.

User analytics are widely used by all types of news media to optimize both digital advertising and the attractiveness of content. They were usually mentioned in the interviews as being the most beneficial development of the digital platform era. Thanks to these analytics, journalists no longer need to guess what the public likes; they can obtain data on actual news use—who is interested in what, how much time is spent on each item, and what other content is consumed. Despite this optimism, the interviewees also said that one should not trust user analytics blindly; instead, one should always inspect them carefully. For example, a news link opened numerous times that is only browsed through is not necessarily influential or good content. In this matter, the interviewees held the same view that is often depicted in research: purely counting readers or page visits is not a guarantee for quality journalism. The uncritical use of analytics results in clickbait—quick, superficial, and entertainment-oriented journalism that is optimized for maximizing readership and thus advertisement income (e.g., Fürst 2020). Most of our interviewees stated that they prefer measuring, for example, the time spent reading a news item. However, for example in the tabloids, clicks are still used as a strong indicator of user interest.

The public broadcaster *Yle* is funded by citizens’ taxes.² Therefore, it is not dependent on other forms of income, such as subscriptions and adverts. However, *Yle* still depends on user analytics in the competition for people’s time and attention. The broadcaster has been one of the most proactive Finnish news media in terms of using analytics as well as seeking out new audiences on social media. *Yle* is also criticized for this by its commercial rivals. Some of our interviewees, for instance, stated that a public news media organization should not create free content for the platform giants. Instead, *Yle* believes that as a public broadcaster with the responsibility to serve all audiences, it needs to reach out to the younger individuals there where they already

² Since 2013, all adult residents and registered businesses in Finland pay an income-based Yle-tax.

are active, such as on YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. Therefore, *Yle* has created a special multimedia portfolio for its young-adult users that publishes content on various channels, including social media accounts or as *Yle* calls them, channels, that are built around popular young hosts. A large share of this content is published on that specific channel only and not on *Yle*'s own channels. Recently, *Helsingin Sanomat* also launched a TikTok channel.

3.2 *Minimizing Costs by Cutting and Merging*

Finland's regional news media (and, to an extent, the national media) are greatly challenged by the fact that the largest share of their subscriptions and advertising income still comes from print. Despite diminishing demand for printed products, production costs have remained proportionally the same for years or have even grown due to the increased prices of materials, the printing process, and distribution (Virtanen 2021). As the costs will keep growing, there is a need to make cuts. There is also a fear that digital content will not be able to receive sufficient investment if the cost of printed products remains so high. The subscribers of regional newspapers are mostly elderly or aging people; therefore, it is unrealistic to expect that they will become subscribers of digital products only any time soon. The printed news needs to be maintained even though it is becoming relatively more expensive.

A recent answer to growing costs in the regional news media has been concentrating ownership. There have been several takeovers or new ownership arrangements of late, and a few media corporations have expanded intensely. The level of concentration in the Finnish media landscape is exceptionally high—the two largest media companies control about 60% of the market, and the largest eight companies have a market share of 80%. There are fears that this situation is starting to negatively affect the originality and diversity of news content. The risk of 'news deserts'—regions without a dedicated news outlet—has been identified also in Finland (Hellman 2021, 2022). However, compared to other countries (Newman 2022: 33), Finland has thus far not created a system of direct public subsidies for commercial media in order to avoid this risk.

Our interviewees did mostly not acknowledge the threat of actual or potential news deserts. According to the editors, the concentration of news media is not the cause of such deserts but an attempt to secure the existence of regional and local media. For them, concentration brings the benefits of scale. For example, it helps to pool digital know-how and offer the same digital solutions to several news outlets, which can save costs compared to a situation where each outlet creates its digital solutions and apps (see also Hellman 2022). As an additional rationalization measure, some regional outlets have removed certain overlapping functions during the consolidation processes, and journalists have been moved from peripheral areas to the regional centers. The interviewees thought that this centralization may have reduced content focused on peripheral areas, but not significantly. User analytics have also been

employed to allocate resources to those types of content and functions that are most requested. In this context, locality is still what matters.

Investments in digital news have also been made in the hope of achieving cost savings. The long-term goal is to familiarize readers with digital content and gain new subscribers. Typically, the regular print subscription also contains a digital subscription. For some regional news outlets, the shift from print to digital is more or less forced because, in the remotest areas, daily newspaper distribution is no longer possible due to cuts in postal services. Therefore, a daily printed newspaper is not offered as an option. The only possibility to read the news on a daily basis is to do so digitally.

3.3 Joint Efforts to Confront the Power of Platforms

Finland's news media are actively trying to find ways to minimize the power of digital platforms by being very selective and conscious about their online activities. When it comes to news for the general public, they restrict the material shared through the platforms and mainly publish it on their news websites. Popular social media are used to advertise their content and attract new readers, but to read the news one needs to visit the news website or the app. As part of this strategy, news media organizations invest in strong and recognizable brands that attract readers without the use of intermediaries. This seems to be working. Compared to many other countries, in Finland, most people go directly to the news media's websites or apps instead of searching for news items on social media or other platforms (Reunanen 2022a: 18–19). However, younger users prefer social media to stay up-to-date with current events, and the news media have already had to adjust their tactics somewhat to reach these users.

News media outlets are also trying to make readers access the news via media-specific accounts instead of the accounts created for social media platforms. Paywalls and compulsory registration have become very common on news media websites. Registered accounts help the news media to keep traffic and user data in their own hands. The largest organizations have invested in their own analytics and algorithms to be less dependent on those offered by the platforms and to circumvent some of the transparency and black-box issues that platform analytics entail. A new initiative in this field is the so-called media account, which some commercial media have been developing (Virranta 2022). The idea is that in the future, the reader could access several different news media with a single account and even buy individual news items without needing to have a full subscription for each outlet. This account could also be used to safely access other kinds of services that in Finland are currently typically accessed through online-banking identification. Similar services are being developed elsewhere too as a tool to control user analytics without platform interference (Newman 2022: 7). Our interviewees believed that well-developed and well-managed analytics could also create new income streams for the news media. However, user data should be managed in an open and transparent manner; for example, as required

by the EU's Digital Service Act, which would avoid the black-box effect linked to very large platforms.

The news media representatives we interviewed did not consider direct negotiations with the platforms a realistic solution for regulatory issues or compensation agreements on content. Their realism is based on the small size of Finland and its media market (Sirkkunen et al. 2021). Any negotiations would need to be carried out at the EU level, as has been the case until now. The new Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market (DSM, EU 2019/790) makes it possible for news media organizations to receive compensation for and better control the use of news content online. The directive has not yet been fully implemented in Finland. Our interviewees had different opinions on content compensation, as many of them saw the benefits of sharing news content on platforms. Better regulating the platforms and having them pay taxes at the country level were given priority over content compensation.

Indirect subsidies were seen as vital for commercial media. There was strong support for the reduced rate of VAT (10%), which is now applied, and for the implementation of 0% VAT in the near future, as it is now allowed by the EU (Haapalainen 2021). Continued state compensation for distribution costs was also seen as necessary. Direct subsidies were much less popular because they raised the question of who or what institution would choose the recipients and the criteria for granting the funds (see also Grundström 2020; Piirainen et al. 2022).

Overall, at the time of interviewing, the news editors' stance toward the challenges brought about by digitalization and platformization was quite positive. Digitalization has increased the understanding of journalism and created possibilities for growth. A special emphasis was placed on the quality of journalism, without which there is no product to sell, be it content to users or advertising space. Digitalization has contributed much-needed tools to better comprehend what quality journalism is. In recent years, Finnish news media have experienced a period of growth after a long downward trend, and organizations have hired new staff. There is even a lack of or competition for the most-skilled professionals (Arola 2022). It seems that this positive attitude toward digital growth is internationally shared. Other reports have also found that investing in quality news products and targeting new subscribers offer the best chances of success (Newman 2022: 6–10). The COVID-19 pandemic has mostly meant an increased interest in the news, as people have recognized the need for high quality, verified information. Now the news media need to find the tools to maintain that interest.

4 Defending the Boundaries of News Media as Societal Institution

In Western societies, news media have traditionally been seen as having a central role in democracy as providers of information, enablers of public discussion and participation, and controllers of those in power. During the time of traditional mass

media, news organizations had an agenda-setting power to filter and steer the daily topics of discussion and influence who got to participate in debates (e.g., Habermas 2006, 2022). The new era of digital communication and social media has changed this. Now, practically anyone can be an information provider or author with the potential power to set the agenda, and the same is true of taking part in public discussions online.

In Finland, as elsewhere in the world, the new digital era has created a competitive and hybrid communication environment where the news media have become just one of the players fighting for consumer attention among other professional, nonprofessional, commercial, and non-profit information providers (e.g., Carlson 2015; Chadwick 2013; Downey and Fenton 2003). The traditional media logic of ‘one to many’ has been supplemented by the new logic of ‘many to many’ in online networks, in which information is spread and discussed without any central control or prior filters. As some of our interviewees noted, digitalization means that news organizations compete not only against other news media and information providers but also against everything else that captures people’s attention in life. In this sense, consuming news is just one way to spend one’s time and not an obvious choice.

The increased diversity of the information environment was greeted positively by our interviewees. The wealth of information was welcomed because it ensures in principle that everyone can access the content they want and need. The competition with other information providers was not seen as a problem but as a reason for journalists to do their work well and to remain interesting and relevant. What was less appreciated was the inevitable growth of “noise” in the information system, meaning information that is inaccurate or somehow misleading or manipulative.

As mentioned above, the best tool to learn what consumers view as important was user analytics. There was criticism of the news media’s prior attitude of thinking they knew best what their audiences wanted or needed. Our interviewees agreed that analytics have changed this. However, they also said that their outlets still offer news that is not necessarily popular or widely read. This is because it discusses very important topics that need to be covered for public-interest reasons or for attracting new groups of readers. Among our participants, there seemed to be a genuine interest in serving audiences broadly and deeply and in maintaining national coherence through offering content that is believed to unite people under shared public interests. This is in accordance with the democratic principles of the media (Habermas 2006, 2022), which the interviewees also reflected on.

The Finnish media editors and experts also spoke about the public delegitimization of the media’s position in society. In Finland, as in other countries (e.g., Carlson 2015; Newman and Fletcher 2017; Waisbord 2018), radically populist voices and their media outlets have actively challenged the news media in recent years, claiming that they are biased and unreliable as an institution. This distrust has been openly expressed especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, but it was also present before; for instance, regarding issues such as migration, minorities, gender and equality, and politics (Noppari et al. 2019; Tolonen 2020). The most recent example has been the war in Ukraine (Tuomola 2023).

Lately, a number of surveys have shown that about half of Finnish journalists have experienced public scorn, devaluing, insults, and other forms of harassment in their work, especially online (e.g., Hiltunen et al. 2022; Väliverronen et al. 2023). The chief editors told us that during the pandemic, their newsrooms had been approached by COVID-19 deniers and related groups who had accused them of bias. Also, during the so-called refugee crisis of 2015, radical right-wing groups accused journalists of spreading disinformation and hiding the truth (Ojala and Pöyhtäri 2018). These direct contacts, public discrediting, and harassment reveal the changed relationship between audiences and the news media. The latter are now present online and expected to connect with people; therefore, they are easy to approach, which might weaken their authority (Ross Arguedas et al. 2022; Schapals and Bruns 2022; Toff et al. 2021). The news media are by no means seen as the only institution holding the truth; people can seek and find their own truths through their online networks (Carlson 2015; Waisbord 2018). As a result, the news media are constantly challenged.

The editors were well aware of the radical and mainly right-wing groups that actively produce their alternative views on current events and the world in their online media ecosystem. However, the general understanding among the interviewees was that these voices represent only a small, albeit loud, minority in Finland. Still, their existence should not be ignored as it causes concern and creates a need to follow the developments with such groups carefully. In the end, though, these groups are not the ones that most news media organizations aim to serve. The participants believed that it was more important to serve the needs of the general public, which still trusts the news, instead of trying to convince a minority that has already been lost as a target group. The interviewees also questioned whether this group had actually been lost as its attacks against the news media showed that these institutions are still very relevant and followed carefully, even by those who do not share their worldviews. The editors were also still thinking of ways to include minority and atypical views in the news given that the democratic objectives of news media organizations require that they cover all opinions in society. The challenge was doing so in a way that respects the rights of others and does not give room to arguments that endanger human rights and equality or violate the ethics of journalism.

All the interviewees believed that the news media still hold agenda-setting power as it is often their content that is being discussed online and elsewhere in society. Furthermore, professional news organizations are the only providers of daily general information in Finland. This is what still differentiates them from other information providers, which all somehow represent niche interests. The media representatives in this study had good reasons to be optimistic as the news in Finland is followed by 90% of the population. Trust in the news is higher than in most other countries, with 65% of the public trusting most news items and up to 73% trusting the news media they follow (see Reunanen 2022a: 36, 46). The number of people who generally distrust the news is low, but there is clear discontent toward news media outlets concerning their ability to serve the public instead of their own interests as well as the power that the public has over the news or its agenda, with 68% of the surveyed public expressing partial dissatisfaction with the lack of such power. Higher discontent correlates with age—older groups are more dissatisfied—, living outside the capital, lower education, and

political affiliation—those voting for the populist right-wing party *Perussuomalaiset* or the traditionally agrarian Central Party are the least satisfied—(Matikainen et al. 2020: 52–54). According to another study (Reunanen 2022b), there is a group of news media skeptics—about 7% of the public—who distrust all the news. However, a recent survey found that despite sometimes expressing discontent, 94% of Finns very much value the free media’s role in sustaining democracy; they also think it is important that diverse, domestic media content is being provided (Medialiitto 2023).

Even though it is present, public trust in the news media cannot be taken for granted. The interviewees stated that the best way to maintain this trust is to do the basic job well. It is also important to explain why society needs journalism and make the journalistic practices more comprehensible and transparent. By doing so, audiences can understand journalistic choices regarding topics, views, the selection of sources, or other restrictions. In general, journalists seem to have significant trust in journalistic values and practices, which are used to justify their role in society. When facing challenges, the news media are seen as capable of becoming stronger if they maintain their professional values and show this to their audiences in a transparent manner (e.g., Ross Arguedas et al. 2022; Schapals and Bruns 2022). In the Finnish context, these professional values relate especially to journalism’s ethics and the strong system of self-regulation that the news media sustain (see Julkisen sanan neuvosto JSN, 2013/2011). The interviewees noted that, unlike many other players in the current information environment, professional media organizations are dedicated to upholding high ethical standards and generally abide by them (Väliveronon et al. 2023). On the basis of this, in 2018, Finnish news media launched the campaign “Responsible Journalism” (Julkisen sanan neuvosto JSN 2018). Media organizations that adhere to the guidelines of journalistic self-regulation can use the campaign’s logo on their news products. A website explains to the public what the ethical principles of professional journalism are. Most of the media representatives in our study greeted this initiative as an important way to distinguish professional news media from other information providers; they thus used the logo. However, some of them expressed criticism and doubts about its efficacy.

5 News Media in Finland: What Needs to Be Done to Stay Relevant?

In the past two decades, the digitalization and platformization of the mediascape have profoundly shaken the industry all over the world. In this study, representatives from Finland’s national and regional news media, as well as sector experts, shared their relatively positive views concerning the news media’s chances to defend their boundaries and survive in the new digital environment. The primary tools for survival seem to be the smart employment of user analytics, high-quality journalism, and digital news products based on the latter two elements. Increasing digital advertising, a restricted presence and content sharing on digital platforms, and business

consolidation are other measures to keep operations running and under the control of news media organizations.

It seems that the hardest years of ‘learning to be digital’ are now over and that there are signs of business renewal—at least for the major brands. This has come at a cost. The adaptation process has been long and painful, with cost reductions, layoffs, and, above all, the closure of small local publications that have been consolidated into larger ones, which has impoverished the media landscape. The concentration of media outlets in Finland is reaching a high level and is considered a potential risk for media plurality by the European Media Pluralism Monitor (2022).

Finnish news media have good reasons to be satisfied—they are popular with the public, which generally trusts and appreciates them. Still, there are signals that this trust is decreasing in the hybrid media environment, and sections of the public are actively delegitimizing the news media’s societal importance. Furthermore, the younger generations need to be approached with different business models compared to the past.

However, it should be noted that the views we collected with our interviews in early 2022 could be temporary. The news media’s ‘crisis talk’ tends to fluctuate, and it strengthens from time to time (Koljonen 2013). In late 2022 and 2023, inflation, and the ever-increasing distribution and production costs have created new problems for many of the top regional newspapers in northern and central Finland. As a result, they have reduced the publication of a printed version from seven to six, or even less days per week. Also *MTV News* is downsizing its news supply. Expected cuts in state budget could also mean significant cuts in the support for both public and private media. The news organizations can by no means relax and think that everything will remain on the right track. As concluded by a recent report (Lindén et al. 2022), to continue to exist in a world of digital giants, the news media will constantly need to renew their business models, strengthen their relationships with audiences, actively respond to the challenges of the platforms, and now increasingly also AI technology, and successfully implement eventual new regulations.

The news media’s position in Finnish society has been comparatively strong, and the industry has been able to function independently. As our interviewees noted, however, this position needs to be actively maintained. Currently, Finland lacks an overarching media policy, and both media representatives and researchers (e.g., Piirainen et al. 2022) are calling for a national debate on the role and importance of the free media as well as for a comprehensive media policy. This policy would make Finland better prepared to confront the incremental legislation coming from the EU that aims to regulate the functioning of the free media, such as the European Media Freedom Act that is now being prepared (European Commission 2022). Some fear that if poorly implemented, these sorts of laws could lead to increased control of the Finnish media, which until now have mainly regulated themselves.

Support for the professional news media is important not only for their survival as businesses but also, more broadly, for the safeguarding of core social values, such as democracy, pluralism, and public deliberation. The accelerating battle on the digital platforms and in the hybrid media system for information production and the truth exposes the whole of society and its central players to external influences. In this

environment, the professional news media still have an important role to play in creating societal stability. In Finland, work needs to be done to keep independent, critical, and plural journalism alive in the future.

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