

Innovation and value creation in local media

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Almost everything written on innovation in public media focuses on large, national, or international media companies. Research on innovation in local media has received much less attention. This imbalance is something the present article seeks to remedy. Using a meta-ethnographic approach, this study investigates the qualitative findings from four different case studies of local media innovation. The purpose of meta-ethnography is to synthesize research findings on a specific topic across different qualitative studies. By identifying concepts, metaphors, and themes that are translated and compared across cases, the researcher can develop a more comprehensive understanding of the topic under investigation than a single study may allow for. This particular meta-ethnography poses the following research question: What characterizes innovation in local newspapers? As the synthesized findings show, innovations in local newspapers are often complex and comprise multiple local alliances and objectives. These outlets often simul-

taneously pursue a range of different values, likely as a result of their many and close relationships to the communities they serve, which challenge their ability to act as professional and independent media actors.

Keywords

media innovation, local journalism, value creation, societal mission

INTRODUCTION

Innovation has been the hallmark of the media industry throughout its history (Küng, 2013; Paulussen, 2011; Singer et al., 2011). Media organizations have had to follow industrial changes in society to remain relevant to their audiences and “continually create the products and the services – and also the content – that fit well with the [newspaper’s] model” (news executive at the Telegraph, quoted in Paulussen, 2011, p. 60). Innovation is about newness and change: it entails creating material or immaterial val-

ues in what Francis and Bessant (2005) referred to as the “four Ps” – product, process, position, and paradigm. These four factors help to characterize where innovation is taking place. Innovation can occur in media products, such as media platforms or genres; in media processes, such as ways of producing and delivering media products; in media positions, such as audiences and markets; and in media paradigms, such as businesses or revenue models.

According to Küng (2013, p. 10), innovation in media organizations has mostly been associated with content creation (i.e., the product). However, over the past few years, the rapid technological and digital changes in the sector have forced the industry to innovate organizationally and in relation to the market (i.e., in terms of processes, positions, and paradigms). Storsul & Krumsvik (2013, p. 17) argue that not even the four Ps cover the full scope of innovation in the media sector. They argue for adding

the concept of social innovation to the list of factors to account for the additional aim of meeting social needs and improving people's quality of life. Quinn (2005) distinguishes between journalistic and economic justifications for innovation and convergence in media companies. The economic arguments focus on increasing productivity so as to "grab as large a share of the advertising pie as possible" at the lowest possible cost (p. 32). The journalistic justification for innovation is that it is needed to improve the quality of journalism.

Almost everything written on innovation in public media is about large, national, or international media companies (Morlandstø & Krumsvik, 2014; Nielsen, 2015; Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013). In contrast, there has been little research on innovation in local media. In this article, the focus is on innovation in smaller and local media companies, which also face the need for economic innovation at the same time that they need to safeguard the values vital to their local anchorage.

This study poses the following research question: *What characterizes innovation in local newspapers?* Using a meta-ethnographic approach, this work investigates and synthesizes qualitative findings from four case studies of local media innovation in Norway. This approach entails translating characteristics and findings from the four case studies into a com-

mon set of concepts in order to understand why these innovations take place, what aims they have, which actors they involve, and what factors influence their implementation.

The article is organized as follows: First, the background section provides some contextual information about the situation for local media in Norway and describes the changes and challenges confronting local media in general. Second, the methods section presents and explains the meta-ethnographic approach. Third, the main body of the study presents the empirical data, analysis, and discussion using the seven phases in a meta-ethnography. Finally, the study closes with concluding remarks.

BACKGROUND

As a Scandinavian country, Norway is a typical representative of the Democratic Corporatist Model, featuring "a strongly developed mass-circulation press" (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 144), partly helped by state subsidies. Compared to the US and most other high-cost countries (except Japan and Switzerland), newspapers are strong in Scandinavia, even though the Norwegian newspaper industry does face transformations similar to (or resembling) those taking place in most other countries (Syvertsen, Enli, Mjøs, & Moe, 2014).

The local print media in Norway still enjoy a rela-

tively stable circulation. Since the beginning of the 20th century, there have been approximately 220 different newspapers in Norway, which currently has a population of just over five million. The vast majority of these newspapers are small local and community papers (Høst, 2017), and while national tabloids and big city dailies are declining in circulation, the smaller local newspapers still enjoy stable circulation numbers. Engan (2016, p. 105f) has argued that despite the emergence of new digital media outlets, local newspapers are often the only responsible and reliable arena for local information and debate, and as such they retain their significance for local communities (see also Mathisen, 2010; Nielsen, 2015). This relatively stable circulation is somewhat paradoxical in view of the quite substantial changes in the general media landscape over the last few decades.

Digitization and convergence present challenges to old products and business models as new players enter the media market. Nielsen (2015) has argued that changes in local media are "driven in large part by the rise of digital media" (p. 2). In light of this climate of fast-paced change, innovation is seen as a necessity for any established media company that hopes to survive. Media organizations are increasingly responding to the perceived need to invent new products and services while also developing new business models that can generate new streams of revenue.

It is worth noting that digitization and media convergence not only challenge existing models, they also represent new opportunities for expanding media companies' portfolios of services. At the same time, print media culture sometimes resists these avenues of change and often takes a position marked as "reactive" and "defensive" (Boczkowski, 2004, p. 51). According to Paulussen (2016), print media often lack the tradition of "experimenting with technology and digital talent" (p. 194). Küng (2015) has even suggested that the biggest obstacle to innovation in print media is the newsroom culture: "part of the challenge is that print is in the blood of most of the journalists at the paper" (p. 39). In fact, media companies approach these digital challenges in a range of ways, from resistance, to moving towards a multimedia model based on providing services for all new platforms.

That said, so far earnings from digital newspapers are rather meagre (Krumsvik, Skogerbø, & Storsul, 2013; Nielsen, 2015), and great uncertainty prevails among the various media providers about how this potential market will develop. Paulussen (2016) has predicted that as long as earnings for digital media remain low and the old newspaper model is still profitable, most media businesses will assume more of a defensive rather than proactive stance regarding digital and technological innovation (p. 194). As Nielsen

(2015) has pointed out, few local media businesses have so far managed to "establish sustainable forms of born-digital local journalism" (p. 17). At the same time, most media businesses share a general perception, and fear, that those who cannot keep pace with technological developments (i.e., by adopting the new digitized media platforms) will be left behind (Paulussen, 2016, p. 194). Consequently, most newspapers today have a website for news distribution even though the number of subscribers taking advantage of web access varies from newspaper to newspaper and is the lowest in the case of small local newspapers – at least this is true in Norway and other Scandinavian countries (Høst, 2017; Nygren, 2008; Ottosen & Krumsvik, 2012).

METHODS

The meta-ethnography presented here is based on four case studies exploring innovation in local media. Three of these case studies (Hansen, Holand, & Morlandstø, 2014; Ijäs, 2014; Lamark & Morlandstø, 2014) were part of an overarching program coordinated by Nord University in Norway with the aim of investigating different types of innovation in local media. Findings from the different case studies were published in an anthology (Morlandstø & Krumsvik, 2014)¹, along with other papers on innovation in local media. The fourth case study included in the

meta-ethnography (Ihlebak, Krumsvik, & Storsul, 2014) was one of the additional studies appearing in the anthology. It was selected because it was also a qualitative case study that provided much the same contextual information as the other three studies.

The aim of meta-ethnography is to synthesize qualitative research on a specific topic across different studies. Meta-ethnography differs from *meta-analysis*, which is a term most often used in relation to quantitative research (Britten et al., 2002, p. 209). While meta-analysis is additive, accumulating findings from different studies, meta-ethnography is transformative. The aim of meta-ethnography is "interpretive rather than aggregative" (Noblit & Hare, 1988, p. 11); its purpose is to produce new knowledge based on individual studies by "[translating] qualitative studies into each other." The "translations" are intended to create "unique syntheses" that "protect the particular, respect holism and enable comparison" (Noblit & Hare, 1988, p. 28).

Westlund and Lewis (2014, p. 12) have noted that scholars doing research on media innovation often focus on specific aspects of media firms one at a time and do not "provide a holistic perspective." Nielsen (2015) has also commented on this shortcoming by pointing out that the available information about local journalism is mostly based on individual case studies and tends to be less comparative than research

on national media (p. 5). The meta-ethnographical approach in this study on media innovation in local media has the aim of creating a more holistic perspective by looking at processes and obstacles across unique cases.

Noblit and Hare (1988, p. 26ff) have outlined seven phases of a meta-ethnographic study. Rather than proceed one after another, these phases can overlap and repeat as synthesis occurs. In the first phase, *getting started*, the interest of the study is identified. In the second phase, *deciding what is relevant to the initial interest*, the case studies to be scrutinized are selected. The third phase consists of *conducting a thorough reading of the studies*. The fourth phase, *determining how the studies are related*, entails the recognition of the metaphors, concepts, and themes for translation. The fifth phase, *translating the studies into one another*, involves analyzing and comparing the metaphors and themes that have been identified in each study. The sixth phase, *synthesizing the translations*, is where the new knowledge found is displayed. The seventh and final phase comprises *expressing the synthesis*.

One of the pitfalls often mentioned in connection with meta-ethnography is “comparing apples to oranges” by combining studies that are not suf-

ficiently similar (Paltridge & Phakiti, 2010). However, meta-ethnography is an approach designed to address precisely the challenges of synthesizing qualitative analyses, which rarely have the same format (Barnett-Page & Thomas, 2009). Another potential problem is underestimating the importance of context in a study. However, this pitfall reflects more an inappropriate use of meta-ethnography rather than meta-ethnography as an approach per se, although accounting for context can sometimes be complicated by the failure of primary study authors to provide adequate descriptions of context and its impact on the findings (Atkins et al., 2008). In any case, meta-ethnography requires the researcher to select primary studies of a sufficiently high quality. The four studies selected for this analysis are all case studies of innovations in local newspapers, all of which provide fairly rich contextual information.

THE MATERIAL OF THE STUDY

The first phase, *getting started*, “involves identifying an intellectual interest that qualitative research might inform” (Noblit & Hare, 1988, p. 26). The focus of this study is innovation in local media. In Norway, local media account for the majority of all newspapers. While smaller local

newspapers face many of the same challenges as the national media, such as competition from social media, they have a more stable circulation than national newspapers in Norway. This has sparked an “intellectual interest” (Noblit & Hare, 1988) in innovation in local newspapers.

The second phase, *deciding what is relevant* to the initial interest, is about identifying which studies are relevant to the research question. I have selected four case studies examining the implementation of innovative projects in local newspapers. Two of the studies focus on internal/organizational impacts of implementing a new application for tablets. The third study investigates the implementation of new digital tools in the newsroom, both to make journalistic research more efficient and to present content on digital platforms. The fourth study explores the establishment of an ultra-local newspaper in a small media market with an ultra-local newspaper already present. Even in this study, the importance of new digital tools is highlighted.

These studies are relevant for this meta-ethnographical analysis because they all investigate an actual innovative process in a local media company, and all studies are based on interviews with key players in the organizations. The primary in-

interviewees in the various studies are the editors of the local newspapers and other representatives of the editorial staffs. Other interviewees include members of national media groups to which local newspapers are affiliated, and one study even includes representatives of local businesses. All four studies are from local communities in the northern part of Norway; one is in an urban setting and the other three are in more rural areas. The case studies were all conducted in 2013 and were all presented as individual chapters in the previously mentioned anthology (Morlandstø & Krumsvik, 2014).

The third phase, reading the studies, involves a careful reading of each case study. The researcher provides short descriptions of each study based on these readings.

The first case study on innovation that forms a basis for this meta-ethnographic study was conducted by Ihlebæk, Krumsvik, and Storsul (2014). It concerns the implementation of an application for tablets in a local newspaper. The newspaper in question is the largest of the local newspapers examined here. It is also one of only two local newspapers considered in the material for this study that is owned by a national media group. In this particular case study, the researchers make use of Actor Network Theory (ANT) to study the struggle for control over decision-making in the process of innovation. The actors in this con-

flict are mainly the editorial staff on one side and the national media group (the owner's management) on the other. The media group consists of several divisions: a technical division responsible for the technical production of the newspaper, a digital division responsible for developing and monitoring digital web solutions, and the management of the media group.

While alliances occurred between the editor and the technical division in the national media group, the researchers identified conflicts between the technical and digital divisions. The tensions were based on the differences in competence and responsibility between the two divisions and their fight to be in charge of the innovation process. What the competition came down to was the rationale behind two distinct approaches: an approach inspired by the traditional print layout versus a web-inspired approach. The editor and the technical division emerged "victorious": they managed to gain support for an application for tablets that uses "a newspaper approach." However, this process went forward without input from the readers, and when the new product was launched, it turned out that the readers were not willing to pay for it. Therefore, the innovation was not very successful in fulfilling its aims of reaching out to a new audience.

The innovation studied by Hansen et al. (2014) was much more successful. In this case, an editor

ignored all of the received wisdom and established a new ultra-local newspaper in a small market with one ultra-local competitor already present. The main reason for the success of this project was that it was grounded in the alliances made with local businesses in the community. The researchers use Schumpeter (2002) and Akrich, Callon, and Latour (2002) when analyzing the innovation processes of establishing this new ultra-local newspaper. The editor resembled Schumpeter's description of "the acting and fighting man" (Schumpeter 2002, p. 422) by demonstrating strong leadership and entrepreneurial initiative. However, personal initiative, while important, is not sufficient in itself for creating innovation. Akrich et al. (2002, p. 205) highlight the importance of also building alliances: "Innovation is the art of interesting an increasing number of allies who will make you stronger and stronger." As the actors in this newly established newspaper confirm, this was the approach the editor used, and implementing new digital tools right from the beginning helped to establish it on firm ground.

The next case study (Ijäs, 2014) investigates the implementation of an application for tablets at a local Sámi-language newspaper outlet. The aim of this innovation was to establish a new cross-national newspaper for the Sámi population in the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. The author

of this study discusses two apparent problems in contradiction to each other. One problem is ambivalence over innovation involving digitalization, given that Norway's newspaper subsidies program gives priority to printed editions. The other problem concerns the distribution of print newspapers. Instead of an east–west distribution among the Sámi population subscribing to the newspaper in the northern parts of Sweden, Finland, and Russia, the newspapers are distributed through the north–south-bound postal network through Norway. This means that the newspapers must be transported from the northern part of Norway to Oslo, the capital in the south, before proceeding to the other Nordic capitals, from which they are again sent north to various destinations of the Sámi regions. As a result, these print newspapers reach subscribers after a one-day or even two-day delay. A cross-national digital Sámi newspaper based on a paid tablet subscription offers a solution to this distributional problem.

The fourth case study, carried out by Lamark and Morlandstø (2014), is the only one based upon interviews with journalists, who are the ones most directly affected by media innovations. The researchers asked the journalists how the implementation of new digital platforms and new digital tools for journalistic production affected their daily work. The journalists expressed frustration over the dramatic changes in

the newsroom and the expectation that they use new digital tools in the production of journalism for several platforms simultaneously. The journalists were expected to produce text and still pictures for their print newspaper, as well as videos and audio tracks for the digital editions and tablet versions. At the root of their frustration is the lack of guidance and training in the use of these new digital tools and a lack of clarity about how to prioritize their different tasks and responsibilities in the digitized newsroom.

The matrix in Table 1 (next page) shows the relevant details of the different settings and research designs for the four case studies.

Considering these innovations in light of Francis and Bessant's (2005) four Ps reveals that the changes taking place in these four case studies are focused on creating new products. The kinds of products and the purposes for which they are created, however, differ widely and thus also involve different processes.

TRANSLATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Phase four, *determining how the studies are related*, entails identifying metaphors, themes, and concepts for translation. The key concepts identified in this meta-ethnography of innovation in local media are objectives, values, alliances, conflicts, and problematics. All of these concepts are derived from the case studies, with the exception of problematics,

which is borrowed from Dorothy Smith (1987).

Objectives refer to the arguments and justifications for the various innovations, including the negotiations they sometimes implied. *Values* identify the differences of values being pursued. *Alliances* point at the collaborations and supporting relationships between various actors emerging from the case studies, while *conflicts* seeks to capture the difficult relationships impeding the innovative projects.

Both alliances and conflicts are essential in order to understand the conditions for innovation in local media. In one of the case studies, the absence of an expected alliance between journalists and editorial management creates an internal conflict in that newsroom. The conflicts in the other case studies most often relate to external actors or issues, including owners, requirements, and political structures.

The last concept, *problematics*, directs attention to the more general question of what is at stake in the attempted innovations. It presents a look beyond the problems reported by interviewees or those identified in the case studies. It therefore takes into account the underlying issues, referring to conceptions of properties or challenges that seem decisive to the innovation under investigation. Dorothy Smith (1987) uses the term *problematic* to indicate “a possible set of questions that may not have been posed ... but are ‘latent’ in the actualities of the experienced world” (p. 91).

Table 1: Meta-ethnography in four case studies of innovation in local media

Method and settings	Ihlebak, Krumsvik & Storsul	Hansen, Holand & Morlandstø	Ijäs	Lamark & Morlandstø
Research question	What arguments, alliances, and decisions are made in the implementation of an application for iPads?	How does a new ultra-local newspaper manage to succeed in a local market with existing competitors?	Do public subsidies promote or hamper innovation?	How does digital innovation in newsrooms affect the role and work of journalists?
Data Collection	Interviews	Interviews Survey Content analysis	Interviews	Individual interviews Focus group interviews
Sample	Two editorial staff members Three staff representatives of the national media group	Four editorial staff members Four business leaders 220 business survey respondents 805 newspaper articles	Four editorial staff members	12 journalists
Setting	A local newspaper in an urban city	A competing ultra-local newspaper in a rural area	A local Sámi newspaper in a rural area	Three local newspapers in three rural areas
Types of Innovation	New application for tablets	Establishment of an ultra-local newspaper	New application for tablets to reach the Sámi population across national boundaries	New digital tools

Identifying such problematics may help to clarify the challenging conditions for innovation in local media.

The fifth phase, *translating the studies into each other*, takes a meta-ethnographic approach to relating the different studies to one another using the identified concepts (Noblit & Hare 1988, p. 28). Table 2 (next page) identifies the relevance of each of the key concepts to each of the four case studies and provides a basis for relating these studies to one another.

In the case of all of the local newspapers in the four studies, proposals for innovation identified objectives that were commercial in nature. The interviewees cited in Ihlebak et al. expressed the need for new revenue models; the informants for both Ijäs and Hansen et al. stated the objective of conquering new market positions; and the interviewees cited in Lamark and Morlandstø talked about increasing efficiencies in the newsroom by implementing digital tools – with all of them referring to economic objectives.

With the exception of the case studied by Ihlebak et al., which relates entirely to commercial objectives, all of the studies also identified other aims underpinning the innovation. Hansen et al. reported that the newspaper in their study was also guided by the objective of anchoring the newspaper in a local identity. The editor even argued that local competition between newspapers was beneficial for the community, taking a position that is supported by various

Table 2: Concepts and translations

Concepts	Ihlebaek, Krumsvik & Storsul	Hansen, Holand & Morlandstø	Ijäs	Lamark & Morlandstø
Objectives	- creating a new revenue model to promote user payment - strengthening their position in the local market	- carving out a market position - adopting digital technology - establishing a professional and critical alternative to the existing newspaper - strengthening local identity and local anchoring	- reaching a transnational Sámi market - reaching new and younger audiences - improving the newspaper - maintaining a democratic forum for debate - preserving the Sámi language	- increasing journalistic efficiency through digitization - improving the journalistic quality of the newspaper
Values	- economic	- economic - cultural/social - professional	- economic - cultural/social - professional - democratic	- economic - professional - social
Alliances	- between the editorial staff and the IT staff of the national media group	- between the editor and local businesses	- between the editorial staff, local politicians, and Sámi interest groups	- an indirect alliance between the journalists and the local community
Conflicts	- between the editorial staff and the web staff of the national media group - between the editorial staff and the readers	- between stakeholder interests and professional journalistic norms	- between the newspaper and national media policies (subsidies and distribution)	- between the journalists and the editorial management - between economic and journalistic values
Problematics	- the challenge of steering innovation in a local newspaper owned by a media group with vested interests in the innovation itself	- the need to secure stakeholder support while preserving journalistic integrity	- the mismatch between local requirements and national regulative structures	- the difficulty of balancing efficiency and quality within a digitized newsroom (i.e., the “industrialization” of journalistic work)

studies (see for example Lindén, 2015). The actors interviewed by Ijäs explicitly called for widening the reach and scope of their local newspaper to create an arena for debate and to promote Sámi culture and language. Lamark and Morlandstø identify the objective in newsrooms of improving the quality and relevance of journalistic work to benefit local readers. To conclude with respect to objectives, all four cases seem to operate with several and partly competing objectives, where commercial goals must be balanced against other, more local concerns.

The local media innovations described in the four case studies rely on different notions of values. Value creation in innovation theory is primarily associated with creating economic value (Francis & Bessant, 2005; Schumpeter, 2012). But as the objectives outlined in Table 2 indicate, we also found other types of values promoted in these projects, some of which are designed to increase social or cultural values. In the context of the local media in this study, in each case this meant forging close relationships with the citizens and communities they serve, broadening the newspaper’s values as the “glue” that holds a community together, fostering local identity, and also promoting democratic ideals (Holand, 2013; Mathisen, 2010).

In journalism, it has always been important to distinguish between commerce and the societal

mandate. On the one hand, media companies must earn money to survive in the media market; on the other hand, they need to safeguard their societal and democratic mission. In local media, this dualism is not always clear-cut because both commercial interests and the societal mission are often embedded in a number of other local concerns. A local newspaper may be a vital channel of information for both local businesses and local associations, hence making it difficult to distinguish between commercial interests and the societal mission. The local newspaper may also create a unique workplace for persons who, for other reasons, are important for the community and who would have moved if it were not for the newspaper (see also Paulussen, 2011; Quinn, 2005). Holand (2014, p. 69) argues that although innovation in local media is most often triggered by external pressure, the mission of remaining locally and socially relevant is the most important consideration in local media innovation.

The final type of values identified in this study is related to professionalism. This is connected to the societal mission, which is particularly important for media to pay attention to at a time when both advertisement revenue and the number of subscribers are dropping. Meanwhile, online publishing allows the public to participate more in the production of journalism, and an increasing part of public discourse

moves from traditional to social media, putting traditional journalistic values under pressure (Singer et al., 2011; Morlandstø & Mathisen, 2016). To conclude with respect to the concept of values, we can say that innovations in local media are pursuing a *multiple conception of values*, with values not always pulling in the same direction.

The translations of the concept of *alliances* direct attention to mutual and supportive relationships apparent in the innovation processes. First, it seems that all of the local innovation projects are dependent on some sort of alliance to succeed. Secondly, alliance partners are most often found locally. The case study by Ihlebæk et al. is the only exception to the latter, as the alliances reported in the study are made with actors outside the local community, more precisely with their national owners. This also corresponds with Krumsvik and Westlund's (2014, p. 43ff) claim that the more digital and technological innovations are (e.g., involving mobile phones and tablets), the more involved the owners and management of media groups tend to be in innovation processes.

By contrast, the innovative actors in the cases studied by Ijäs and Hansen et al., respectively, find their alliance partners in their local communities. In Ijäs's study, alliances are made with both local politicians and local interest groups, while in Hansen et al.'s case study the alliance partners reported are lo-

cal enterprises. We find a *multitude of mainly local alliances* when it comes to innovations in local media. As mentioned previously, this may be due to the fact that only two of the newspapers under study are owned by a national media group. It seems that local media, and particularly those that are locally owned, are dependent on support and legitimation from the local community in order to pursue their various aims, and this is reflected with respect to innovation.

Innovation is often contested, resulting in *conflicts*. All of the case studies report on conflicts of some sort, be they in relation to the actors' own values or professional norms, conflicts among the actors involved, or tensions relating to external actors or institutions. We could also argue that the conflicts reported refer to three different levels: 1) the intrapersonal level, 2) the interpersonal level, and 3) the systemic or political level.

Intrapersonal conflicts refer to conflicts that the actors involved in innovation experience between competing goals, such as between profit and the quality of journalism. This is shown in the study by Larmark and Morlandstø, in which journalists feel they are about to become industrial workers rather than cultural workers. The researchers discuss this from the journalists' perspectives and contend that the "industrialization" of journalistic work made possible by digitization makes it more difficult to meet both pro-

fessional expectations and expectations from the local community. These journalists report that they feel pressured to sit by their computers producing journalism out of information they find online instead of going out and talking to people. Their concerns are also supported by other research (Lee-Wright & Phillips, 2012; Nygren, 2014). Nygren states that the changed culture of journalism is characterized by “less shoe-leather reporting and more desktop reporting” (Nygren, 2014, p. 94).

The case study by Hansen et al. notes that journalists report on the difficulties of being critical and independent in relation to local stakeholders to whom they feel overly dependent. Mathisen (2013, p. 96ff) describes a similar dilemma reported by local journalists who must adopt the conflicting roles of critical watchdog and patriotic supporter on behalf of local residents and institutions. These are part of the everyday ambivalence faced by local journalists.

The level of *interpersonal conflicts* refers to friction between people or groups of people. The case studies report both internal conflicts, such as those between journalists and the local media management, and also those between media actors and readers. The journalists in the study by Lamark and Morlandstø emphasize the lack of support and guidance from management on how to use new digital tools and how to establish priorities given the enormous

number of available stories online. Ihlebæk et al. report on interpersonal conflicts between the editorial staff and the web division in the national media group, and their study describes a hidden tension between the newspaper and readers who are unwilling to pay for the new application.

The third level of conflict, *systemic conflicts*, refers to institutional or regulatory divisions or inconsistencies, which are found in some of the research. For example, in the case studied by Ijäs, the mail distribution system makes it impossible to distribute printed newspapers to the Sámi regions within a reasonable amount of time, as all mail from northern Norway to other countries with Sámi populations must first pass through Oslo. Going online to realize a cross-national Sámi newspaper in the north is an innovation plan that would address a systemic conflict. The problem in this case, however, was that the subsidies in Norway were based on print versions of newspapers. Thus, digitizing this newspaper would jeopardize its funding. In other words, in this case solving one systemic conflict creates a new one. Hansen et al. describe a similar problem. Although the new ultra-local newspaper in their study succeeded in establishing itself next to an existing ultra-local newspaper, both papers have experienced problems as a result of the change: both the ultra-local papers have struggled to achieve and maintain the thousand

subscribers required to qualify for national subsidies. To conclude, the studies reveal a *variety of conflicts* that are internal as well as external and personal as well as structural.

The final concept, which Smith calls *problematics*, condenses the problems and dilemmas experienced in relation to the innovation processes. Problematics may also be said to represent what Britten et al. (2002) call “second-order interpretations” – that is, the meta-analyst’s understanding of the way in which key concepts are accounted for in each case study. In the case studied by Ihlebæk et al., what represents the problematic is the challenge of carrying out an innovation in a local newspaper owned by a media group with a vested interest in the innovation. Even an innovation carried out locally and with local editors in control of the innovation has the potential to place the interests of the invested owners over those of the paper’s readership. This leaves possible relationships to local stakeholders, including the readers, unexploited. According to the editor of this paper, leaving the readers out of the equation may have jeopardized the potential success of the innovation.

Also, with respect to the study by Ijäs, the problematic identified is systemic in nature but in this case involves both infrastructure and public policy. On the one hand, the mail system makes it virtually impossible to reach the Sámi paper’s transnational

“local” market because there is no direct east–west distribution in the north. On the other hand, the alternative solution – to go online – would mean losing public subsidies. The two systems seem to “conspire” to hinder an alternative understanding of the local. More generally, as national regulatory structures are often rigid and designed to meet the needs of the majority of media, they are sometimes in conflict with specific local requirements and, as in this case, can even impede innovation in local media.

In the innovation investigated by Hansen et al., the problematic concerns the need to balance stakeholder support with journalistic integrity. This is a classic journalistic dilemma (Mathisen, 2010), which is probably even more pressing in local media than in the larger national media, where the relationship to stakeholders is more institutionalized. In the case in question, the innovation concerned the very establishment of a new ultra-local newspaper, in which the support of local stakeholders (e.g., local businesses) was vital and made it important to meet stakeholders’ expectations.

Finally, in the case study of Lamark and Morlandstø, which is based on interviews with journalists bombarded by new digital opportunities, the emerging problematic involves the difficult balance between efficiency and quality within an ever more digitized newsroom. The journalists expressed their fears

that increasing digitization was affecting not only the journalistic product, but also the practice of journalism, by turning journalists into “industrial workers” rather than “cultural workers.”

The sixth phase, *synthesizing translations*, consists of “making a whole into something more than the parts alone imply” (Noblit & Hare 1988, p. 28). Here, “whole” can imply several possible outcomes. The different accounts may be directly comparable, acting as “reciprocal translations”; they may “stand in relative opposition to each other”; or the different studies taken together may form “a line of argument” (Noblit & Hare 1988, p. 36). The research question for this meta-ethnographical study is: *What characterizes innovation in local newspapers?* We can argue that the outcome of this study is a line of argument that constitutes the following synthesis:

All innovations covered in this meta-ethnography aim at developing or implementing new digital solutions in one way or another. It seems that all media companies experience a demand to be online in order to survive (Küng, 2015; Paulussen, 2016). At the same time, all of the case studies also refer to a broader set of objectives not only for the newspaper, but also in relation to the local community. The local papers in the studies chosen for this research seek to strengthen their local identities and create a sense of belong-

ing among their readerships, and in some cases seek to increase the social well-being of local citizens or to strengthen local democracy. This multitude of objectives is probably due to the local newspapers’ close and multifaceted relationships with the communities they serve. This may explain the many alliances made with local stakeholders in the innovation processes, as well as the detrimental effect of *not* forming such alliances in the case studied by Ihlebæk et al. While these close relationships and alliances are paramount to local newspapers, not least in times of innovation and change, they simultaneously challenge the possibility of being a professional and independent media actor.

This dilemma corresponds with the intra-personal conflicts reported from most of the case studies, between efficiency and quality, and between stakeholder interests and journalistic values and norms. Another type of conflict frequently reported is a systemic conflict, or incongruity, between local conditions and national politics and regulations. It seems as if both proximity and long distances (relative to national decision-makers) represent significant challenges to local media. On the one hand, it is difficult to be a professional and independent journalist when relationships to people and organizations in the local community are too close. On the other hand, difficulties can arise for local newspapers that are located

far away from the decision-makers on whose policies they must depend in order to survive. Hence, it is likely that these challenges apply in general to local media and relate not only to innovative changes. As Engan (2015, p. 158) concludes: “Whether local print news will survive is a question in itself, which probably depends as much on an economic and media-political framework as on purely editorial innovations.

CONCLUSION

The seventh phase of meta-ethnography outlined by Noblit and Hare (1988) involves tying together and *expressing the synthesis*. This is often done by a figure or chart, but sometimes, as in this case, it takes the form of a written conclusion.

Based on the meta-ethnography presented in this article, what seems to characterize innovations in local media is that they are complex, comprising multiple objectives and often pursuing different values at the same time, including economic, social, professional, and democratic. In what way is this different from what one would expect to find in national media?

All four case studies included in the analysis involved the introduction of digital platforms in one way or another. Quinn (2005) claims that the transition to multi-platform publishing is generally driven by two competing sets of values: economic and jour-

nalistic. The analysis presented here suggests that local newspapers have an additional set of values to account for, values relating more to the specific needs of the community in which they operate. In two of the cases, alliances with local stakeholders were a crucial aspect of securing the necessary support and legitimacy of the innovation. In the two other cases, a lack of cooperation (Ihlebak et al.) or loyalty to an existing community alliance (Lamark and Morlandstø) were sources of failure and conflict, respectively.

The question is of course whether this really differs from what one will find in any newsroom. Most journalists experience conflicting loyalties. But while large national newspapers relate to a broad spectrum of readers with a wide array of preferences, local newspapers, and the ultra-local papers in particular, aim at narrower and more homogeneous audiences and are therefore more vulnerable than national outlets to changes in their readership. Moreover, consumers of local media are also consumers of national media: the legitimacy of local newspapers thus rests on their ability to carve out their own niches and address the needs of the readers in relation to their communities.

Regarding the values created by innovation in local print media, we saw in the case studied by Ihlebak et al. that introducing a new application for tablets was largely designed to meet internal and

commercial aims. However, this case involved the largest newspaper in the sample, which is also owned by a national media group. The innovations studied in the case of the other small and ultra-local newspapers, which were independent or owned by local actors, were less dependent on national media groups and the local actors were eager to form more local alliances and partnerships.

This raises a question for further research: What does it actually mean to be “local” in local journalism? This question could also be suitable for a meta-ethnographic analysis. Unlike the study reported here, based on relatively similar case studies focusing on innovation, a broader inquiry about local journalism would require a wider range of studies reflecting a greater variety of business models and associations with the local community

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NOTES

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