
Solutions, perspectives, dialogue

**Why constructive journalism pays off
for the media and societies**

Author: Ellen Heinrichs

Research Assistant: Alexandra Haderlein

A project of the Grimme Institute, 15 April 2021



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Summary

Constructive journalism pays off for society as well as for the media. It counters the trend of news avoidance by adopting a less pronounced focus on negative news events and coming closer to people's subjective sense of relevance. People consume constructive content comparatively longer and comment less hatefully about it on social media. Similarly, there is growing evidence that constructive journalism has a positive effect on the monetisation of journalistic content in both national and regional media.

In the COVID-19 pandemic, people frequently turned to constructive information offers. The media should take this as an opportunity to critically question whether they are sufficiently prepared for major social challenges such as the climate crisis. In difficult times, it is clear that users increasingly demand fact-based information and useful, solutions-focused journalism that is oriented toward their everyday realities and thoroughly examines problems along with possible alternatives and solutions.

Given this enormous potential, there is great need for research on the impact of constructive journalism. This means systematic empirical editorial experiments that refer to local media markets and their specific conditions, thus complementing research that has so far mainly taken place in the United States and Northern Europe.

This study will provide an overview on the current state of constructive journalism within a transforming media landscape. It draws on surveys, research in the social sciences, media publications and in-person interviews to create a picture that is supported by both theory and practical experience. While a particular focus will be placed on German media contexts, the nature of media production and consumption has changed drastically around the world over the past decades, and the questions, challenges, debates and conclusions that arise from the (potential) implementation of constructive and solutions-oriented journalism in the German context address fundamental industry issues that could prove insightful to other countries, contexts and cultures.

1 Challenges for journalism

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1 Challenges for journalism

The challenges facing journalism could not be greater. They range from the collapse of traditional business models to the established media's progressive loss of importance among young target groups to heated discussions about reforming public media where it exists. Well before the COVID-19 pandemic arose, the situation had been exacerbated by increasing polarisation in social media, whose algorithms favour irreconcilable one-sided thinking and the spread of misinformation. Quite a few media representatives are critical of their own industry and its practitioners for basing business models on divisive tactics and conflict creation.

Constructive journalism stands in contrast to this: It is relevant, nuanced and perspective-rich journalism that wants to initiate and moderate fair debates and report on problems as well as solutions. It has gained noticeable attention in recent years because it promises a way out of the conflict-based scenario described above. According to Ulrik Haagerup, a Danish journalist and the founder of the Constructive Institute, a leading institution that promotes the practice, the mission of constructive journalism »... is to reinstall trust in the idea that shared facts, shared knowledge and shared discussions are the pillars on which our societies balance«.¹

While such thoughts are well-meaning, the practice of constructive journalism must be examined. Does it achieve its ideals? Is it really suitable for helping society and the media meet the diverse challenges of our time? In order to evaluate these questions, it is important to first look at the problems that journalism faces.

¹ See <https://constructiveinstitute.org/why/support-democracy/>

1.1 Focus on negativity

In the digital age, characterised by an incessant, cross-border and ubiquitous flow of information, many people are increasingly dismissive of the media's traditional focus on problems and negative news events.

1.2 News denial

American journalist Eric Pooley coined the slogan »If it bleeds, it leads« in 1989.² While it continues to haunt the industry, it has in fact been losing its guiding relevance for news journalists for some time now. Negative headlines still get a lot of clicks,³ but they leave more and more people feeling helpless and paralyzed in the face of the sheer volume and complexity of problems that confront them, as global analyses by the Reuters Institute at Oxford University and others have shown. According to the Reuters Institute's 2019 »Digital News Report«, more than a third of people worldwide consciously avoid consuming news on a consistent basis.⁴

When asked about the reasons for this behaviour, one in two »news avoiders« answered that the reports have a negative effect on his or her mood. The second most frequently cited reason for news avoidance was the feeling that the individual could not do anything.⁵ In extreme cases, this feeling, known in psychology in the context of depressive illness as »learned helplessness«,⁶ can lead people to withdraw completely from current news events. This phenomenon can be observed in all social classes and age groups. Such developments are poisonous for democracy and social discourse, because only informed citizens can have their say and ultimately make informed (electoral) decisions.

Another factor needs to be considered in the discussion on news denial. The traditional focus of news media on problems and negativity increasingly bypasses the subjective sense of relevance held by large parts of the population. Christopher Pramstaller, an audience editor specializing in qualitative analysis at the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, one of Germany's largest and best-regarded daily newspapers, believes that the industry often cares more about doing »journalism for journalists« than »taking people's actual information needs seriously«.⁷

NDR Info, the news service department of a northern German public radio station, has been working to address this issue. Last year, it invited listeners to take part in individual discussion groups on a variety of topics. Participants in all rounds expressed an above-average desire that NDR Info should offer not just »bad news« but also »edifying news«.⁸

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2 See <http://evaluatingconversations.weebly.com/if-it-bleeds-it-leads.html>

3 David Leonhardt, *Is bad news the only kind?*, https://messaging-custom-newsletters.nytimes.com/template/oakv2?uri=nyt://newsletter/fc33b4ca-2e50-5185-a861-886c84c0da5f&productCode=N-N&abVariantId=0&te=1&nl=the-morning&emc=edit_nn_20210324

4 Reuters Institute: *Digital News Report 2019*, p. 11, <https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/>

5 Ibid., p. 25

6 See Sandy Winkler et al., *Klassische Experimente der Psychologie*, https://www.ewi-psy.fu-berlin.de/einrichtungen/arbeitsbereiche/allgpsy/media/media_lehre/Lernen_und_Ged__chtn__s/seminar_12.pdf

7 Christopher Pramstaller, personal communication, January 28, 2021

8 NDR Info: *Der Tag im Dialog*, https://www.ndr.de/nachrichten/info/wir_ueber_uns/NDR-Info-Der-Tag-im-Dialog,ndrinfoimdialog186.html

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The feedback led the department to rethink established practices, such as the top news tradition. »Do I still have to repeat the top news every quarter of an hour on the radio? Or don't users rightly expect more, like background information, analyses, surprising perspectives?« said Christiane Uebing, the department's head of politics and current affairs.⁹ NDR Info is taking steps to deal constructively with the growing discrepancy between traditional news value criteria and users' subjective perception of relevance and offer listeners content with more value.

It is not only between journalists and consumers that shifts are taking place between what is considered relevant and how it is evaluated; critical discussions around the negativity focus are also taking place within editorial offices. Marcus Bornheim, editor-in-chief of German national public broadcaster ARD's news department, believes two journalistic cultures are colliding: »There are those who say, ›In news journalism it always has to be banging and bad. ... And then there is another culture – not necessarily the very young – that says, ›Let's understand journalism differently. It doesn't always have to be about deaths and victims. Instead, the world is full of solutions and clever thoughts.«¹⁰

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9 Christiane Uebing, personal communication, November 2, 2020
10 Markus Bornheim, personal communication, November 20, 2020

2 Monetisation

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2 Monetisation

The desire of users to more frequently »switch off« established media offerings has the greatest impact on those media that live from marketing their content. They already find themselves in a situation that makes it difficult to monetise their offerings. For instance, TV advertising has been steadily losing its appeal for years, partly because replay functions make it possible to skip commercial breaks and streaming services are taking market share away from TV stations.

The situation is even more serious for daily newspapers: the coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated negative developments that had already existed since the start of digitalisation.

In Germany, many large national newspapers saw their circulation numbers fall in 2020.¹¹ Even the tabloid-style *Bild*, Germany's best-selling national daily newspaper, is in a circulation free fall. It seems to have been unable to derive economic advantage from its polarising coronavirus reporting, especially since print declines have not been offset by digital growth.

Additionally, the model of ad-financed digital journalism has proven to be a dead end, and not just since the coronavirus. The preponderance of Facebook, Google and other digital giants in the market for online advertising has become overwhelming. Users today have also developed a flair for clickbaiting, and the time spent on pages that promise more than they deliver is often extremely short.

New players in the German industry offer a way out of this situation. Digital publishers and journalistic start-ups such as Krautreporter, RUMS Münster and Perspective Daily are relying on community-based membership or subscription models for financing. Similar successful business models also exist within more established media. The highbrow weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* invites subscribers to become »friends« and thus part of a community. The *taz*, a cooperative-owned daily newspaper, has also come through the coronavirus crisis well so far, in part through growth in digital subscribers.¹²

Among English-speaking media, the British newspaper *The Guardian* offers an interesting financing model. Owned by the Scott Trust, the news outlet draws on both ad revenues and reader payments, either in the form of voluntary contributions or various monthly subscriptions. There is no exclusive content for subscribers; instead, they can benefit from curational apps, ad-free reading or a weekly print magazine, among other perks. According to *The Guardian* itself, over half its income now comes from readers.¹³

11 *So hoch ist die »Harte Auflage« wirklich*, https://www.dwdl.de/zahlenzentrale/81192/ivw_42020_so_hoch_ist_die_harte_auflage_wirklich/page_21.html

12 Jens Schröder, *Zeitungs-Auflagen: »Zeit« wächst massiv mit Print und Digital, »taz« überholt »Welt«*, <https://meedia.de/2021/01/21/zeitungs-auflagen-zeit-waechst-massiv-mit-print-und-digital-taz-ueberholt-welt/>

13 Jim Waterson, *Guardian Media Group to voluntarily return £1.6m of furlough money*, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/apr/21/guardian-media-group-to-voluntarily-return-16m-of-furlough-money>



A map that displays communities where newspapers have disappeared (UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media)

Most other publishers, however, are still working on answering the question of what kind of content will turn free readers into paying customers in the long term.

A look at the United States shows what could happen if a consistent overarching concept cannot be found and editorial offices continue to be slimmed down and eventually closed. More than 2,000 local American newspapers have closed since 2004, and the effects on society are highly problematic.¹⁵

Joshua Benton, former director of the Nieman Journalism Lab at Harvard University, describes local newspapers as »little machines that spit out healthier democracies« by increasing voter turnout, reducing government corruption, making cities financially healthier, increasing citizens' knowledge of politics and their likeliness to engage with local government, reducing partisan voting and making elected officials more responsive, among other things.¹⁶

Research by the Columbia Journalism Review has also found that the population in areas without local newspapers is almost always significantly poorer and less educated than the population in areas that have local newspapers.¹⁷

Due to the effects of newspapers dying out, the economic survival of the newspaper industry in the age of digitalisation is therefore not just in the entrepreneurial interest of publishers but must also concern society as a whole. This study will later discuss whether and to what extent constructive journalism approaches offer opportunities in the monetarisation of journalism, including at the local level.

14 Tom Stites, *A quarter of all U.S. newspapers have died in 15 years, a new UNC news deserts study found*, <https://www.poynter.org/locally/2020/unc-news-deserts-report-2020/>

15 Tom Stites, *A quarter of all U.S. newspapers have died in 15 years, a new UNC news deserts study found*, <https://www.poynter.org/locally/2020/unc-news-deserts-report-2020/>

16 Joshua Benton, *When newspapers shrink, fewer people bother to run for mayor*, <https://www.nieman-lab.org/2019/04/when-local-newspapers-shrink-fewer-people-bother-to-run-for-mayor/>

17 Columbia Journalism Review, *Life in a News Desert*, https://www.cjr.org/special_report/life-in-a-news-desert.php

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**Age of climate
crisis:**

**How does the
media react?**

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3 Age of climate crisis: How does the media react?

Due to the pandemic and increasing user interest in solutions-oriented content, editorial offices seem to be growing more aware that democratic societies are not always crisis-proof. In the coming years, the climate crisis will be one of humanity's biggest global challenges, and journalism will also have to confront it.

In most media outlets, climate reporting continues to be the responsibility of business and/or science desks, even though the pandemic has made it clear that crisis reporting requires the involvement of all departments, from local news to the culture and politics desks.

Wolfgang Blau, the former global chief operating officer of Condé Nast International and a current visiting fellow at the Reuters Institute researching journalism and climate change, believes that if media organizations do not position themselves more foresightedly on the topic, they will be threatened with further loss of relevance and reach: »For large news organisations to not cover the climate across all their desks – versus mostly as a science or occasional politics story – doesn't mean the crisis isn't a major topic, it only means that especially younger readers and viewers are learning to go somewhere else.«¹⁸



Fig. 2: Journalists must have basic knowledge of the climate crisis¹⁹

18 Wolfgang Blau, Tweet, <https://twitter.com/wblau/status/1376517494953893890>

19 Ibid., <https://twitter.com/wblau/status/1381222214347993089>

While Germany's established media have largely slept through the climate crisis so far, new players have appeared on the market to occupy a green niche. Some of them have chosen to use a constructive journalism approach and convey ideas, solutions and successes related to climate, energy and sustainability.

The established media in Germany also still largely lack factual and interdisciplinary knowledge about climate change. An initiative at the Technical University of Dortmund that examined dozens of contributions on environmental topics in recent years for quality found that the vast majority of newspaper articles, radio analyses and online pieces only reported linearly on environmental problems and did not relate them to economic, social or political contexts.²⁰ Darmstadt journalism professor Torsten Schäfer, who specializes in climate change reporting, concluded that this »decontextualisation« is due not to ignorance but to a simple lack of time and knowledge – conditions which are particularly true for smaller and regional media.²¹ The journalism industry needs support in preparing for the future. It will play a decisive role in providing people with climate-change-related information, just as it did in the pandemic. This requires strategies, editorial concepts, the exchange of best practices, climate-change-specific industry training and further education for journalists, as well as a more intensive exchange with actors in science and business.

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20 See <https://medien-doktor.de/umwelt-info/>

21 Torsten Schäfer, *Wo steht der deutschsprachige Umwelt- und Klimajournalismus? Ein Überblick*, <https://www.klimafakten.de/meldung/wo-steht-der-deutschsprachige-umwelt-und-klimajournalismus-ein-ueberblick>

4 Unfinished tasks in the context of digitalisation

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4 Unfinished tasks in the context of digitalisation

In addition to the complex problems described above, media companies face a whole series of unfinished tasks that they must address in order to successfully manage digitalisation. For too long, established companies have mainly concentrated on the technological side of innovation. The question of how journalism should deal with the loss of its former unique selling point – the gatekeeper role in the distribution of news and information – has remained largely unanswered. In the face of an unmanageable amount of news and content producers worldwide, media have lost their time and knowledge advantage and are now competing with countless other actors for people’s attention and trust.²²

4.1 Trust and media literacy

At the beginning of April 2021, a new publication within a long-term study on trust in the media brought encouraging findings to light. Researchers at the University of Mainz measured a significant increase in people’s trust in the media in Germany in 2020.²³ Media cynicism and approval of conspiracy narratives also decreased measurably. German media seems to have succeeded in serving as an orientation point and providing people with adequate information.

However, in past years, many of the same researchers repeatedly found that people’s trust in the media had declined.²⁴ They have also pointed out that the gap is growing between the informed public and those who no longer trust the media and sometimes even attack them. Therefore, it seems premature to speak of a trend reversal based on the recent survey.

Media companies must look for ways to strengthen people’s trust in journalism. One good approach would be that advocated by the non-profit initiative Trusting News, a project of the Missouri School of Journalism and the American Press Institute, and its editorial practice partners: systematically experimenting, testing and communicating methods that can strengthen trust in the media.²⁵ »We have to stop assuming people understand the mission, ethics and processes behind our work ... We need to actively work to earn trust from our communities by telling them why we’re worthy of their time, trust and support«, reads the website of Trusting News, which was founded by journalist Joy Meyer.²⁶

22 See Rasmus Kleis Nielsen and Meera Selva, *More Important, But Less Robust? Five Things Everybody Needs to Know about the Future of Journalism*, <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/more-important-less-robust-five-things-everybody-needs-know-about-future-journalism>

23 Ilka Jakobs, et al., *Mainzer Langzeitstudie Medienvertrauen 2020 Medienvertrauen in Krisenzeiten*, p. 152, https://medienvertrauen.uni-mainz.de/files/2021/04/Medienvertrauen_Krisenzeiten.pdf

24 Tanjev Schultz et al., *Erosion des Vertrauens zwischen Medien und Publikum?*, https://www.ard-werbung.de/fileadmin/user_upload/media-perspektiven/pdf/2017/0517_Schultz_Jackob_Ziegele_Quiring_Schemer.pdf

25 Gina M. Masullo et al., *Building Trust. What works for news sites*, <https://mediaengagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/CME-Press-Release-Building-Trust.pdf>

26 *Trusting News Initiative: Helping journalists earn news consumers’ trust*, <https://trustingnews.org/>

The non-profit German journalism network Correctiv also maintains that such efforts have positive effects: »The more people are familiar with the mechanisms of journalistic work, the stronger the media competence and debate culture of a society.«²⁷In the context of digitalisation, it is important for all media to constantly explain the journalistic profession in a manner that is transparent and comprehensible. The task is important for our democracy and for strengthening trust in journalism – and trust is essential for survival, because no business model works without it.

4.2 Young and diverse users

Another unfinished item on the digitalisation list of media providers: how to reach young people. The proportion of young users who prefer to have the news explained to them by people they care about – and since the pandemic, increasingly also by scientists – is rising. Social networks are also important sources of information for those 35 and younger, according to study results from Reuters Institute.²⁸

These statistics are reflected in the success of »What happened last week«, an English-language newsletter by journalist Sham Jaff, written in what she calls simple language.²⁹ Jaff currently reaches around 14,000 subscribers, many of whom were born after 1995 and are therefore members of Gen Z.

Jaff, herself born in 1989, describes the information needs of younger generations as follows: »We definitely want more context, we want underreported things, and we also want a bit of action-oriented, solution-oriented reporting.«³⁰ She has the feeling that young generations see themselves more frequently than older ones as »co-creators« who want to know what concrete things they can do about grievances reported in the media.

Alexandra Haderlein, founder of Relevanzreporter, a local membership-based Nuremberg news service, has also studied the needs of young people. [She also provided research assistance on this study.] Through 120 interviews, she found that people born between 1981 and 2000 are particularly interested in constructive and solutions-focused content; they want less bad news, less superficiality, less click-bait and more topics with greater relevance.³¹

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27 Correctiv, *Über uns*, <https://correctiv.org/ueber-uns/>

28 Reuters Institute: *Digital News Report 2019*, p. 54-59, <https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/>

29 See <https://www.whathappenedlastweek.com/>

30 Interview with Sham Jaff by Daniel Fiene & Herr Pähler, *Wie konsumiert die Gen Z Nachrichten*, Sham Jaff? <https://wasmitmedien.de/2021/04/09/wie-konsumiert-die-gen-z-nachrichten-sham-jaff/>

31 Alexandra Haderlein, *Frischekur für den Lokaljournalismus*, <https://www.media-lab.de/blog/artikel/frischekur-f%C3%BCr-den-lokaljournalismus>

The comparatively well-funded public media in Germany have done a lot in recent years to offer young users attractive formats. However, local, regional and financially strapped established media continue to find it difficult to develop suitable products for young target groups. While it is economically necessary to do so, it is questionable whether a rethink will take place in time. In addition to investments in user-centred product development for young people, the effort would require a less elitist mindset and the unconditional desire to truly address all parts of society.

Closely related to this topic is the question of how established media can better reach people with foreign heritage, including those individuals who themselves have migrated to Germany. This target group often finds that its interests and concerns fail to be taken into account by the media, and it can also face high barriers to access.

For example, the often sophisticated language of some media deters many potential users. This applies to people whose native language is not German as well as to native German-speakers with less formal education. Jaff, who was born in Iraq and came to Germany at age nine, believes media needs to improve access by breaking down linguistic barriers: »How can reporting be redesigned in such a way so that this incredibly great distance between different languages and cultures can somehow be shortened?«³²

The situation is made more difficult by the fact that most journalists working in German editorial offices do not have personal connections to issues of foreign heritage and/or migration.³³ Many of the topics that these journalists consider relevant and cover in their work therefore do not resonate with the everyday realities experienced by a large part of the population.

The homogenous cultural composition of editorial teams can only be solved through dedicated efforts over a longer period of time. It is therefore all the more important to work with journalists who are currently producing daily media content to ensure the needs of a large part of the population are met.

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32 Interview with Sham Jaff by Daniel Fiene & Herr Pähler, *Wie konsumiert die Gen Z Nachrichten*, Sham Jaff? <https://wasmitmedien.de/2021/04/09/wie-konsumiert-die-gen-z-nachrichten-sham-jaff/>

33 Neue deutsche Medienmacher:innen, *Warum Medien mehr Vielfalt zum Überleben brauchen*, <https://neuemedienmacher.de/wissen-tools/diversity-im-medienhaus/chancen>

Interim conclusion

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If the digital transformation process is not successfully implemented beyond the introduction of new tools and output channels, people will soon seek information elsewhere. There are already a whole host of niche offerings that successfully cater to the needs of young people and population groups with foreign heritage and/or migration experiences. Their expectations of media products have changed due to digitalisation, as have those of the rest of the population.

Nowadays, people are used to having their individual needs taken into account and fulfilled. Continuous product development based on customer wishes and ratings has become common practice across all digital industries.

Established media cannot afford to ignore this development. For many, this means profoundly changing their thinking to adopt a service mentality. Journalism must be an act of service, one that is committed to the common good and putting people's information needs above journalists' own need to communicate.

However, in recent years, instead of discussing the question of how journalism needs to change in the context of digitalisation, the industry has been almost exclusively preoccupied with technologically driven issues such as analytics tools, robot journalism and other AI applications, or with monetisation strategies, paywalls and the opportunities and risks of new output channels. These are undoubtedly very important topics, but nevertheless, a debate about the product »journalism« and the quality of its content is urgently needed in view of the upheavals described.

Ultimately, the question to be answered is what journalistic innovation can look like if one thinks of it in terms of content rather than technology.

5 Potential of constructive journalism

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5 Potential of constructive journalism

5.1 Definition of constructive journalism

Constructive journalism, which originated in Northern Europe, may be understood as a complementary journalism practice. The Constructive Institute defines it as »... a response to increasing tabloidization, sensationalism and negativity bias of the news media today [that] offers an add on to both breaking and investigative journalism«.³⁴

Haagerup, the founder of the Constructive Institute, is not fundamentally questioning the journalistic craft; he does not propose producing news solely and without exception according to the criteria of constructive journalism.

Instead, he is much more concerned with fundamentally shifting journalism towards questions about the future and changing the way journalists see themselves, especially with respect to the claim that the press is the fourth pillar of democracy. According to Haagerup, this claim requires journalists to increasingly give up the role of those who merely denounce grievances; instead, they must actively contribute to the democratic discourse. He believes that in times of increasing polarisation, it is particularly necessary for the media to contribute to an open, constructive social dialogue that involves the broadest possible section of the population. According to Haagerup, constructive journalism has three pillars: 1) a focus on solutions (after sufficient analysis of problems); 2) nuanced reporting that largely avoids polarisation, sensationalism and black-and-white thinking, adopts different perspectives insofar as possible, and strives to see the world more completely; and 3) the deliberate spurring and moderating of open, constructive social debates, which can in turn become the subject of reporting (see Fig. 3).

Constructive journalism is not opinion journalism, even if it is sometimes misunderstood as such by its critics. Accordingly, it does not contradict other forms of reporting. Constructive journalism aims to enrich journalism, not to reinvent it. According to the Constructive Institute: »Constructive journalism does not stand in opposition to other types of reporting. It suggests that journalists review their mindset from exclusively focusing on what is going wrong, to seeing both the good and the bad. Reporting on responses to social ills is an additional tool in a journalist's toolbox, an add-on that can be used when a problem has been hashed over several times. It changes the focal point of the conversation from the problem itself to responses to it. Constructive journalism can take on from where investigative reporting left off. The two are inherently complementary.«³⁵

34 See <https://constructiveinstitute.org/what/>

35 See <https://constructiveinstitute.org/what/facts-and-questions/>

Fig. 3: The three pillars of constructive journalism³⁶



Constructive journalism also positions itself against the tendency to primarily report on negative developments and foreground problems. In this way, it is similar to solutions journalism, which is mainly represented by the US-based Solutions Journalism Network.

The Constructive Institute (CI) and the Solutions Journalism Network (SJM) overlap in their values and vision but differ in their realisation methods. Whereas the CI focuses on a fellowship programme and interdisciplinary exchange with academia, political leaders and business representatives, SJM has developed curricula to promote solutions journalism and works closely with editorial offices and journalism schools.³⁷ Both organisations conduct research to further explore the impact of constructive and solutions journalism on the media and their recipients.

5.2 Varied implementation in German editorial offices

In German editorial offices, constructive journalism is predominantly equated with solutions journalism. Guidelines for its practice vary among media outlets; while some only have minimal or even no established criteria, others have identified requirements that constructive programming needs to fill, which can include addressing a general social problem, being verifiable, providing a solution that is critically evaluated and being both relevant to a local audience yet applicable elsewhere.

36 David Schraven, *Konstruktiver Journalismus in Zeiten von Covid-19*, <https://correctiv.org/aktuelles/2020/03/30/konstruktiver-journalismus-in-zeiten-von-covid-19/>

37 See <https://www.solutionsjournalism.org/>

While the vast majority of the editorial offices interviewed for this study see constructive formats as add-ons to their normal daily business, at the Sächsische Zeitung, a Dresden-based regional daily paper, constructive journalism is understood as a mindset: it is journalism that is explicitly oriented towards user needs.³⁸ According to editor-in-chief Uwe Vetterick, the paper has consciously tried to shift the focus away from negativity and deal with broad social problems. He did not want to resign himself to the cycle in which a problem is identified, described, analysed and then simply dropped, with coverage turning to a new story and a new problem.

Vetterick believes journalists must be aware of the prominent role they play in the lives of their readers and deal with this responsibly: »We are one of the very few products they allow into their homes every day, that they take with them when they withdraw to a very secure space – the kitchen table or the living room. And when they give us half an hour there, they shouldn't get up from the table and say, ›Oh dear, now I'm so depressed, I'm going to go open a bottle of wine‹. Instead, they should be encouraged and inspired to tackle their everyday lives better. That is the goal, if it goes well.«³⁹

5.3 Constructive dialogue instead of polarising reporting

Constructive journalists are distinguished by how they reflect on the effect that their actions have on the people who are willing to pay for journalism, whether payment is through subscription fees, membership fees or broadcasting fees. These journalists feel like social actors, not passive observers, and this goes hand in hand with their goal of creating a more intensive exchange with users.

One example of such an intensive exchange is the Germany Talks (Deutschland Spricht) project, in which individuals of opposing political opinions are matched for one-on-one discussions. According to Maria Exner, a co-editor-in-chief of Zeit Magazin who helped develop the format, a systematic evaluation of the project has shown that even a two-hour conversation helped reduce prejudices about people of differing political persuasions.⁴⁰ The project was so successful that an independent subsidiary organisation, My Country Talks, was launched to implement the format in other countries with participating media partners. The format also inspired the transnational Europe Talks.

Constructive exchange can also emerge at the local level. Vetterick says his regional newspaper primarily focuses on »... banal things: better school lunches, zebra crossings or things like that. We don't solve the Middle East conflict. But we have often experienced that someone says, ›Well, I hadn't actually thought about it that way yet. But it could be done‹. Or someone in the city council picks up on it and makes it a parliamentary item at this low level. And then things really do get moving, and it's nice when you can really get things moving with journalism«.⁴¹

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38 Uwe Vetterick, personal communication, April 7, 2021

39 Ibid.

40 Lea Menges, *Wie ein »Tinder für politische Gegensätze Menschen zusammenbringt«*, <https://opinary.com/wie-ein-tinder-fur-politische-gegensaetze-menschen-zusammenbringt/?lang=de>

41 Uwe Vetterick, personal communication, April 7, 2021

One could also say that by »moving things«, journalism is also moving itself a bit towards the future. It is taking responsibility for democratic discourse instead of merely describing its shortcomings and problems. Through this active involvement, it earns his own self-attribution of being the fourth pillar of democracy.

5.4 Controversies in German newsrooms

Nevertheless, controversies are still arising at major media outlets over the introduction of constructive journalism practices. For instance, in August 2015, Florian Harms, then-editor-in-chief at Der Spiegel online, one of Germany’s most popular news sites, announced that the outlet would henceforth publish more articles »... that inspire further thinking, that even in the case of gloomy topics reveal an aspect that gives hope, that points a way out, that sometimes illuminates much-discussed topics from a different perspective«. ⁴²

Harms was referring to the principles of constructive journalism. His announcement found few supporters among the outlet’s editors, who understood their mission to be pointing out undesirable developments, grievances and problems. The announcement was reportedly greeted with disapproval, and the constructive formats introduced by Harms have yet to be thoroughly embraced.

In other media organizations, journalists report intense discussions about the concept and implementation of constructive journalism. To date, concerns are expressed that constructive journalism is not critical enough and that it is positively biased and activist.

According to Gerda Meuer, the managing director of programming at Deutsche Welle (DW), Germany’s international public broadcaster, [where this study’s author is the head of the Trends & Knowledge department], not all journalists, editors and departments agree on constructive offerings, despite their popularity among consumers. »We know from user research that about two-thirds of our TV viewers tune in to DW’s English-language news programme because, as an international broadcaster, they expect us to give them tips on how to solve problems they have at home«, Meuer said. ⁴³ Nevertheless, »... many editors are still worried that a solution-oriented approach will not be perceived as critical enough« and could even be seen as public relations.

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42 Florian Harms, *In eigener Sache. Artikel, die weitergehen*, <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/florian-harms-constructive-journalism-artikel-die-weitergehen-a-1048166.html>

43 Gerda Meuer, personal communication, April 12, 2021

5.5 Labelling constructive journalism

One question that arises within media organizations and editorial departments is whether to use a label that explicitly identifies formats and offerings as constructive journalism products.

Jonathan Widder, founder of the news app Squirrel News, which curates solutions-oriented articles, consistently labels and promotes Squirrel News as constructive. He sees the constructive aspect as a unique selling point of his service in the battle for readers' attention. »Because just saying, ›We're a news app‹... there are hundreds of them, why should people read us? The reason is this focus on the solutions-oriented.«⁴⁴

The Sächsische Zeitung also believed it could use the constructive label as a way to get readers' attentions. However, it dropped the labels after surveys showed these did not register with most users.⁴⁵

Bornheim, the news editor-in-chief at ARD, said it is the internal needs of many editorial departments – rather than user needs – that seem to motivate explicitly labelling formats as constructive, since when constructive elements are integrated into established practices, the change of habit can be greater for the editors than for the viewers.⁴⁶

The characteristics of the target market can also impact decisions on labelling. Jaafar Abdul Karim, the presenter and editorial director of DW's Arabic-language TV youth programme JaafarTalk, sees constructive journalism as too abstract for the audience to understand.⁴⁷ He also wants to avoid discussions about what could be seen as tendentious journalism in a region with highly polarised societies.

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⁴⁴ Jonathan Widder, personal communication, October 21, 2020

⁴⁵ Oliver Reinhard, personal communication, November 5, 2020

⁴⁶ Markus, Bornheim, personal communication, November 20, 2020

⁴⁷ Jaafar Abdul Karim, personal communication, November 2, 2020

5.6 Monetisation

In a time of industry transformation, it is important to examine whether constructive journalism is financially worthwhile for media companies. The effect of constructive reporting on the monetisation of media content has not been proven by systematic study. This may be due to the fact that media hardly ever measure the influence of constructive journalism, often because they lack criteria or only have a poor definition of what exactly constitutes constructive journalism. Additionally, the path to a conversion (ie finalising a new paid subscription) is a complex process that depends on countless factors.

For these reasons, the simple equation »more constructive content = better monetisation« doesn't work. And yet there are a number of indications and anecdotal evidence on this topic that are worth examining.

The concept of utility journalism is central to the subject of monetisation. Robin Riemann et al. (2020) associated it with »personally relevant« topics for which users are particularly willing to spend money. This shows recognisable overlaps with constructive journalism, as both focus on topics that have particular user relevance and combine them with practical information.

The Solution Journalism Network has highlighted how solutions-oriented reporting can increase opportunities for monetising local journalism. One such case is that of regional French daily newspaper Nice-Matin, which faced imminent bankruptcy in 2015. Its decision to establish an editorial department for solutions journalism decisively helped the paper achieve a 600 % growth in subscribers by 2019.⁴⁸ In the process, the »... solution articles achieved twice as many conversions and kept readers hooked three times longer« than other content, SJN found.

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48 Solutions Journalism Network, *Impact Examples from 2019-2020*

More subscription sales through constructive journalism at the Danish regional newspaper *Fyens Stiftstidende* (local editorial office Middelfart) ^{49,50}

In 2019, in the face of continuous circulation declines and unsatisfactory sales of digital subscriptions, the regional newspaper *Fyens Stiftstidende*, in the southern Danish municipality of Middelfart, began a year of intensive work on a constructive reorientation. The process was supported by a full-time employee from the constructive start-up Room of Solutions.

The comprehensive change process, which followed an initial reader survey, included the following goals:

Solutions: The editorial team focuses on possible solutions in addition to grievances when covering relevant issues and problems in the municipality.

Trust: The editorial team works hard to strengthen locals' trust in journalism through increased dialogue and presence in the public sphere.

Dialogue: Readers are involved in the journalistic work before and during the research. The editorial team organises open and constructive debates on local issues.

Perspective: The editorial team shapes its reporting in a nuanced and perspective-rich way. It strives to provide significantly more context and background information.

The local editorial team experimented intensely with new formats, both in the printed newspaper and online, as well as in terms of new types of events. Central to this was bringing the journalistic work more into the public eye (eg by moving the editorial team into the local supermarket for a few days) and intensifying the dialogue with people of different origins and ages.

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49 Gerd-Maria May, *How engaging and constructive journalism improved reader-satisfaction and sales in subscription*, <https://gerdmay.medium.com/how-engaging-and-constructive-journalism-improved-reader-satisfaction-and-sales-in-subscription-b55f5e480a41>
50 Gerd-Maria May, personal communication, January 17, 2020

After one year, a new survey showed that readers' satisfaction with their newspaper had increased by 23%. Relevance improved by 16%, and the price-performance ratio and credibility of the newspaper also scored better in the eyes of the readers. The satisfaction of journalists also increased significantly.

Most importantly, the willingness to pay for the journalism of Middelbart's local newspaper had grown, because the sale of both digital and print subscriptions increased significantly during the trial period. In the meantime, Fyens Stiftstidende has extended the constructive strategy to all local editorial offices.

Prominent German online news website Focus Online is the first German – and possibly international – medium to develop a »Constructive Score«, which allows the editorial team to measure the solution orientation of its own content with the help of artificial intelligence.⁵¹ Its efforts to become increasingly constructive are probably not an end in and of themselves and instead likely economically informed. Focus Online does not rely on a paywall, and constructive journalism seems to be attractive for monetisation via digital ads.

According to Focus Online editor-in-chief Florian Festl, »Constructive [website] surroundings are very popular and are booked by large customers, [many of whom] have a fundamentally optimistic and forward-looking philosophy and find themselves [reflected in the page surroundings]. They also secure comprehensive brand safety there. Clients can assume that crime, disasters and misfortunes will not be presented there as plain news. Every angle is framed around a solution and will have a positive vibe. Along with individual spots, all other forms of advertising have been proven to work better in these sections because they are perceived as having more value. The content rubs off on its surroundings.«⁵²

The Solutions Journalism Network also points to evidence that solutions-oriented reporting increases the time users spend on digital offerings, which also allows them to be exposed to adverts for longer.⁵³ In addition, the network is also conducting research on the theory that advertisers may prefer to appear in solutions-oriented surroundings and be willing to spend more money for this.

When journalism is implemented in a way that is aware of and meets user needs, this willingness to spend money also appears to extend to readers. Die Zeit editor-in-chief, Giovanni di Lorenzo, believes the editorial staff's empathetic attitude towards readers is one of the factors for his newspaper's increased sales, especially in the current coronavirus crisis. After unexpectedly gaining large numbers of readers during the pandemic, the paper asked these new users why they had started reading Die Zeit at this particular moment. According to di Lorenzo, »One important answer was, »You neither played down the problem nor made it too alarmist«. From this I conclude that we found a tone that did not make one despondent even in difficult times«.⁵⁴

51 See <https://www.burda-forward.de/en/news/focus-online-becomes-more-constructive-with-ai/>

52 Rupert Sommer, *Case Redaktion: »Die Trefferquote ist inzwischen verblüffend«*, p. 22-26

53 Rikha Sharma Rani, *What we know – and still don't know – about what solutions journalism can do*, <https://thewholestory.solutionsjournalism.org/what-we-know-and-still-dont-know-about-what-solutions-journalism-can-do-507fff777126#.prymjedo1>

54 Giovanni di Lorenzo, personal communication, March 19, 2020

The Sächsische Zeitung has observed a similar trend. According to feuilleton Editor Oliver Reinhard, »New subscriptions are our golden tickets, and we have, to say the least, clear indications that constructive texts tend to very strongly correspond to finalised subscriptions«.55

A final note on monetisation through constructive journalism: In the United States, where non-profit journalism is already more widespread, solutions journalism has proven to be a promising way to raise funds for independent journalism. According to Sharon Chan of The New York Times, private donors and non-profit organisations are increasingly interested in funding media that address possible solutions to problems that are of particular concern to the donors, rather than merely analysing them.56

In short, while hard scientific evidence on the profitability of constructive and solutions journalism is lacking, the examples given suggest that media companies do benefit.

5.7 Interaction with the public

Hate speech on the internet has been a widespread societal problem for many years. Can constructive journalism contribute to making digital debates more tolerant and objective? There is need for further research on this highly relevant question. However, anecdotal evidence collected for this study strongly suggests that constructive and solutions-oriented contributions are not only frequently shared by users in social media but also provoke less hate speech.57

The journalists interviewed for this study all agreed that in their personal experiences, a comparatively peaceful tone prevails in social media comments or in readers' posts on constructive offerings. »There are always a few outliers or trolls, but with constructive pieces, the narrative in the comments is completely different. Much more benevolent«, said Laura Goudkamp, a journalist who leads the digital global reporting team for German public broadcaster ARD.58

ARD news editor-in-chief Bornheim also confirmed the same for constructive TV offerings: »Viewers express themselves positively when they are pulled out of this negative news stream with a [constructive] report.«59

Solutions-oriented segments and pieces can also lead to constructive dialogue with users, which in turn can shape future program offerings. Bianca Leitner, a managing editor at ARD's news department, observed that »... [user] letters were always positive and enthusiastic. They wanted more [constructive offerings] and actually suggested topics from their own daily experiences«.60

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55 Oliver Reinhard, personal communication, November 5, 2020

56 Solutions Journalism Network, *Make money with solutions journalism? Here are 8 tips to get there*, <https://thewholestory.solutionsjournalism.org/lessons-from-our-revenue-summit-in-mansfield-638a7c22cb84>

57 See Mark Rice-Oxley, *The good news is ... people like to read good news*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/12/but-first-here-is-the-good-news->

58 Laura Goudkamp, personal communication, November 30, 2020

59 Markus Bornheim, personal communication, November 20, 2020

60 Bianca Leitner, personal communication, October 21, 2020

Another important question to examine is whether constructive offerings are shared more frequently and have greater reach than other content. This is especially important for public broadcasters, since compared with other media organizations, they tend to use social media intensely to disseminate their content. The digital team led by Goudkamp, which launched the global stories account Weltspiegel on Instagram, found there was high user demand for constructive examples on the platform: »That’s why we strategically focused relatively early on ensuring that our posts and our Insta-Stories show or depict a solutions-oriented approach whenever possible.«⁶¹

At the end of 2018, Deutsche Welle launched an editorial experiment in which for two weeks, only constructive and inspiring content was posted on the »DW Stories« Facebook account. Not only did the account increase its reach by 423% during the trial period, but the DW News videos on Facebook were also viewed much more frequently and for much longer, and the news account gained a total of 20,000 followers.⁶²

Experiment

DW Stories on Facebook

(December 21, 2018–January 5, 2019)

Fig. 4: Interaction with constructive and inspiring content on DW Stories⁶³

	Absolute totals	Change over trial period
Reach	55 million	+423%
Video views	24.9 million	+415%
Watch time (minutes)	15.6 million	+430%
New followers	20,000	+400%

International studies confirm these editorial observations. For instance, a publication by the Reuters Institute on the »shareability« of social media content states, »With traditional media in turmoil due to the digital transformation and their collapsing business models, it has become even more important to understand the needs and interests of the audience ... It is not enough to produce content according to current news values. That news is disseminated quickly and as accurately as possible may be sufficient in breaking news situations, but otherwise audiences expect journalists to be able to stir emotions, analyse, surprise and give audiences tools to engage in discussions – indeed, tools to build their identities«.⁶⁴

61 Laura Goudkamp, personal communication, November 30, 2020

62 Deutsche Welle, internal document, January 10, 2019

63 Ibid.

64 Satu Vasantola, *Do you think it is sex? You are wrong! This is what people share most on social media*, p. 37, <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/research/files/Do%2520you%2520think%2520it%2520is%2520sex%2520You%2520are%2520wrong%2521.pdf>

The study continues: »Some of the news values, such as negativity and objectivity, are even at odds with the type of content people want to share. Classifications of the most shared content in mainstream media show that people tend to share positive, feel-good stories, opinions and analytical, in-depth articles rather than accessing quick, objective news.«

A study by the Center for Media Engagement at the University of Texas at Austin found that readers of solutions-oriented articles feel better informed, have a stronger connection to the producing media brand and are more likely to express a desire for engagement than readers of non-solutions-oriented news articles.⁶⁵ Some researchers, especially from the field of positive psychology, have consequently tried to find evidence that the increased willingness to engage after reading solutions-oriented articles also leads to actual social engagement. So far, evidence for this has not been found. In 2017, communication and media professors Karen McIntyre and Meghan Sobel concluded in an experimental study that while people who read an article on the sex trafficking of underage girls developed more empathy for those affected, neither an increased motivation to act nor a generally better understanding of the topic could be observed among the readers.

Nevertheless, the sense of »feeling better« that readers of solutions-oriented articles are left with likely contributes to a reduction in news avoidance, since the latter is largely based on the subjective impression of being powerless and unable to act in the face of a multitude of complex problems.

Additionally, it is important to note that a journalist's role is not to persuade people to get involved but to inform comprehensively and understandably. Solutions-focused journalism seems to succeed in this.

In short, constructive journalism not only has a more positive emotional impact, but its users also seem to share it more often than average and engage with it more positively on social networks, which in turn means greater reach for content producers.

It would be desirable if research on the impact of constructive and solutions-oriented reporting were also intensified in local markets. So far, systematic findings have mainly been collected in the United States, whose media market and social conditions differ in some respects significantly from those elsewhere. More research on different local, regional and national editorial experiences – also with regard to increased reach and monetisation opportunities in respective media markets – would stimulate the exchange of knowledge and motivate experimentation in media organizations that have so far been reluctant to engage in constructive reporting due to reservations or lack of knowledge.

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65 Alexander L. Curry & Keith Hammonds, *The Power of Solutions Journalism*, <https://mediaengagement.org/research/solutions-journalism/>
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5.8 Responding to the climate crisis

Climate change is forcing newsrooms, media organizations and journalists everywhere to ask themselves essential questions: how should journalism position itself in light of the climate crisis? Is it serving its target groups' desires for information about the related problems and how they can be addressed? Will journalism itself be transformed in this process? Is its self-image changing? Which formats will be successful and which business models?

As mentioned earlier, there has been some experimentation and innovation on the topic of climate reporting. However, an incident in Germany illustrates how contentious such new endeavours can be.

On 25 September 2020, World Climate Day, the weekly magazine Stern published an issue in collaboration with the Fridays for Future climate protection movement that featured the cover teaser: »The climate crisis has been around awhile. What we must do now to save ourselves.«

The publication triggered industry-wide discussions, as some people, including higher-ups on the magazine's editorial advisory board, thought it crossed a line that had long been considered sacrosanct in journalism: non-association with a cause and/or movement.⁶⁶ Others, including Stern's editor-in-chief, argued that journalism needed to get more involved with climate protection and that involvement had always been part of the publication's tradition.⁶⁷



Fig. 5: Cover of the Stern issue from 25 September 2020, produced in cooperation with Fridays for Future

This incident illustrates questions over journalism's fundamental role that need to be addressed in a changing industry and shows how a broader discourse must develop out of debates that already taking place around the world.

66 See <https://www.stern.de/panorama/fridays-for-future-und-stern--wie-die-zusammenarbeit-entstand-9424280.html>

67 Ibid.

Conclusions

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You have to be able to afford problem-focused journalism, because at the end of the day, it goes against public interest. Put the other way round: Constructive journalism pays off for society as well as for the media.

This study has shown that constructive journalism is effective in many ways. Importantly, it counters the trend of news avoidance by adopting a less pronounced focus on negative news events and thus approaching many people's subjective sense of relevance. Constructive journalism users consume constructive pieces comparatively longer, comment on them less hatefully and share them more often.

There are also indications that constructive journalism has a positive effect on the monetisation of media offerings, both at the regional and national levels.

People are looking for constructive information offerings, particularly in the current pandemic. This has led to a small boom in solutions-oriented and constructive formats. From this, it can be deduced that in addition to fact-based information, people are interested in useful and solutions-oriented journalism that is geared to the realities of their everyday lives – an insight that can also be applied to climate reporting.

Constructive journalism, like digital product development, relies on unconditional user orientation, a wealth of perspectives and dialogue with users. This means that constructive journalism can help editorial offices tackle unfinished tasks from the digital transformation, such as meeting the actual interests, information needs and usage habits of young and diverse target groups.

Finally, this study has shown how journalism can not only report on social discussions, but also organise and moderate them in order to make the resulting constructive debates the subject of its own reporting. It is interesting to observe how journalists' role in society is gradually changing and how research results are stimulating and enriching debates. The examples outlined in this study show that constructive journalism can increase the proximity between media and their audiences, and that this in turn can help strengthen people's trust in media, which is an important prerequisite for monetisation within the framework of subscription or membership models.

List of interviewees

Abdul Karim, Jaafar

Presenter and Editorial Director, Jaafar Talk, Deutsche Welle

Berbner, Bastian

Author, Die Zeit; Author and Producer of the podcast 180 Grad. Geschichten gegen den Hass, NDR

Blau, Wolfgang

Fellow, Reuters Institute; former COO, Condé Nast

Bornheim, Markus

Editor-in-Chief, ARD-aktuell

Di Lorenzo, Giovanni

Editor-in-Chief, Die Zeit

Dörner, Katja

Mayor, City of Bonn

Egbringhoff, Verena

Head of Content, Digital Aktuell, WDR

Ehrenberg, Katja

Professor, Department of Psychology, Fresenius University of Applied Sciences Cologne

Elmer, Christina

Deputy Head of Development, Der Spiegel

Fasciaux, Nina

Europe Manager, Solutions Journalism Network

Gehlen, Dirk v.

Head of Department, Social Media/Innovation, Süddeutsche Zeitung

Goudkamp, Laura

Team Lead, Weltspiegel Digital, Bayerischer Rundfunk

Haagerup, Ulrik

Founder and CEO, Constructive Institute

Hoch, Michael

Rector, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn

Hombach, Bodo

President, Bonn Academy for Research and Teaching of Practical Politics

Horn, Charlotte

Radio reporter, NDR Info

Jelenkowski, Julia

Head of UX and Innovations, Media Group RTL

Jost-Westendorf, Simone

Head of Journalism Lab, State Media Authority North Rhine-Westphalia

Kramp, Leif

Communication and Media Researcher, ZeMKI; Member of the Board of Directors, VOCER

Kronenberg, Volker

Dean, Faculty of Humanities, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn

Leitner, Bianca

Managing Editor, ARD-aktuell

May, Gerd-Maria

Founder and CEO, Room of Solutions

Meuer, Gerda

Managing Director of Programming, Deutsche Welle

Neuhoff, Ulli

Department Head, Foreign TV Reports, SWR

Patel, Rishad

Co-Founder and Head of Product, Slice Media

Pramstaller, Christopher

Audience Editor, Süddeutsche Zeitung

Reinhard, Oliver

Deputy Department Head, Feuilleton, Sächsische Zeitung

Reuter, Stephanie

Managing Director, Rudolf Augstein Foundation

Rosenberg, Tina

Co-Founder and VP Innovations, Solutions Journalism Network

Schraven, David

Founder and Managing Director/Publisher, Correctiv

Schröder, Jens

Editor-in-Chief GEO Group and P.M. Group, Gruner + Jahr

Uebing, Christiane

Head of Politics and Current Affairs, NDR Info

Vetterick, Uwe

Editor-in-Chief, Sächsische Zeitung

.....

Vogel, Johannes

Consultant and ex-CEO of Digital Media, Süddeutsche Zeitung

Wegner, Jochen

Editor-in-Chief, Die Zeit Online and Member of the Editorial Board, Die Zeit

Weichert, Stephan

Filmmaker and Member of the Board of Directors, VOCER

Wellbrock, Christian-Mathias

Professor Media and Technology Management, University of Cologne

Widder, Jonathan

Founder, Squirrel News

Wulf, Michael

Editor-in-Chief, Media Group RTL Germany

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About this study

This study was conducted as part of the Grimme-Akademie's project »Impact and Potential of Solution-Oriented Reporting«. The aim of the project was to shed light on the impact of constructive journalism and to take a deeper look at its potential to support the media in their transformation. Attention was also given to the possible positive effects of constructive journalism on the refinancing of journalistic offerings.

This study was originally published in German (Lösungen, Perspektiven, Dialog – Warum Konstruktiver Journalismus sich für Medien und Gesellschaft lohnt). The translated English version has been edited for relevance to an international, non-German reader. However, all sources used in the original study are listed in the English end-of-text interview, reference and audio-visual lists. For the original study, please visit the website of the Grimme Institut: <https://www.grimme-institut.de/publikationen/studien/p/d/loesungen-perspektiven-dialog-warum-konstruktiver-journalismus-sich-fuer-medien-und-gesellscha/>.

About the author

Ellen Heinrichs is a journalist with experience in print, online, TV and radio journalism. She leads the Trends & Knowledge team at Deutsche Welle, Germany's international public broadcaster. She previously was head of Format Development and Innovations and was involved in setting up the DW Akademie, the training institution for young journalists from around the world. She founded DW Minds, the largest and most diverse network for knowledge transfer in a German media company. In 2019-20, Heinrichs was the first German fellow at the Constructive Institute in Aarhus, Denmark. She is also trained as a solutions journalism trainer and agile culture coach. As a single mother of two teenagers, she experiences on a daily basis how young people today use media in a fundamentally different way and what expectations they have of information offerings that are relevant to them.

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