

Innovation, digitization, and disinformation management in European regional television stations in the *Circom* network

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Abstract

The *European Association of Regional Television (Circom)* is an umbrella organization of regional broadcasters in Europe, currently composed of a total of 43 broadcasters from 29 countries. These public service media play a decisive role in information reality owing to their proximity, the cultural development of their communities, and the emotional bond they have with their audiences. This research analyzes the relationship between European regional media, innovation, and digitization processes and the fight against disinformation in the current media context through interviews with *Circom* network managers. In turn, the resulting sample has been compared with the models of Hallin and Mancini (2004), demonstrating that this classification is not significant in terms of innovation and digitization approaches but is decisive in the analysis of disinformation and the strategies used by the media in each country. Innovation, digitization processes, and business structure have conceptualization problems in solving the pressure that today's convergent environment exerts on linear television. After analyzing the results, it becomes clear that there is a pressing need to renew and redefine professional profiles, adapt content to different formats, and conquer young audiences, although there is no agreement on the best way to face these challenges.

Keywords

Circom; Television; European regional media; Audiovisual; Disinformation; Innovation; Digitization; Professional profiles; Information; Audiences; Proximity; Local; VoD; Platforms.



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1. Introduction

The current media context is determined by changes in audiovisual consumption, the demand for new audiences, and the pressure exerted by video on demand (VoD) platforms on linear television in its various forms of access, such as subscription video on demand (SVoD) and transaction video on demand (TVoD) (D’Arma; Raats; Steemers, 2021). The media, in general and linear television in particular, are subject to innovation and digitization processes that allow them to maintain a relevant position among their audiences, ensure the generational replacement of their audiences, and enjoy a significant presence on social networks that bring together the most important parts of audiovisual consumption on the mobile screen (Navarro-Robles; Vázquez-Barrio, 2020).

In this context, several contemporary phenomena determine the process of evolution to which traditional media are subject: obligatory digitization, adaptation of their content to a multiformat environment, and the loss of the TV event in favor of disaggregated consumption. Digital native media play with an advantage in this new market structuring, but even so, the professional profiles in demand are not clear in the current employment landscape (Negreira-Rey; López-García; Vázquez-Herrero, 2020). Thus, on the one hand there is a change in information processing, and on the other hand, technological innovation that requires multidisciplinary training (Marqués-Pascual; Sintes-Olivella, 2020), in a new reality in which there are also threats such as content saturation, content trivialization, or misinformation (Herrero-Curiel; Planells-de-la-Maza, 2020).

Disinformation and the proliferation of fake news have become global problems, affecting the stability of Western democracies and the trust of citizens in their representatives and public institutions, and in this sense, the work of verification journalism becomes fundamental in regard to its accountability to society, which in turn is related to trust in state power (Rodríguez-Pérez, 2020).

The phenomenon of fake news has been extensively studied by academia in recent years, in both the European and Ibero-American spheres and especially in the wake of Covid-19 (Sánchez-Duarte; Magallón-Rosa, 2019; Ufarte-Ruiz; Anzera; Murcia-Verdú, 2020; Pérez-Dasilva; Meso-Ayerdi; Mendiguren-Galdospín, 2020; Salaverría *et al.*, 2020; Guallar *et al.*, 2020; Villa-Gracia; Cerdán-Martínez, 2020) and the so-called global infodemics (García-Marín, 2020).

An infodemics spreads like a virus resistant to truth and leads to an infocracy in which information is used as a weapon and as part of the “information regime.” This information regime is a new form of government that replaces discourse with the “rationality” of data (dataism) through algorithms and machine learning that mimic arguments and that is exercised over people trapped in the information of a digital prison (Han, 2022) under the guise of freedom, where truth and veracity succumb to the new era of digital post-democracy.

The perception of so-called Generation Z is that social networks and web spaces are where most fake news is distributed, despite the fact that, curiously, it is these same media that they consume massively, and in which –at the same time and paradoxically– they place less trust (Pérez-Escoda; Pedrero-Esteban, 2021). Social networks such as *TikTok*, which initially emerged as a mass consumption platform for teenagers and on which ephemeral and visual communication prevails, now bring together a multitude of actors, media, and journalists, confirming the great potential of this network to combat misinformation, as well (Sidorenko-Bautista; Alonso-López; Giacomelli, 2021).

The rise and impact of disinformation through social networks are already inescapably part of the fourth wave of digital democracy (Ireton; Posetti, 2018), whose the most notable milestones in shaping public opinion are the intensive use of artificial intelligence and Big Data, the search for engagement with audiences, and the validation of lies as a political strategy, with a combination of hyperlocal and supranational elements (García-Orosa, 2021). Consequently, disinformation causes an alteration and manipulation of public space and democratic dialog, including pseudo-media and web content

that mimic the format of traditional media through narratives that alter reality, which though they have been present since the beginning of public life, have never before had the resources to achieve large-scale repercussions (Palau-Sampio; Carratalá, 2022).

Verification has become a main task in the news room of media corporations

This leads to a responsibility of public media and their commitment both to a citizenry who may feel defenseless in the midst of this scenario because they are not able to distinguish real statements from false ones that use deception to hide their true nature (Kušen; Strembeck, 2020; Wölker; Powell, 2021; García-Orosa, 2021), and to providing the means, techniques, and tools necessary to combat disinformation available, including media literacy to citizens, and to which the European Union attaches increasing importance (Sádaba; Salaverría, 2022).

1.1. Innovation, digitization, and the fight against disinformation in the EU and on European regional TV stations

Today, the media are facing the challenge of adapting to a changing context within media convergence. Thus, the obligatory innovation processes that have been occurring recently take on special relevance in regional media owing to their limited capacity when compared with global media, but which are essential in the development of the communities in which they operate. These processes of innovation and digitization have interpretations both in the introduction of technological innovations and in the changes as to how content is produced, consumed, and presented. The incorporation of new communicational agents, such as international VoD platforms and social networks, drags European public service media (PSM) toward a process of platformization that forces them to integrate structural changes into their production and dissemination processes to attract digital audiences (Bonini; Túdez-López; Barrientos, 2021; Duffy; Poell; Nieborg, 2019).

In recent years, several initiatives have emerged within the EU in the fight against disinformation, focused on the defense of geostrategic security and the maintenance of democratic guarantees in the interest of protecting the electoral processes of Member States against ever-present interference and cyberattacks from other countries, as well as on the promotion of media literacy. Among these initiatives (European Commission, 2020), the following deserve mention (Rúas-Araújo; Rodríguez-Martelo; Máiz-Bar, 2021):

- the launch of the *EastStratCom Team* under the *European External Action Service (EEAS)* in 2015 and the subsequent creation of the *EU vs. Disinfo (EUvsDisinfo, 2018)* platform, a project focused on detecting and responding to disinformation campaigns from Russia (European Commission, 2016);
- the “Joint declaration on freedom of expression, fake news, disinformation, and propaganda,” established within the *Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)* and the *United Nations (UN)* and in line with the objectives set out by the *European Network and Information Security Agency (Enisa)*; and a series of recommendations “in defense of free and fair European elections,” raised at their meeting in Salzburg one year before the European elections in May 2019 (European Commission, 2018, document 637).

Other actions also of note were

- the launch of a *European Union Action Plan against Disinformation*;
- the promulgation and dissemination of European codes of good practice and advice against disinformation at the initiative of the *European Parliament* (2019; 2020a; 2020b) and the *Council of Europe* (Chapman; Oerman, 2020); and
- the creation, within the *European Commission*, of a group of experts on disinformation (De-Cock-Bunin, 2018).

Institutional initiatives are complemented by the creation of the *European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO)*, which brings together university researchers and opinion leaders with the aim of limiting disinformation in the EU and protecting the democratic integrity of electoral processes (Ramón-Reyero; Gil-Martín, 2021).

<https://edmo.eu>

Likewise, the *EDMO* also includes *Iberifier*, a digital media observatory in Spain and Portugal that is a research and fact-checking project coordinated by the *University of Navarra* and made up of a dozen universities, five verification organizations and news agencies, and six multidisciplinary research centers.

In addition, from the point of view of promoting digital literacy, it should be noted that the verification exercise is not limited only to the media, since nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have been equally active in promoting digital verification owing to the importance it has for human rights (Redondo, 2018), just as it is also necessary to highlight the role of schools and universities as key points for the recovery of trust in the media (Nigro, 2018).

In a similar vein, the *Council of Europe*, through the aforementioned *EastStratcom* platform, has a total of 400 volunteers who produce weekly bulletins on fake news, as does *Fiskkit*, a civil platform that promotes online dialog.

Likewise, both the *EDMO* and the *European Commission’s Expert Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation* state the promotion of media literacy as one of their main objectives, which includes the creation of a public portal for this purpose, as well as the promotion of research projects related to disinformation on a European scale (Sádaba; Salaverría, 2022).

Meanwhile, television channels and social networks also face the continuous need to evolve and innovate in the fight against fake information (Túñez-López; Feiras-Ceide; Vaz-Álvarez, 2021), taking into account the great conceptual complexity in the study and analysis of images in the current context of disinformation (Marzal-Felici, 2021), in which hoaxes and fake news increasingly use audiovisual materials to support their messages of deception, pointing to the importance of the audiovisual fact-checker's role (Rodríguez-Serrano; Soler-Campillo; Marzal-Felici, 2021).

The presence and combination of text, images, and audio as well as the manipulation of still and moving images has more media reach and thus causes greater interaction on social networks (Brennen *et al.*, 2020). This, in turn, is generating another offshoot in the fight for the imposition of digital storytelling through the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and the training and development of detection algorithms and machine learning programs, especially in the wake of Covid-19 (Sun, 2019; Bullock *et al.*, 2020) and the manipulation of images and videos through deepfakes to intensify deception (Miller, 2020; Gómez-de-Ágreda; Feijóo; Salazar-García, 2021).

In the case of the so-called public service media (PSM), the use of AI offers new opportunities in all its facets (Feiras-Ceide; Vaz-Álvarez; Túñez-López, 2022), with some public broadcasters, such as the *BBC*, *Deutsche Welle*, and *SRG-SSR* (Switzerland), having already worked with linguistic technologies based on speech recognition, automatic translation, and content generation in recent electoral processes. Similarly, *Full Fact* (UK) and *Décodex* (France) are two AI-based verification projects that include fake video detection, as is the *Fandango* project that is funded by European projects (Rodríguez-Martelo, 2021).

Finally, it is worth mentioning the *Um Olhar Europeu* project, launched by the Portuguese *RTP*, which involves 10 European public radio and television companies (*RTBF* of Belgium, *YLE* of Finland, *France Televisions* of France, *BR/ARD* of Germany, *RTE* of Ireland, *RAI* of Italy, *RTVE* of Spain, *SWI* of Switzerland, *ART* of France and Germany, and the aforementioned *RTP*) and uses the *Eurovision News Monitoring Tool*, also promoted by the *EBU* (Canavilhas, 2022).

1.2. Truthfulness as a public value in local television stations

During the last few years in Northern and Southern Europe, different studies have highlighted attempts to discredit public media with the objective of eroding the perception of PSM (Sehl; Simon; Schroeder, 2020; Schulze, 2020). When PSM are subjected to state control by conservatism, as in the case of Hungary or Poland, selective political exposure is evident, which enhances polarization in society (Bos; Kruikeimer; De-Vreese, 2016), causing a democratic backlash in these countries (Surowiec; Kania-Lundholm; Winiarska-Brodowska, 2020) and turning public media into sources of disinformation (Dragomir, 2019).

Truthfulness as an element of public value is evidenced in different ways depending on the economic and political context of each country. In the PSM of Southern Europe, for example, *RTVE*, citizens' perception of the value of the media is linked to the truthfulness, accuracy, and independence of the news together with their commitment to public service (Campos-Rueda; Goyanes, 2022).

On the contrary, in Northern Europe, public broadcasters such as the Flemish *VRT* are under close scrutiny by their stakeholders regarding public media's role in addressing the problem of disinformation. In this way, the media is held directly responsible, as part of its public service function, for finding a solution to the problems arising from the dissemination of false information, which generates a high level of pressure as to what is expected of them (Van-den-Bulck; Raats, 2022).

In addition, PSM have attracted increasing academic interest in recent years in the face of digital transformations, which force them to rethink their content production strategies (Lestón-Huerta; Goyanes; Mazza, 2021).

The actions of public media in the fight against disinformation encounter internal obstacles arising from the political and cultural contexts in their own governance that affect their independence and funding (D'Arma; Raats; Steemers, 2021). These materialize in the capacity for the development of effective tools to fight disinformation.

Another difficulty encountered by PSM in their fight against disinformation is related to the convergent integration established between public media and private social networking platforms (EBU, 2021). This public-private relationship generates a dilemma between the need to disseminate content to all audiences and the participation in social networks, which turns out to be the main channel for the dissemination of fake news (Horowitz *et al.*, 2022).

The public value of truthfulness from which independence, and ultimately, reputation emanate offers the opportunity to build trust and credibility (Karppinen; Moe, 2016) with local public media and thereby develop and strengthen the public value of PSM vis-à-vis advertising-dependent private media while improving the democratic quality of the country. In addition, truthfulness in regional media is linked to the dialog with their audiences and the emotional bonding implied by local media.

2. Methodology

The objective of this research is to study the innovation processes and management of disinformation in European regional television media, defining the sample on the basis of the *Circom* network member broadcasters. Through this approach, and after a review of the current literature on innovative processes and verification, an exploratory study with a qualitative approach was chosen.

To carry out the research, a series of semistructured interviews with open and dichotomous questions were conducted with professionals in managerial positions in different European regional media. The interviews were conducted by two interviewers on May 26-27 of 2022, held during *Circom's 38th Annual Conference 2022* in Galway, Ireland. The conference's collaboration made it possible to speed up the process by scheduling appointments in advance with the attending executives, and a schedule was drawn up in morning and afternoon sessions, during which 18 interviews were conducted.

The selection of the theoretical, non-probabilistic, and convenience sample (Denzin; Lincoln, 2005) was made from an available sample of 43 channels from 29 countries, all of them European regional television media from the *Circom* network, which resulted in a final sample of 18 broadcasters interviewed from a total of 15 countries.

The panel of experts, their corresponding broadcasters, and the resulting countries were as follows:

- Werner Erics, *ORF*, Austria (national coordinator).
- Alexander Pletser, *RTBF*, Belgium (national coordinator).
- Gordana Skaljic Narancic, *HRT*, Croatia (national coordinator).
- Jyri Kataja-Rahko, *YLE*, Finland (national coordinator).
- Jean-Marc Dubois, *FTV*, France (President, *Circom* network).
- Françoise Erb, *FTV*, France (Secretary General, *Circom*).
- Aline Montaner, *France 3*, France (regional coordinator for Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes).
- Frank Böhm, *HR*, *RBB*, Germany (national coordinator).
- Micaela Panella, *RAI*, Italy (national coordinator).
- Ildiko Komaromi, *MTVA*, Hungary (national coordinator).
- Klaas Geert Bakker, *RTV Oost*, The Netherlands (national coordinator).
- Eivind Undrum Jacobsen, *NRK*, Norway (national coordinator).
- Maja Smiljanic, *RTV*, Serbia (national coordinator).
- Marta Gajdosikova, *RTVS*, Slovakia (national coordinator).
- Zoran Medved, *RTVSLO*, Slovenia (national coordinator).
- Andoni Aldekoa, *EITB*, Spain (national coordinator).
- Josefin Ziegler, *SVT*, Sweden (national coordinator).
- Xaime Arias, *RTVG*, Spain (director of social projection).

The semistructured interviews allowed for the collection of relevant qualitative information. Open-ended questions were combined with dichotomous questions to set the context and collect certain numerical data. This strategy was considered the most suitable to take advantage of the know-how of each interviewee given their professional profile, as well as to establish a series of variables in the responses, which were coded on the basis of a content analysis according to the most commonly repeated terms and structures in each thematic area for the extrapolation of trends (Krippendorff, 1990).

The interviews conducted consisted of two distinct blocks of content. Following the script and the closed/dichotomous questions allowed for equivalent results that maintained unity and coherence among all the interviews to obtain a relevant and analyzable panel of experts.

Table 1. Interview script of the selected panel of experts

Questionnaire script	
Block I. Innovation and digitization processes	1. How is your channel adapting to the demands of new audiences and digitization processes?
	2. How does linear TV handle the pressure of subscription video on demand (SVoD)?
	3. Does your media company have a specific department dedicated to innovation?
	4. If yes, how many people does it have?
	5. What kind of professionals or new profiles are required in this department?
	6. What processes or strategies are being developed in the innovation department?
Block II. Disinformation and verification	7. What are the main strategies in the fight against disinformation on your channel?
	8. What fact-checking systems or strategies do you use in your channel? Are the verification tools you use proprietary or third party?
	9. What resources have you used to build your fake news verification or detection mechanisms/platforms? Have you used external agents/companies/collaboration to develop these tools?

The general objective (GO) of the research and the specific objectives (SO) are as follows:

GO. To classify and analyze the similarities and differences in the process of adaptation to the digital environment that the European regional television stations belonging to the *Circom* network utilize and to review the sample according to the models and comparative media systems of Hallin and Mancini (2004):

SO1. To analyze the processes of innovation, digitization, and adaptation to the demands of new audiences in European regional television stations.

SO2. To understand the organization and structure of newsrooms in their adaptation to the digital environment.

SO3. To analyze the strategies for action in the management of disinformation.

In accordance with the main objective and according to the classification of models by Hallin and Mancini (2004), the list of countries and channel managers interviewed corresponded to: the Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist model and the Northern European or Democratic Corporatist model (see Table 2).

Table 2. Hallin and Mancini's (2004) classification and list of countries and media interviewed

	Mediterranean/ polarized pluralist model	Northern European /democratic corporatist model	Liberal model	Other media interviewed in the European context
Hallin and Mancini models	France (<i>FTV, France 3</i>)	Austria (<i>ORF</i>)	United Kingdom	Slovenia (<i>RTVSLO</i>)
	Spain (<i>EITB, RTVG</i>)	Belgium (<i>RTBF</i>)	Ireland	Croatia (<i>HRT</i>)
	Italy (<i>RAI</i>)	Sweden (<i>SVT</i>)	United States	Hungary (<i>MTVA</i>)
	Portugal	Finland (<i>YLE</i>)	Canada	Serbia (<i>RTV</i>)
	Greece	Germany (<i>HR, RBB</i>)		Slovakia (<i>RTVS</i>)
		The Netherlands (<i>RTV Oost</i>)		
		Norway (<i>NRK</i>)		
		Denmark		
		Switzerland		

Note. The green highlighted boxes contain the countries in which one or more of their regional broadcasters were interviewed.

3. Management of innovation and the digitization process in the *Circum* network European regional media

The situation of public service media (PSM) is determined by a series of difficulties stemming from aging audiences and their general decline (Gesto-Louro; Campos-Freire, 2020), the pressure of international SVoD platforms on linear television (Izquierdo-Castillo; Latorre-Lázaro, 2022), and the need for the digitization of content for dissemination through the web and social networks.

In this context, European regional public media have special relevance owing to the public services they provide in a local environment that serves multi-profile audiences. Their mission and positioning require a review of and an adaptation to the demands of new audiences in a stage of media convergence (Túñez-López; Campos-Freire; Rodríguez-Castro, 2021).

Table 3. Main ideas concerning innovation and digitization obtained during the interviews

Radio-television	Main ideas expressed regarding innovation management and the digitization process
<i>France TV</i> (France)	It is not strategic, for the moment linear TV prevails in regional media.
<i>France 3</i> (France)	The digitization process is focused on making multimedia content.
<i>France TV General</i> (France)	It is a continuous process, although in the public media the audience is much larger and the pace is slow.
<i>EITB</i> (Spain)	Sociological studies have been increased, and the focus has been on content creation.
<i>RTVG</i> (Spain)	A big data system has been implemented to learn about viewers' habits, and a system of alliances to introduce content on VoD and IPTV platforms.
<i>RAI</i> (Italy)	The first concern of regional media is the digital environment and the adaptation of content.
<i>ORF</i> (Austria)	The key is to appeal to new audiences with products and services that interest them, such as events, e-games, music contests, etc.
<i>RTBF</i> (Belgium)	The processes of innovation and digitization have brought about a structural change.
<i>SVT</i> (Sweden)	Local newsrooms produce for online and national newsrooms are focused on linear TV, so innovation is not a determining factor in regional media.
<i>YLE</i> (Finland)	The innovation process has been addressed by shifting resources to the platforms.
<i>HR, RBB</i> (Germany)	The main strategy in the area of innovation is focused on the development of a proprietary VoD platform. This process has taken 2 years.
<i>RTV</i> (The Netherlands)	TV content on <i>YouTube</i> has to be prioritized. Linear television is unimportant in the current format.
<i>NRK</i> (Norway)	Innovation and digitization processes respond to the need to develop a new media ecosystem.
<i>RTVS</i> (Slovakia)	Innovation and digitization processes are oriented toward the development of the web.
<i>RTVSLO</i> (Slovenia)	The main strategy in the area of innovation is focused on the development of a proprietary VoD platform.
<i>RTS</i> (Serbia)	We need to move television content to social media and <i>YouTube</i> .
<i>HRT</i> (Croatia)	The main innovation strategy is oriented toward generating a multimedia environment.
<i>MTVA</i> (Hungary)	DK/NA

Source: interview results.

In the approach to the processes of innovation and digitization, each of the media interviewed has provided different points of view. However, given their role as regional public media, there is a general coincidence in the answers that demonstrates the lack of economic resources to deal with these processes and the dependence on an audience with an older age profile. Within this generality, each medium opts for different solutions to face the pressure exerted by SVoD platforms on linear television.

“ New professional profiles demanded by media companies must be multifaceted ”

Most of the managers interviewed (13 out of 18), indicated that their channel has a specific innovation department, which in some cases is cross-sectional in relation to other departments, such as content or information technology (IT), or are departments that are recognized as innovation departments, though their main task remains focused on digitization and not innovation (called “new media departments” or similar nomenclatures). Likewise, four of the broadcasters in the sample do not have a department of this type.

Most regional broadcasters agree that linear regional television continues to maintain a status of necessity owing to the profile of their audiences and the nature of their public and local services, but the reality of media convergence and new consumption formulas are imposing themselves on traditional logic and development.

In general terms, there are three different approaches to the strategy followed in the area of innovation: the development of video on demand (VoD) platforms or proprietary multimedia environments (*YLE* in Finland, *HR* and *RBB* in Germany, *NRK* in Norway, *RTVS* in Slovakia, *RTVSLO* in Slovenia, and *HRT* in Croatia), the adaptation of content for different media and formats focused on the web and social networks (*France 3* from France, *EITB* from Spain, *RAI* from Italy, *ORF* from Austria, *RTV* from the Netherlands, and *RTS* from Serbia), and lastly, the consideration of these processes as secondary due to their slowness and the prevalence of linear television among their current audiences (*France TV* from France and *SVT* from Sweden).

The media that are focused on building their own platforms understand that this is the formula that allows them to move between current audiences and new demands without losing the essence of linear television. This idea is directly related to the approach of content adaptation. As *France 3* states:

“[...] 10 years ago, journalists worked on news for the television format, today they must adapt the information for other formats. The pressure comes, above all, from social media”

This opinion, shared by more interviewees, is key to understanding the pressure exerted by the constant presence of and updating required by social networks, which is the point of connection with new audiences. In the case of *ORF* (Austria), for example, the need for content to be not only adapted but also attractive to new audiences is recognized. This involves being open to new trends such as e-games or the transposition from TV event to successful programs such as music competition reality shows to social networks. According to *NRK* (Norway), at this point it is crucial to build a new logic for formats that responds to current audiovisual consumption formulas.

Interestingly, *RTVG* (Spain) is working on a two-pronged approach, developing its own over the top (OTT) service and using innovation to get to know its users better, while ensuring young audiences access its own content by introducing them to already consolidated platforms.

However, many of the interviewees emphasize that the pressure of VoD platforms or digital environments is not considered a problem at the regional level, as it covers other needs. Although evolution is something strategic, in the national media it is a matter of greater relevance. Although the aging of audiences and their general decline are significant effects for linear television, it is also true that the regional media fulfill other functions at informational, cultural, linguistic, and emotional levels in the connection they have with their communities.

4. Organization and structure of newsrooms in their adaptation to the digital environment

As was pointed out in the theoretical framework and in the results already presented, the current media environment calls for necessary changes, such as the adaptation of information to new formats from social networks. This new reality has brought with it changes in the way of producing content that, inevitably, entail a revision of the necessary skills the professional working in media needs, with a dichotomy between multifunctionality and specialization (**Salaverria; Martínez-Costa, 2021**).

Starting from this premise, once the question of whether to have an innovation department has been resolved, the definition of the department and the number of employees offers very different answers: from very large teams of more than 30 people (*RTSLO*, Slovenia), to smaller ones of between 2 and 4 professionals. In other cases, the exact number of people occupying these positions is not known and they are identified with other interdisciplinary positions such as community managers (*France 3*, France) or technical or computer engineers (*SVT*, Sweden).

Consequently, it is clear from these answers that structural change, although not already implemented or in progress, will be crucial in the future due to the demands of dynamics and the form of content production, which is changing according to the standards of what linear television demands. In this sense, all the interviewees agreed that the gene-

ralized demand is for young professional profiles whose skills in the digital environment, knowledge of trends and language in social networks, and ability to adapt classic content to these formats are more important and relevant than their previous work experience.

Media of *Circom* network see it as necessary and strategic to develop innovation processes in the context of digitization

One of the most interesting processes has been the approach of *RTBF* in Belgium, which, although it does not currently have a proper innovation department, understood the need for structural change at the time and worked for two years with an innovation area until the necessary changes were implemented. In addition, while in the past the newsroom sections were focused on the media (TV, radio, web, etc.), today the organization works on the basis of content with multidisciplinary professional profiles.

In spite of these needs conveyed by most of the managers interviewed, there is also a drawback pointed out by several of the respondents, namely the lack of unity or definition in this demand for new professional profiles –no one is clear about what training they should have, whether only digital skills are important or editorial skills as well, or if these new incorporations should aim at more specific knowledge such as data journalism, work with artificial intelligence, or have a deep understanding of the algorithmic reality of each network or platform. This is where the conflict between required knowledge, ability for specialization or multifunctionality, and the youth of the professionals who are considered suitable for these innovation and digitization departments becomes apparent.

5. Disinformation management

One of the areas that has most concerned the media and governments in recent years is the management of disinformation. Moreover, since the Covid-19 health crisis, this information scourge has increased exponentially. If it was already an affront to democratic systems owing to the massive circulation on social networks, the recent pandemic has increased the vulnerability of the people, given the proliferation of false information in a field as delicate as that of health (Brennen *et al.*, 2020; Fontenla-Pedreira; Rodríguez-Martelo, 2021; Costa-Sánchez; López-García, 2020).

The problem of disinformation being something of special relevance in the public media as well as being related to the areas of innovation and digitization has led to the outline of the second block of interviews conducted, which were focused on the policies, resources, and strategies for verification and the fight against fake news as applied in each European regional media consulted.

Just as in the management of innovation, there are no differences in digitization processes nor in the configuration of new newsrooms that lead to a division according to the models of Hallin and Mancini (2004). In the case of disinformation management, it is relevant to note this division as key regarding the impact of disinformation in the media.

This issue acquires great relevance and concern in the Mediterranean or polarized pluralist model as seen through the media interviewed from France, Spain, and Italy. Though it is identified as an active problem, it also has different approaches. In the case of the Northern European or democratic corporatist model, which includes the countries of Austria, Belgium, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Germany, and The Netherlands, it is not considered a relevant problem since the control over it is constant and strategic. This is due to there being a cause–effect relationship defined by the low circulation of disinformation combined with a comprehensive and rigorous approach to eradicating the problem through various initiatives.

An issue shared by the media and countries interviewed is the lack of resources and the low incidence of this phenomenon at the regional level, so much so that only three of them (16%) have a specific department for the detection of disinformation and verification. However, the question of the level at which disinformation has the most effect is contradictory, since the consistency in the answers does indeed show that it is at the regional level, and when the issue becomes more developed, many media point out that much of the false information that reaches the national level is generated in local or regional environments and that this has a cross-disciplinary nature.

By pooling the responses of all the media consulted, three fundamental ideas in the fight against disinformation (contrast of information, literacy, and development of proprietary tools) and two general issues in the approach to verification strategies (journalistic work and collaboration with third parties as verification initiatives) were identified together in the strategic approach to the problem.

Table 4. Main anti-disinformation and fact-checking strategies adopted by the *Circom* network European regional media

Main strategies adopted to combat disinformation	Verification of information: Public denouncement, consultation of original source, and collaboration with the audience.
	Training and media literacy.
	Development of proprietary tools.
Verification strategies	Assumed as something intrinsic to journalistic work without a specific strategy for the current reality.
	Collaboration and joint financing of verifiers for common use.

Source: interview results.

In the countries associated with the Northern European model, the results show that great importance is attached to media literacy and training for the general population as a fundamental pillar in the fight against disinformation. Verification is approached via joint initiatives financed by several media for the common use of verified information, as is seen particularly in the cases of Norway, Sweden, or Belgium, for example, with initiatives such as *Faky* or *Faktisk*, verification tools co-financed by several media and/or institutions and available to citizens as well.

On the other hand, in the countries associated with the Mediterranean model, no specific strategies are identified. The interviewees recognized the urgency of applying containment procedures, but there is a dependence on the national media (*France 3* and *France TV*, France), as well as neither having established a systematization of the process (*EITB* or *RTVG*, Spain) nor proposing a committed approach based on collaboration with third parties, universities, and professionals (*RAI*, Italy).

Beyond the countries classified by **Hallin** and **Mancini** (2004), similar responses were obtained from the PSM in Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Slovakia, and Hungary regarding these two aspects. *HRT* (Croatia), *RTS* (Serbia), and *RTVS* (Slovakia) did not comment on the existence of an action policy beyond journalistic work in which contrasting sources are considered inherent to the profession. Hungary did not take a position or answer any questions regarding disinformation. The case of *RTVSLO* (Slovenia) is of interest, as the government has developed a program to tackle disinformation jointly with the media, and their concern lies in how false information is able to disrupt the media agenda.

6. Conclusions

The *Circom* network, which brings together European regional media, is an object of study of great interest, as it represents local linear television, establishing partnerships and networking in local areas where its presence is key in the development of culture, language, and public services for their respective communities.

The research objectives address this situation and the different trends in the public media's future (GO) that are under increasing pressure from international VoD platforms and digital ecosystems (SO1, SO2), as well as their strategy in the management of the global problem that is disinformation (SO3). These issues are related to the media's ability to adapt to a changing, digital environment that is constantly bidding for the attention of young audiences without affecting current audiences with an older age range.

The professionals interviewed, who are representatives of the media and have a managerial or highly professional profile, agreed on the need to establish innovation and digitization processes as a priority in the mandatory updating of radio and television, but when it comes to defining specific issues, the results are very different and there is no consistency nor clear definition of these concepts.

In some cases, the organization chart of an audiovisual company is understood as a structural change, while in others it is understood as a process of adapting content to new formats and media that seek multimedia and multitarget presence. In addition, for some media, the fundamental issue lies in meeting the demands of new audiences and their consumption habits.

The analysis proposed in SO1 has revealed the diversity of strategies and beliefs regarding the ideal approach in the current context, which can be summarized in two issues: the creation of proprietary platforms as a means to compete with SVoDs, and the adaptation of content to different formats to ensure a presence on social networks and attention to new demands.

In this regard, the internal structure of the newsrooms is experiencing two main difficulties: the lack of resources at the regional level and the need to overhaul professional profiles with young and multidisciplinary talents.

However, the ideas stated by the interviewees regarding SO2 are in contradiction with the realities of the profession. The incorporation of young workers moves in a dichotomy between the specific knowledge required to meet current demands and the ambivalence required in the digital and journalistic environment. The generational replacement of the workforce is proposed as a solution to the pressure of platforms and social networks on linear television, but there is no agreement as to what is required of these new professionals.

Lastly, as a conclusion of SO3 –the management of disinformation– most of the interviewees resent the fact that there are not enough resources to manage it at the regional level and that the issue of false information becomes a problem when its effects rise to the national or international level. The ability of disinformation to bend the media and political agenda generates concern, so it is essential to link these media with their audiences.

Finally, it is concluded that the results obtained concerning innovation management and digitization processes (GO) do not show significant differences between countries, according to the classification of **Hallin** and **Mancini** (2004), but this pattern does intervene when dealing with disinformation, which has a different importance and focus according to the Mediterranean model (high interference and lack of specific systematized strategies) and the Northern European model (low circulation, literacy, and well-established verification systems).

The results obtained from these interviews leave many questions open for discussion, such as the restructuring approach of linear television and the role played by regional media in this process. This is an opportunity to continue with avenues of research regarding the *Circom* network and how its members deal with change in the current media paradigm.

7. References

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