

Towards the Liberation from Capitalist Business Models: The De-capitalisation of Journalism and Communication Studies

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Abstract: This paper introduces a perspective on media companies, journalism, and Communication Studies beyond capitalism. It starts from a critique of German Communication Studies that has neglected the critical, Marxian-inspired analysis of the relationship of the media and capitalism. The article introduces elements of a Critique of the Political Economy of the Media. It discusses foundations of the liberation of the media from capitalist business models. The author in this context introduces the notion of the decapitalisation of the media, the rollback and abolition of the logic of capital in the media economy and society. He shows what role decapitalisation could play in journalism, communication studies, and academic publishing.

Keywords: capitalism, journalism, Critique of the Political Economy of the Media, de-capitalisation, academic publishing

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1. Introduction

In German-speaking Communication Studies, theoretical and analytical approaches that are critical of capitalism and based on the academic writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels as well as the critical developments based on their works are still largely ignored. This neglect is incomprehensible insofar as, in view of the real excesses and crises of capitalism as a globally dominant economic order and societal formation, academic publications focused on the "New Reading of Marx" (see, for example, Altvater 2012; Heinrich 2004; Hoff 2009; Reichelt 2008) or the approach of *After the New Reading of Marx* (Bonefeld and Heinrich 2011) have been published in other social sciences. This abstinence from Marx 2008 is also astonishing because media communication is almost without exception organised along capitalist lines and as such fulfils elementary functions for capitalist society¹.

¹ De-capitalisation does not mean expropriation, but active liberation from the capitalist mode of production and the commodification of media products and the commodity form in general.

2. Communication Studies in the Normative-Political Theory Race

Although a shift away from Soviet Marxism, which was categorised as dogmatic, towards a pluralistic “Western Marxism” (Elbe 2008) has been observed worldwide for several decades, the justified fear of being considered a Marxist (Knoche 2005, 411–414), which originated in the 1970s (with professional bans on Marxists in Germany), seems to continue to have an effect in Communication Studies. An orientation of communication theory and research on Marx’s theoretical framework (Marx 1867, 1885, 1894, 1962/1985), as was briefly the case in Germany at the beginning of the 1970s (see, for example, Dröge and Modelmog 1972; Holzer 1973; Hund 1976), is still seen, especially by young academics, as hindrance or damaging to academic career ambitions.

Due to the current hegemony and power distribution in the academic system and society, analyses critical of capitalism with a radical reformist perspective have very little to no use or exchange-value for the state, economy, and society, i.e., for academics and students (see figure 1 below). In this context, “abstinence from Marx” is an expression of the (political) conviction conveyed or imposed by the academic mainstream that “Marxist” journalism research critical of capitalism is neither academically justified nor opportune.

This avoidance strategy is rather detrimental to a possible gain in knowledge – especially on the topic of “business models” – especially as young academics are instead driven to a normative-political theory race in the cyclical ups and downs of a multitude of “theories of journalism” (Löffelholz 2004; Scholl 2013). For example, they must be careful not to miss out on books such as “Journalism Theory: Next Generation” (*Journalismustheorie: Next Generation*; Altmeppen, Hanitzsch & Schlüter 2007) in the maelstrom of a partial departure from the previously dominant Systems Theory that has been mixed with Radical Constructivism. It is advisable to follow the leaps from journalism as a Luhmannian autopoietic system to Ortmann, Sydow and Türk’s organisation and Giddensian structuration theory with various Bourdieuan fields and types of capital, i.e., to be able to connect to Journalism Studies, where recently a “journalism as an organisational field of action”, as a “figure of thought”, and “recognised body of thought” (Altmeppen and Arnold 2013, 8; see Altmeppen, Greck and Kössler 2013) was recently discovered.

In view of the “paradoxes of Journalism Studies” (Pörksen, Loosen & Scholl 2008) discovered somewhat earlier, with a constantly changing “differentiation/de-differentiation cycle of system-theoretical journalism research” (Loosen 2008, 597–601) with varied phases of differentiation, coupling, de-differentiation, and de-de-differentiation of an alleged journalism system, a quick and easy (finished) rethink from difference to integration, from system-environment differences to co-orientated organisations, is called for. These are approaches in which the fetishised ideal of journalism’s autonomy is claimed to be real in the manner of the humanities and idealism. Objectively, this illuminates both a petty-bourgeois journalistic ideology of status and a publisher’s ideology of harmony (for criticism of this, see Jansen 1983; Zeuner 1972).

In earlier years, Altmeppen had introduced “economic factors” into the system-theoretical approaches abstinent from Economics, emphasising the dominance of an economic influence on “journalism” by means of “commercialisation”². He noted: “In this way, economic factors gain considerable influence on publishing decisions. The specific economic mechanisms of the media, their dependence on mass appeal and

² However, the terms economisation and commercialisation fall short; capitalisation is essential (see Knoche 2001, 2021).

advertising, require the adaptation of journalistic goals to economic success. No media companies can escape this spiral. Journalism simply cannot afford the freedom of not being a business”³ (Altmeppen 2000, 239).

However, the great desideratum of Systems Theory and also of classical Economics is not addressed here: the real connection between Economics and Political Science as Political Economy. In order to safeguard their economic interests and in the overall economic and societal interest in legitimising and stabilising the capitalist formation of society, capitalist owners of media companies pursue political interests to the highest degree, which are reflected in journalistic media production as a powerful determination of “content”. In accordance with these economic and political interests of the owners of capital, journalists are selected and controlled according to strict criteria.

On the basis of the homogeneity of interests created in this way, journalistic products are produced by dependent journalists in the awareness of “professional” autonomy. Journalists who had not developed this awareness of autonomy and were not prepared to represent their interests in this way were occasionally dismissed in earlier times (for examples, see the documentation in: Berliner Autorenkollektiv Presse 1972: 88–146; Zeuner 1972). Nowadays, such dismissals for political reasons are hardly necessary due to the careful selection and control of journalists and the resulting far-reaching homogeneity of interests and awareness between media owners and journalists. Instead, journalists are “only” dismissed for purely economic reasons, in particular legitimised by an alleged “newspaper crisis” and the lack of new business models.

Basically, however, journalism researchers of all generations can be reassured “in the struggle for the prerogative of interpretation”. For they are assured, with analogies to the Starship *Enterprise*: “The next generation has no intention of breaking with the ‘old’ [...]. However, instead of picking up the obvious threads of well-worn theories, the novelty of this volume lies simply in approaching journalism research using hand-picked terms. [...] Most of the journalism researchers who have their say in this volume therefore build on existing theoretical threads and interweave them with new or rediscovered ideas. In this way, the ‘next’ generation is to some extent also the old one” (Hanitzsch, Altmeppen & Schlüter 2007, 8).

In the “sorting of these theories” (Scholl 2013, 168), everything that was unrealistically separated in earlier theorisations must be painstakingly brought back together to form “integrative social theories”: in particular the micro, meso, and macro levels as well as the actor, action, and structure, for which a Giddensian “recursive duality of action and structure” or a Schimankian⁴ “actor-structure dynamic” (Scholl 2013, 179, 181) is now used. However, the fact that Marx’s theory, categorised as a “normative critical theory” (Scholl 2013, 183), can be considered an elaborated integrative social theory is still deliberately overlooked, whereby the economic, political, and historical perspective of Historical Materialism is often neglected by sociological theories is also relevant.

³ Journalism was thus formerly declared to be a trade (business).

⁴ Uwe Schimank is a German sociologist and social theorist who has tried to enhance Luhmann’s Systems Theory by a focus on actors.

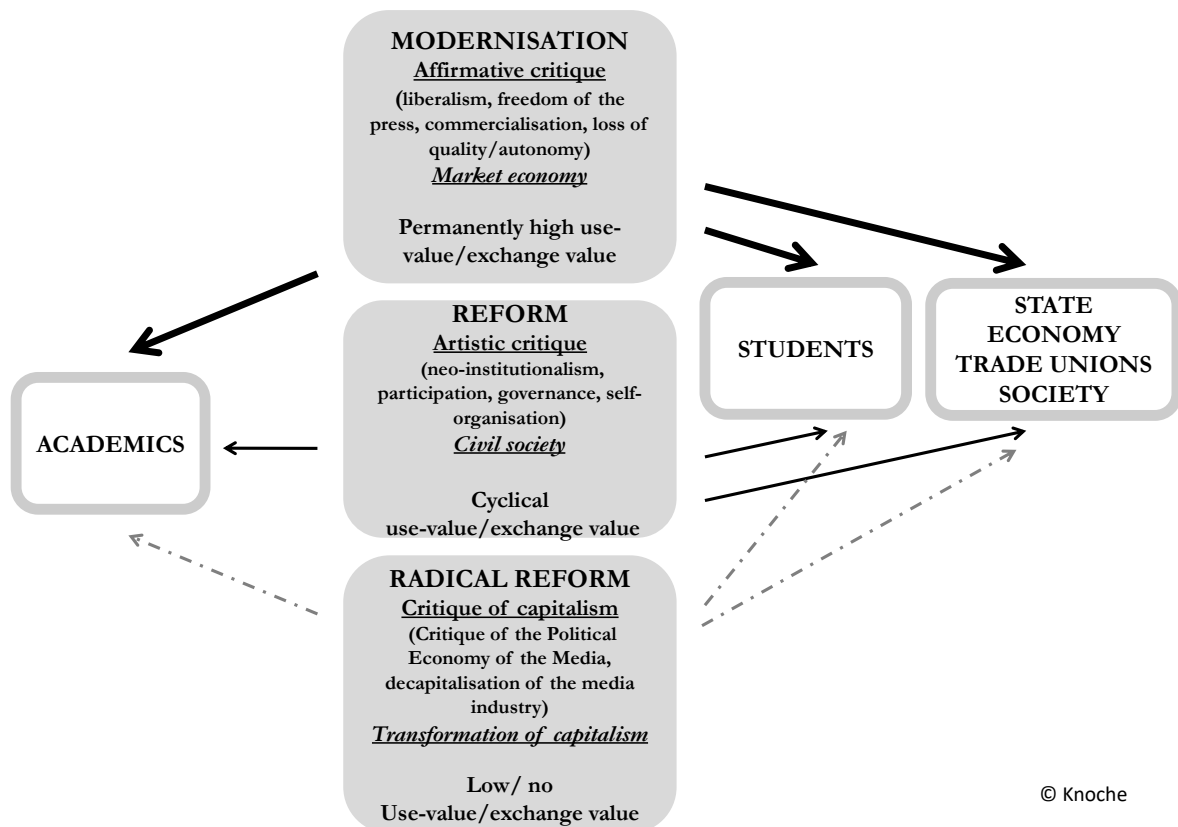


Figure 1: Use and exchange-values in the normative-political theory race

The debate on the funding of journalism also reveals divergences in the theory-race and its normative-political foundations, its various theoretical concepts and the associated differences in their use-value and exchange values (figure 1). One example of this is how Marie Luise Kiefer (2011a) was attacked in her cautious neoinstitutional-economic search for a “third way” of funding journalism. On the one hand, her approach was questioned by the self-confessed Schumpeterian “creative destroyer” Stephan Russ-Mohl (2009), who stigmatised some of her proposals as “delicate, perhaps downright dangerous to democracy” (Russ-Mohl 2011, 403) and summarily identified the proposed third way as a dead end. On the other hand, the obvious state-phobic Rudolf Stöber (2011) branded Kiefer’s search as “dangerous” and also as “endangering democracy”. In her rejection of misunderstandings, reinterpretations, insinuations, misinterpretations, and accusations, Kiefer noted, among other things, a pronounced “control pessimism” among her critics (Kiefer 2011b).

Frank Lobigs, who recognises that the topic of funding journalism has always been “omnipresent” and in recent times “no longer just an important research subject, but rather the fateful topic of journalism and journalism research per se” (Lobigs 2013, 53), formulates the dictum that Kiefer’s proposal “must be viewed soberly as politically/legally hopeless and therefore unfortunately unrealistic” (Lobigs 2013, 69). Presumably due to his theoretical proximity to Kiefer (Media Economics, Institutional Economics), he asserts that he has “sympathy for this proposal” and that Kiefer’s contribution points in a “sensible direction”, but his own considerations and proposals are characterised by a pragmatic position that is realistically adapted to the current real power relations in society.

3. Theoretical Elements of a Critique of the Political Economy of the Media

An essential characteristic of Marx's Critique of Political Economy (cf. Marx 1867, 1885, 1894, 1962/1989) is that, as a critique of capitalism, it is both a critique of science and a critique of social practice, combined with a critique of knowledge and ideology. Building on this, a further developed Critique of the Political Economy of the Media as a unity of a historically oriented material analysis of forms, structures, actions, actors, processes, and functions can fulfil the claim of a foundational critical theory of society applied to Communication Studies. It thus enables a theory-based empirical analysis and explanation of media production, distribution, and consumption in the context of society.

In contrast to dominant ways of thinking in terms of economic calculation and instrumental reason (Media Management), economic-journalistic value/norm dichotomies (see Heinrich 2010), or constructivist-systemtheoretical binary codes (see, for example, Löffelholz 2004; Pörksen, Loosen & Scholl 2008), a Critique of the Political Economy of the Media (see Knoche 2001, 2002, 2021) is characterised by thinking in terms of antagonistic contradictions (of interests) (for example between capital and labour, productive forces and relations of production) and dialectical contradictions. This specific way of thinking is determined by the certainty that "all science would be superfluous if the form of appearance of things directly coincided with their essence" (Marx 1894, 956). The media specificity of a Critique of Political Economy is primarily justified by the fact that the media industry, as an integral part of capitalist society, fulfils additional macroeconomic (advertising/consumption) and political-cultural-ideological functions for society as a whole, over and above the rest of the economy.

4. The Capitalist Mode of Production in the Media Industry

Limiting the question of "business models" to the discussion of how media companies can achieve the highest possible revenues, in reality profits, is not academically justifiable. As illustrated by the example of the "business model" of ancillary copyright, the "press publishers interested in their continued existence" (Buschow 2012, 40) are concerned with the continued existence of the "legitimacy of the institutional arrangement", in other words: the claim to dominance of capitalist media companies with commodity-like production and distribution of journalism, and furthermore with securing the dominance of capitalist-organised "professional" journalism for the future.

What is therefore needed first and foremost is a deeper insight into the basic elements of the capitalist mode of production that also prevails in the media industry in order to be able to assess what opportunities exist to de-capitalise journalism with the help of alternative funding and changed legitimation. Deeper insights into the capitalist-influenced object of investigation, the media industry, can be gained less through a "structuration-theoretically integrated neoinstitutionalism as a research guiding perspective" (Buschow 2012, 22–36) than through (transformation) theories critical of capitalism, such as those presented by Kiefer (2004) as the development from a Fordist to a post-Fordist capitalism with corresponding transformations of the accumulation regime and the mode of regulation of a "new capitalism".

An essential feature for characterising different societal formations is the respective dominant, yet fundamentally changeable historical mode of production as a dialectical, contradictory unity of productive forces and relations of production, which are decisive for the way of working and living as well as for the distribution and power relations in a society. This is why "thinking the mode of production" (Haug 2003, 27–42) is also an

immensely beneficial basis for academic knowledge in the field of media production, distribution, and consumption.

In the capitalist mode of production shown schematically in figure 2⁵, a distinction is made between constant and variable structural elements (see Knoche 2013, 92–93). The actions of media companies are determined by the production conditions as largely constant structural elements:

- the constitutionally protected hereditary private property of capital owners in the means of production, thus in fixed capital and also in productivity growth;
- derived from this, the relations of production with the power of private capital owners to dispose of the means of production and wage- or salary-dependent labour, including journalists;
- the right to determine the sole production targets and the corresponding use of the productive forces (means of production and labour as commodities); and
- the appropriation of products as commodity-like results of labour and the accumulation of capital and profits achieved through them;
- the legitimisation and stabilisation of the capitalist mode of production for media companies by the state through law, “ideological flank protection”, indirect/direct subsidies, and advertising contracts.

The more variable, fundamentally crisis-prone structural elements explain the different behaviour and actions with different accompanying “crisis cries” about “business model problems”. These include:

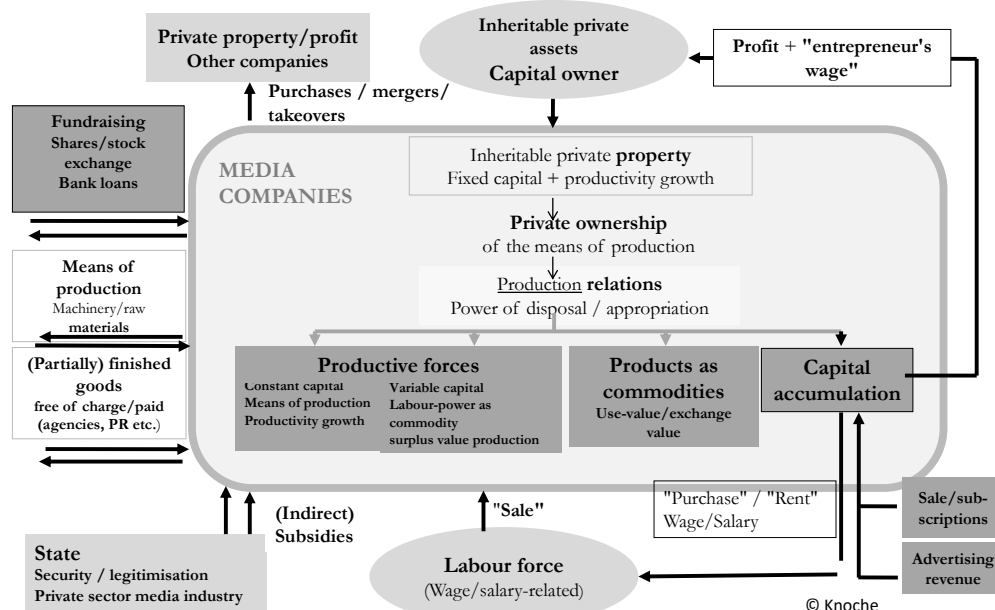


Figure 2: The capitalist mode of production in the media industry, based on Knoche (2013, 92)

⁵ The terms mode of production, productive forces, relations of production, labour power as commodities, products as commodities, surplus-value production, and capital accumulation were explicated by Marx (1867, 1885, 1894, 1962/1989).

- the productive forces as constant capital (means of production in the form of machines and raw materials with productivity growth) and as variable capital the labour force with surplus-value production;
- the production of commodities on the basis of free, sponsored or paid partial finished goods from agencies, PR, etc. as the production of use and exchange-values;
- raising money (shares/stock exchange, bank loans);
- the realisation of capital accumulation through advertising revenue, the sale of commodities and other revenues.

Characteristic of the “business model” of media companies is the “capital relationship” as a unity of labour and valorisation processes under the sole control of capital owners or the managers, editors-in-chief, etc. as their vicarious agents. Consequently, journalists are subject to the effects of the capitalist mode of production in the same way as all other dependent workers and constantly reproduce the capitalist relations of production with their labour and thus also the corresponding property and distribution relations in society.

5. Economic and Political-Ideological Goals of Commodity Production in the Media Industry

Journalism is clearly recognisable as a real and significant line of business for private sector media companies, regardless of whether it is defiantly and provocatively claimed, against previous better judgement (Altmeyden 2000). For example, Altmeyden (2012, 49; 2014) claims that journalism is not a business model, will never become one, and never was one. It is puzzling how the clarification of the frame of reference of journalism and media can arrive at the following strange view: “From an organisational perspective, however, media companies are more like journalism’s ‘nearest neighbours’. What journalists produce is distributed by the media, but media also convey entertainment and advertising that are not produced by journalists” (Altmeyden and Arnold 2013, 8).

Such views obscure what Zeuner, for example, as one of several *Spiegel* journalists dismissed because of their fight for co-determination, has analytically established as practical experience for the basic professional constellation of journalists: “As wage earners they work for the private profit of an entrepreneur, as writers they come up against taboos determined by capital interests, as producers of commodities in the consciousness industry they are expected to value the saleability of their information and opinions on the capitalist market more highly than demands for consistent analysis or loyalty to truth and conviction” (Zeuner 1972, 18).

If the aforementioned artificial separations were not presented as a theoretical analysis of the current situation, but rather as a socio-political goal to be strived for by Kiefer (2011a) that wants to detach journalism from private commercial media companies worthy of criticism, they could point the way forward in the discussion about alternative funding and organisational models for journalism. In their current form, however, these approaches objectively serve to ideologically conceal the real business and power relations in the media industry and society.

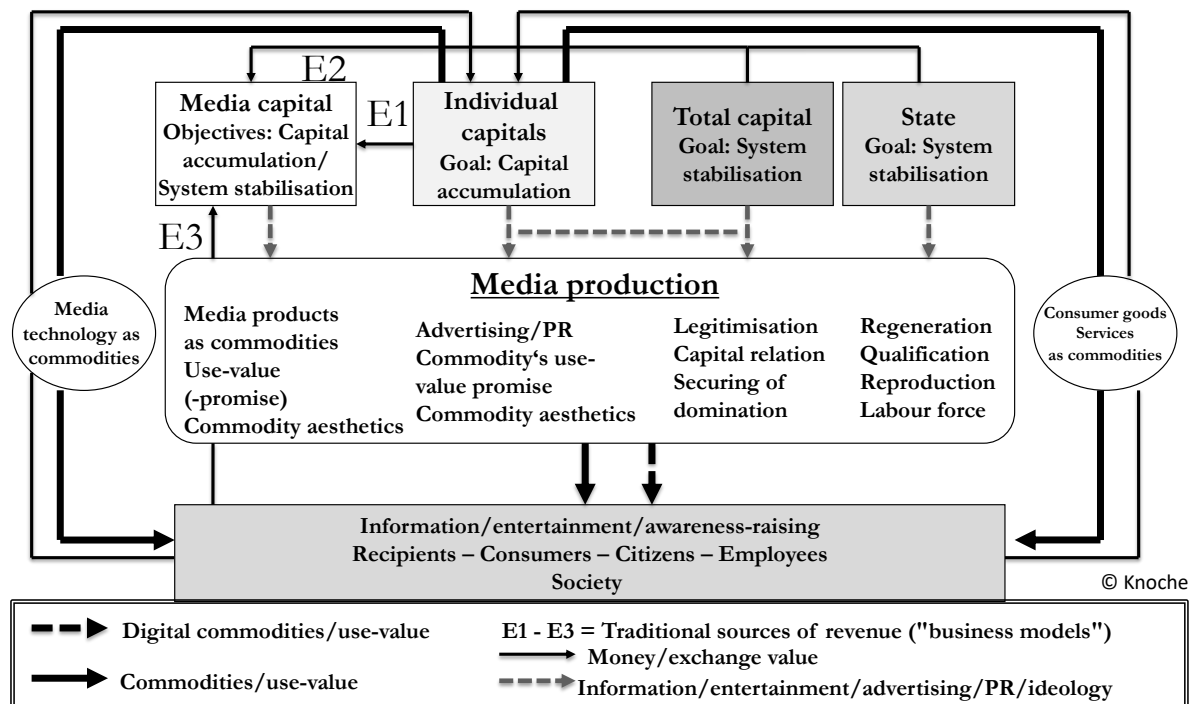


Figure 3: The economic and political-ideological goals of capitalist media production, based on Knoche (2002, 106)

As shown schematically in detail in figure 3, media production is a unique business model in that media companies not only pursue their own capital accumulation and stabilisation goals as individual capitals like companies in other sectors/industries. Rather, they tend to support the capital accumulation goals of all other individual capitals as well as the stabilisation goals of capital as a whole (represented by industry, business, and employers' associations) and the state. Accordingly, three main sources of revenue ("business models") in various versions form the basis of the media production sector: revenue from advertising by individual capitals (E1 in figure 3), revenue from advertising and from indirect and direct subsidies from total capital and the state (E2), and, to a much lesser extent, revenue from sales to media consumers (E3).

In the context of a Critique of the Political Economy of the Media, a distinction is made between various economic and political-ideological functional areas or determinations of media production (see Holzer 1973, 129–137; Hund 1976, 175–193; Knoche 2002, 105–107). The quality of media products is optimal in the interest of capital accumulation if it has an optimal "use-value" for the realisation of four main goals:

- Capital accumulation of media companies as individual capitals by designing media products as commodities with (promised) use-values for potential buyers of media products
- The support of the accumulation of capital by various individual capitals by promoting (advertising/PR) the circulation of commodities and the realisation of the exchange-value of investment and consumer goods and services as commodities
- The legitimisation of the capital relationship as an ideological safeguard of rule and power (system stabilisation) for capital as a whole, in particular for media capital, and for the state. This also means that, if necessary, partial de-legitimisation and system de-stabilisation are pursued in a way that promotes the goal
- Support/supplementation in the qualification ("education") regeneration, and reproduction of the workforce as well as the ideological reproduction of the capital

relationship (legitimisation of the employer/ employee relationship as “natural”) to stabilise the system.

6. Liberation from Capitalist Business Models

In the context of the current discussion about capitalist business models, it makes sense to think about how journalism and Communication Studies can be freed from business model problems on the basis of an analysis that is critical of capitalism. It could already have a liberating effect if the fear fuelled by media companies and academics that the end of quality journalism is imminent or that the press and books are dying out completely disappeared (for a critical view, see also Meier 2012b).

6.1. Liberation from “Cries of Crisis” and from Thinking in Terms of Apparent Causalities

First of all, the pseudo-causal character of the dominant “crisis discourse” propagated by academics must be exposed. Altmeppeen has also criticised “absurd, even *grotesque chains of argumentation*” (Altmeppeen 2012, 37, italics in the original) to justify savings and redundancies as “hard-core savings and profitability measures”. Pseudo-causalities are constructed in the following way by arguing that:

Because there is a “newspaper crisis” (due to the decline in sales and advertising in the print sector),

- caused by the growth of “free culture” (consumers’ unwillingness to pay) and
- “the Internet” (the Internet as a player!), there are “funding problems” of journalism.
- Because of the risk of journalism losing its autonomy and quality, it is necessary and unavoidable to implement measures such as,
- cost-saving rationalisation (such as dismissals of journalists, discontinuation of newspapers),
- the saving of business models with “paywalls” on the Internet and
- ancillary copyrights, hard disc levies, subsidies and the like for the support of media companies.

Lobigs reproduces these bogus arguments in a similar way. In the “lively dispute between the arguments about the best ways to financially secure independent and socially relevant journalism” (Lobigs 2013, 69), he thus orientates himself in principle towards the interests of capitalist media companies. This partly contradicts his findings, according to which the private sector funding of journalism leads to a fundamental market failure in terms of journalistic product quality, and the private sector press is generally characterised by concentration and rationalisation measures (Lobigs 2013, 59–60, 65–69). His way of thinking is obviously determined by two empirically unproven problem assumptions: that there are serious funding problems for journalism in media companies and that the safeguarding of the assumed quality of journalistic media products is severely jeopardised due to these funding problems.

In reality, it is not a question of funding problems, but at best of profit maximisation problems, a distinction that is essential for academic analysis. Even the assumption of profit maximisation problems is not justified for almost all media companies; it is no coincidence that it is not substantiated by the media companies. Lamentable declines in circulation and (advertising) sales in the print sector do not prove that “journalism” is

therefore no longer financially viable⁶. On the contrary: documentations on the newspaper market (see Röper 2012a), the consumer magazine market (see Vogel 2012b), multimedia provider and offer structures in media regions (see Röper 2012b), and “online as a business area and distribution channel of the press industry” (Vogel 2012a) prove an uninterruptedly prospering, highly concentrated, internationally active media industry. Accordingly, the much-vaunted quality of journalistic media products is at risk due to the effects of the profit maximisation strategies of media companies and the restructuring measures used for this purpose (see Knoche 2013, 95–102).

Based on his assumptions, Lobigs (2013, 69) describes “politically more feasible reform initiatives” as worth considering, which are almost congruent with the catalogue of demands of private sector press companies: abolition of VAT for newspapers, subsidisation of newspaper distribution, relaxation of press antitrust law, tax incentives for foundation models, reallocation of revenue from the budget levy. In his opinion, the fact that foundation models and targeted state subsidies for print journalism have no tradition in Germany should change. A fundamental difference can be seen here to Kiefer’s position, which, on the basis of an institutional economic theory of the commons and professional sociological considerations, proposed public funding support for (new) journalism “linked to its autonomy through professional development and self-organisation” (Kiefer 2011a, 19).

Such debates “raise the fundamental question of the extent to which commercial media groups, whose bottom line has always been more about profit than journalism and democracy, should also benefit from public funds” (Zwicky 2012b, 326). Puppis also names “the commercial institutionalisation of media organisations” (Puppis 2012, 298–299) as the trigger for a “media crisis” that he also assumes to exist. However, he also considers the state subsidisation of private commercial media companies in addition to “market funding” to be a suitable way of overcoming the crisis, referring to the practice that already exists in several European countries (see Puppis 2012, 305–307).

In contrast, Werner A. Meier (2012a) comes to the critical conclusion that state funding is not very effective with regard to the desired political goals of journalistic diversity and the political relevance of the subsidised press. On the contrary: “It must be feared that such structure-preserving funding measures, which are most likely to be politically enforced, are at the same time also those that are least likely to serve the safeguarding of journalistic diversity and the strengthening of democracy” (Meier 2012a, 135). He therefore cautiously poses the question of whether new organisational models could be conceived and clarified that could combine professional journalism and citizen journalism organised as co-operatives on the basis of a mixed funding regime of civil society, public, and state funding (see Meier 2012a, 141).

The business model of a media company is in reality by no means limited to “revenue models”, but also includes in particular the realisation of “cost reduction models”. Press publishers, for example, have been systematically and strategically pursuing such models in a permanent process in the areas of production, reproduction, and distribution since the 1970s on the basis of a radical transformation/restructuring of the productive forces (means of production and labour) (see Knoche 2013, 96–99). What is erroneously labelled a “newspaper crisis” or even a “media crisis” is nothing other than a capitalistically shaped, strategically oriented transformation process in the

⁶ The fact that the lack of validity of the data presented by the newspaper publishers meant that their “subsidy claims were without foundation” (Knoche and Zerdick 1974) could be empirically proven in an earlier phase of the alleged “newspaper crisis”.

media industry to secure the individual accumulation of capital in the competition between media owners (cf. Knoche 2013, 103–108).

The transformation process of the advertising industry also plays a central role here, which is also expressed in a strategic cross-media budget shift from print to online media. This also implies a shift to new (mobile) forms of advertising that are not tied to journalistic content (see Siegert et al. 2012, 174). In this context, it is not an expression of a crisis-like lack of new business models for media companies, but of the strategic use of different business models over time. At present, the most promising business model for the majority of media companies in a transitional phase is obviously to realise profitable advertising revenues with multiple content exploitations that complement the traditional, still lucrative “print business” via print and (mobile) online free offerings. So far, this has been achieved more with free offerings than with paid content. But the “paid content” business model that collects subscription fees is the more profitable one and is therefore increasingly being realised.

6.2. The De-capitalisation of Journalism

Academic considerations on non-capitalist forms of organisation and funding for journalistic production and distribution remain idealistic and voluntaristic as long as they do not take into account the real economically and politically secured power position of media corporations. To ensure that “alternatives do not die in beauty as mere utopias” (Zwicky 2012b, 329), the misguided assumption of a “media crisis” must first and foremost be avoided. On the one hand, the metaphor of a “media crisis” leads to proposals for combating the crisis that are “alien to the system”: state funding support for media companies. On the other hand, the “media crisis” can lead to illusionary “collapse theories”, according to which the downfall of the capitalist media industry is imminent and therefore “civil society citizen journalism” is easy to achieve.

The question is therefore to what extent theoretical “liberation movements” can realistically become practical for professional journalists or “citizen journalists” so that they can take action to drive forward a transformation of capitalist journalism into a non-profit, cost-covering professional online production.

Theoretically, the real conditions and associated possibilities shown in figure 4 form a suitable basis for a liberation from “business models”: On the basis of the progressive digitalisation of media production, distribution, and consumption and the associated radical reduction in costs for means of production and distribution as well as for production and distribution, a real utopia of transformation into a non-capitalist production of online journalism as partial de-capitalisation is possible.

Real preconditions

- Radical reduction in costs for the means of production, production, and distribution
- End of the structural monopoly in production/distribution ("gatekeeper") of capitalist media companies
- Delegitimisation and real "dispensability" of investors

Real opportunities for journalists

- Liberation from wage dependency and the power of disposal of capital-accumulating publishing families
- Partial "overriding" / overcoming of the capitalist mode of production
- Organisation of non-capitalist "editorial communities"
- Back to the origin: Augstein, Springer and Co. were originally only temporary licence holders, they became capitalist publishers with the help of the allied forces

But no "revolutionary" romanticism/euphoria/illusion

- Search for the "revolutionary subject" for non-profit journalism
- Search for real funding (cost-covering production/distribution)
- Real strength and power of capitalist media groups as "brands" in the transformation process of the media industry

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Figure 4: Conditions and opportunities for the de-capitalisation of journalism

Such a real utopia would have the advantage of achieving a structural change in the prevailing relations of production with the antagonism between capitalist owners of the means of production and wage-dependent or "free" labour, i.e., a radically liberating gain in autonomy. Above all, this would have the advantage that the content of journalistic production could be radically liberated from its commodity form. However, these advantages would not be achieved if, as is usually the case, liberation were limited only to participation within established media companies (co-determination, co-ownership), or even to new "start-ups" on the Internet without transformation into non-commercial, i.e., non-capitalist journalism.

This non-capitalist production is already being practised, albeit marginalised in "niche forms", e.g. by non-commercial radios (see Knoche 2003), and "professional" by the German daily newspaper *taz* (die tageszeitung) that is organised as a co-operative (see Zwicky 2012b, 323–326) and the same goes for the daily newspaper *nd* (Neues Deutschland). However, due to the real strength and power of capitalist media corporations, which actively shape the transformation process of the media industry as "brands", there is no reason for illusionary euphoria regarding a "revolutionary potential" (Puppis 2012, 300–301) in the form of citizen or lay journalism, blogs etc. for the realisation of de-capitalisation of the media industry.

Such "revolutionary" romanticism would be of little help, above all because, at least at present, neither active "revolutionary subjects" for non-profit-oriented professional alternative journalism nor active members of the phantom "civil society", which has also been much invoked in Communication Studies, are visible in the necessary strength that non-capitalist media would and could produce. It is therefore only of limited use to propose ideal new forms of funding without reflecting on their realisation possibilities in the context of the prevailing social power and distribution relations and the consciousness structures and activity potentials in a capitalist society determined by them.

Accordingly, in the context of the “vision of a civil society mode of institutionalisation” (Zwicky 2012a, 238) societal change is also recognised as a prerequisite for an alternative media order. Broad and successful civil society and political resistance to neoliberal capitalism is cited as a necessary condition for a “better” media order. This clear statement by a young researcher gives rise to hope for a liberation of Communication Studies from “business models”, especially as it is analytically stated: “Due to the embedding of the media in society’s power structure, overcoming the neoliberal institutionalisation mode of the media (which is largely controlled by the ruling class) presupposes overcoming neoliberalism (which is supported and driven by these same classes)” (Zwicky 2012a, 238)⁷.

However, since these statements are based on a very artificial idealtypical comparison of “Fordist and neoliberal modes of institutionalisation” (Zwicky 2012a, 125) and the overcoming of neoliberal capitalism is propagated as a prerequisite for a “better” media order, the question must be asked as to what “improvements” a non- or post-neoliberal capitalism, which is still a form of capitalism, could bring for the realisation of an alternative media order.

6.3. The De-capitalisation of Communication Studies

At least the liberation of Communication Studies from worrying about capitalist business model problems is already possible in reality, and not just theoretically as a de-capitalisation of thought and research. There are several active “liberation movements” in the academic field that can serve as role models. In the field of Communication Studies, for example, the open access online journal *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique* (<http://www.triple-c.at>; see also Fuchs and Mosco 2012) applies a non-commercial Creative Commons licence and is focused on the Critique of the Political Economy of the Media.

The ideal that has already been partially realised in practice is *Diamond Open Access publishing* (Fuchs and Sandoval 2013) without profit-oriented capitalist publishers (Knoche 2020). However, strong forces are standing in the way of realisation here too. For some time now, the state, the publishing industry, and established academia have been pursuing a powerful dual strategy: supporting the traditional book and journal trade in conjunction with online publications, which are offered by publishers for a fee and sometimes free of charge as a form of “hybrid⁸ open access”, provided they are funded by the state (libraries) with “fees” or author payments (“publication subsidies”), i.e., generate profits on the basis of double dipping⁹. The capitalisation of publishers’ open access academic publications is therefore already well-advanced far into the online sector, which makes de-capitalisation considerably more difficult.

^{1 7} This is a key “conclusion” of this dissertation, which was accepted in Zurich by Otfried Jarren and Werner A. Meier.

⁸ Hybrid open access, which is highly open to criticism, means that only individual articles in a fee-based academic ejournal that have been paid for by the authors or their institutions via high publication fees (APCs = Article Processing Charges, double dipping) are generally freely available in open access, while the other articles are not.

⁹ The highly criticisable double dipping means that in the hybrid open access business model for academic journals capitalist academic publishers are paid twice from taxpayers’ money: on the one hand by university libraries through subscription or licence fees, and on the other hand through publication fees covered by authors or their institutions for individual articles in the academic journals.

An example of this circumstance is how academic book and journal companies have established combined business models based on their business relationships with the German Communication Association (DGPK) and individual academics: via a “compulsory subscription”, decided by a majority of the DGPK’s general meeting and integrated into the membership fee, for the academic journals *Publizistik* (Springer VS) for a fee. The manuscripts are supplied by scholars in Communication Studies “ready for reproduction” free of charge and the copyrights are transferred. Publishers, editors, advisory boards, and reviewers, paid for by public funds, also work free of charge to realise the capitalist business model of these publishers. This model is a prime example of lavish indirect state subsidisation of the private sector, specifically a fourfold promotion of profit maximisation by capitalist academic publishers achieved with the help of the funding of academic research and publication work at universities (free of charge for publishers), libraries’ payments for print and online versions of books and journals, and high fees charged to authors or their institutions for hybrid open access publications.

The profitable constellation of two combined private sector business models of (academic) publishers – for traditional printed books and journals and for online publications (eBooks/electronic journals) – is shown schematically in figure 5’s top half. State-paid university researchers and authors make their research results available to publishers free of charge as digital print templates, often on the basis of additional state funding for research projects. This means that publishers are spared the otherwise burdensome high fixed costs for research, creation, composition, and design of print templates. In addition, copyrights are assigned free of charge, and often even a printing cost subsidy, partly funded by the state, is paid to the publishers. This business model is supplemented by a second model in which the publishers also make the print templates available for download as eBook or ejournal in return for payment.

The consequence of such models is the paradoxical constellation that researchers/authors and libraries have to buy the state-funded products provided free of charge from the publishers. In most cases, some publishers only allow them to “self-archive”, preprint or “secondary publications” for an additional fee. These business models based on the private appropriation of public academic production by publishers are “ideally” supported by the fact that in academia, publishing dissertations and habilitation theses by established publishing houses is either made compulsory or declared to be an indispensable prerequisite (along with impact factors, presence in citation indexes, peer reviews, academic reputation, prestige, quality) for an academic career in order to stabilise the power of academia’s mainstream.

With the possibility of online publication, however, there are good conditions for the liberation from capitalist business models and the practice of “diamond open access”¹⁰. Universities, libraries, academic organisations and associations, and individual scholars could make academic publications available for download free of charge and publicise them at no extra cost (see figure 9.5 below). In addition, print on demand can be offered at the cost price, i.e., without adding a profit. Capitalist publishers are thus delegitimised in principle and have become dispensable.

¹⁰ For reasons of space, it is not possible here to go into the advanced discussion about various forms of (free) open access that are already being practised and the complex of “print versus online” in the academic sector (see also Deutscher Bundestag 2011, 2013).

In this way, the universities would also fulfil their obligation to make the *results of state-funded research available to the public free of charge*. The budgets of public libraries and the private budgets of academics, students, and interested members of society would be relieved enormously. The rapid, “barrier-free” wide dissemination of academic research results within the scientific community and beyond to the general public would be greatly promoted.

Theoretically and practically freed from capitalist business models, Communication Studies’ thought and action could concentrate on the discussion already underway about alternative funding models for journalism and their realisation possibilities – and thus on the search for a “third way” for a “new” or “alternative” de-capitalised, non-profit-oriented journalism.

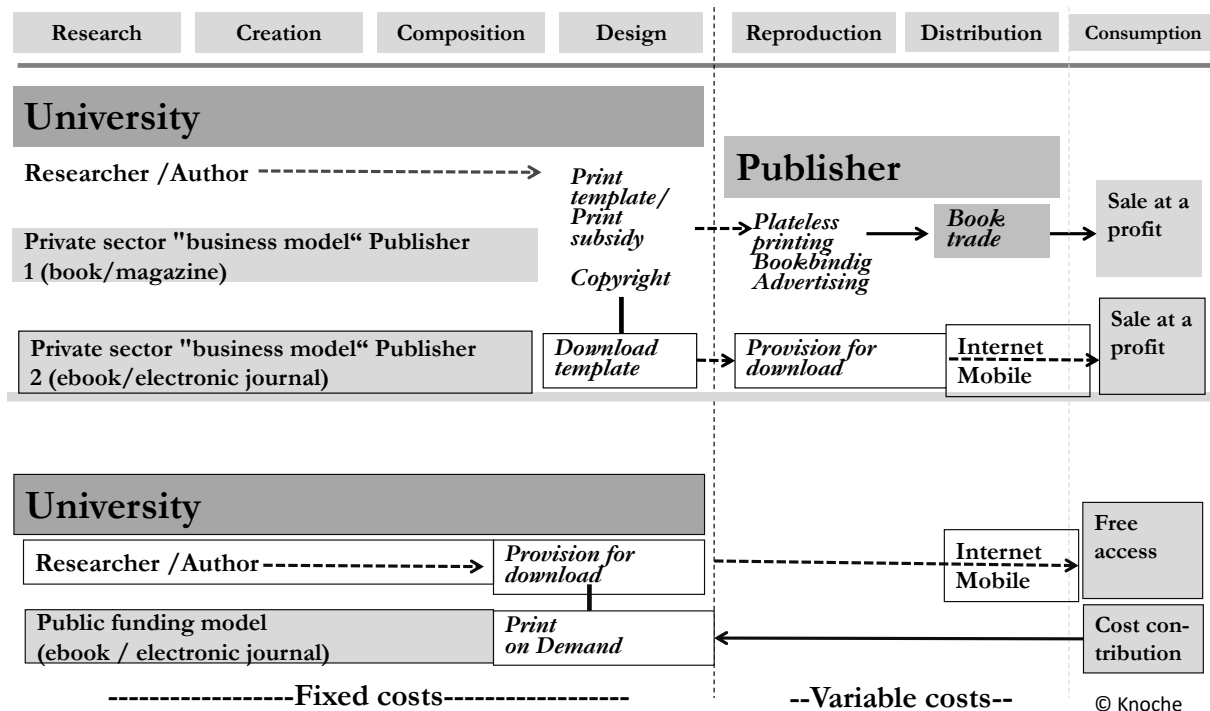


Figure 5: The (de)capitalisation of academic publications

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