Investigation of the use of influencer strategies by the German public media sector:

The Instagram channels News-WG, Migratöchter and Mädelsabende as a case study

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Master’s dissertation 15 credits
International Journalism | Spring semester 2024
Abstract

This master's thesis deals with the impact of influencers on journalism and explores the question of whether influencer strategies are adopted by journalists and how these strategies affect journalistic practices. By examining journalistic content on three German public service media accounts: News-WG, Migratöchter, and Mädelsabende, this study aims to uncover the extent to which influencer tactics are integrated into journalistic work by German public service media. Based on the theoretical framework of the profession of journalism and the profession of influencers, specific strategies were identified that characterize the work of influencers. These strategies were divided into the categories of posting, trust/authenticity, journalistic quality, and influencer inspiration. A qualitative content analysis of Instagram accounts and interviews with people associated with these accounts were then conducted. The analysis revealed that while Instagram accounts draw inspiration from influencer practices, journalistic quality and adherence to professional standards remain paramount. In addition, the analysis was placed in the context of the theory of hybrid media, which added a further perspective to the analysis. This research contributes to the understanding of the evolving dynamic between influencers and journalism in the digital age.

Keywords: Germany, Journalism, Influencers, Strategies of Influencers, Journalistic Quality, Instagram
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1. Introduction

In recent decades, the media landscape has undergone profound transformations, driven by the rapid advancement of digital technologies and the widespread adoption of social media platforms (Schützeneder & Graßl 2022, 11). These changes have not only influenced people's consumer behavior but also the way information is produced, distributed, and consumed - the central line of media development in recent years is the increased focus on image and video content (Schützeneder & Graßl 2022, 11). Notably, Instagram has replaced Facebook as the platform with the largest reach (Schützeneder & Graßl 2022, 2). Central to this transformation is the meteoric rise of influencers within the realm of social media. Influencers, individuals renowned for their substantial following, sway, and expertise in specific domains, have emerged as influential figures across diverse topics, ranging from fashion and beauty to fitness, lifestyle, and even socio-political matters (Kernen et al. 2021, 356). Their capacity to cultivate and mobilize engaged communities of followers has positioned them as pivotal actors in the digital public sphere, thereby fortifying their role within the broader media landscape. Consequently, citizen journalists, and influencers have contributed to the blurring of distinctions between traditional journalists and themselves (Grubenmann & Meckel 2017, 732).

An interesting question in this context is whether and, if so, to what extent journalists are adopting the strategies of influencers to deal with the new realities of digital journalism. By examining the tactics of influencers and juxtaposing them with journalistic practices on Instagram, this paper attempts to shed light on the changing dynamics of today's media.

To achieve this goal, this paper proceeds as follows:

The introductory chapter first provides an overview of the topic, as well as the purpose and research questions of the study. This lays the foundation for the rest of the study. The Background chapter provides basic information on the development of journalism in Germany and the connection between Instagram and journalism. The Theoretical Framework chapter, which draws on the professions of journalism and influencers, as well as hybrid media theory, provides analytical lenses through which to understand the evolving landscape of digital media. Next, the methodology employed in this study is detailed. This encompasses qualitative content analysis of German public Instagram accounts and semi-structured interviews. Additionally, the validity and reliability of the chosen methods are addressed to ensure robust findings. Subsequently, the findings of both content analyses and interviews are presented and categorized according to identified criteria. These results are then contextualized within the theoretical framework, facilitating a nuanced exploration of the convergences and divergences
between influencer and journalistic practices. This section serves as a platform for critical analysis and discussion. Drawing upon the synthesized findings and theoretical insights, final conclusions are drawn, and the research question is addressed, offering a culmination of the study's exploration into the evolving dynamics of digital journalism and influencer culture.

This structured approach aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how journalists navigate today's media landscape, particularly in response to the rise of influencer culture and the dominance of visual content on platforms such as Instagram.

2. Background

The history of journalism in Germany is characterized by a long period of change. For centuries journalism was limited to text until the early 19th century, and editorial offices remained the main site of journalistic work into the 20th century. But over time various communication channels have emerged and journalism has become a form of public communication that exists alongside entertainment, advertising, and public relations (Altmeppen et al. 2023, 61; Deuze & Witschge 2018, 169), playing a substantial part in democracy by supporting the concept of a public sphere as described by Habermas (Habermas 1990). Today, journalism uses a multitude of communication channels, including social media and other forms of digital communication. This shift is a significant development in the field of journalism, as social media is increasingly displacing traditional forms of journalism in the advertising and audience market (Meier & Neuberger 2023, 9). In response, media companies have set up development apparatuses and innovation centers in newsrooms to embrace digitization and drive mobile applications to engage audiences across multiple platforms (Meier & Neuberger 2023, 11).

A significant distinction between social media and journalism is the objective of both. While journalism is traditionally characterized by contributions to the public sphere in the sense of Habermas, the business model of social media is capitalist (Altmeppen et al. 2023, 62-63). Social media platforms do not require journalistic content to be successful, but they do not prohibit it either (Altmeppen et al. 2023, 63). Their pursuit of publicity and their content is based on what is financially lucrative and what is not (Altmeppen et al. 2023, 63). While journalism employs media to disseminate information that serves society and the common good, the concept of social media as such does not include any main intentions that serve the common good (Altmeppen et al. 2023, 69). A significant challenge for journalism on social media platforms is that it is funded by media organizations but not by platform organizations (Altmeppen et al. 2023, 75). This implies that while the platform provides a conduit for the
dissemination of journalism, it does not provide financial support for it. In this regard, social media serves as a free distribution platform that does not benefit the public media financially.

In this dynamic and changing environment, journalists face both new challenges and new opportunities. The German JIM Study 2023, which surveyed 1,200 young people aged 12 to 19, found that 62% of respondents use Instagram daily, while 59% use TikTok with a similar frequency (Medienpädagogischer Forschungsverbund Südwest [mpfs] 2023, 2 & 33). TikTok (30%) and Instagram (29%) are also strongly represented as sources of information and news (mpfs 2023, 44). Reuters' Digital News Report 2023 confirms this shift, showing a growing propensity for audiences to rely on celebrities, influencers, and social media personalities to overshadow traditional journalists when consuming news, particularly on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat (Newman et al. 2023, 10). The proliferation of user-generated content platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat has democratized the dissemination of information, allowing individuals to share news and opinions in real time. However, this democratization also brings challenges in terms of verification and credibility of information, as content creators may not adhere to journalistic standards. Influencers are often referred to as the new journalists, many of whom offer journalistic (semi-)services (Hoffjan 2020, 3). This leads to heavily debated new neologisms such as "jinfluencer", the combination of journalist and influencer (McEntee 2024). This shift in audience behavior necessitates that media groups distribute their content online and cease relying solely on their television reports and print editions (Newman et al. 2023, 77). As a consequence of the digital transformation of society, professional journalism has lost its monopoly position as a gatekeeper (Meier & Neuberger 2023, 9).

In order to ensure quality journalism in the changing media and news landscape, especially in public service media, the promotion of innovative offerings is of the utmost importance (Kapferer 2020, 42-43). It is therefore necessary to engage with audiences on the platforms where they are most active. With younger demographics shifting to social media for news consumption, journalists are being forced to rethink traditional methods of content delivery and embrace the dynamic nature of digital platforms. As a result, several public service broadcaster accounts on social media in Germany have recalibrated their strategies to align with the preferences of younger audiences by taking inspiration from successful accounts, such as those of successful companies or influencers, and adapting their approaches accordingly (Schützeneder & Graßl 2022, 22).
The journalism industry is undergoing a profound transformation, evolving from a relatively uniform entity to an extremely diverse and multifaceted practice (Deuze & Witschge 2018, 166). One clear change is the growing importance of image and video content, regardless of the distribution channel. Since the mid-2010s, social media platforms such as Instagram have become increasingly important for the distribution of photos and media content (Schützeneder & Graßl 2022, 11).

2.1. Instagram & Journalism

Instagram is one of the most significant social networks in the present era, particularly among the often challenging-to-reach demographic of individuals between the ages of 14 and 29, which has compelled journalism to adapt (Schützeneder & Graßl 2022, 14 & 23). This network can be utilized as a hinge, or a link between journalism and the audience (Schützeneder & Graßl 2022, 18). The capacity to provide feedback and commentary directly on Instagram posts presents a distinctive opportunity for engagement that would otherwise be challenging to achieve on this scale (Schützeneder & Graßl 2022, 18). One problematic aspect of Instagram is its wide accessibility, allowing many people to disseminate information. This has made the journalistic work of non-professional journalists more popular, which in turn makes it difficult for professional journalism to filter out truly credible information from the implausible (Višňovský & Radošinská 2018, 5).

The use of Instagram in journalism is multifaceted. It is used as a publication platform for one's own content, which is only teased and intended to generate clicks on one's own online pages through links to other, sometimes even paid content (Schützeneder & Graßl 2022, 20). Conversely, as an interaction medium, it greatly simplifies interaction with the audience through the possibility of comments or direct messages (Schützeneder & Graßl 2022, 20). This interaction, which is the core element of social media, offers the audience the opportunity to actively participate in discussions and express their own opinions, thus promoting democracy (Sehl et al. 2022, 52; Mahrt 2019). In recent years, the distribution of posts created for Instagram has become a separate approach (Schützeneder & Graßl 2022, 20). However, these are also more about linking to other content and thus attracting the audience to one's own website (Schützeneder & Graßl 2022, 20). In light of these considerations, it can be argued that traditional journalism still occupies a dominant position, while Instagram represents a complementary means of engagement. As the importance of linear media declines, the focus has shifted to maintaining a presence on Instagram in order to appeal to a younger target group (Schützeneder & Graßl 2022, 22).
In light of these developments, it is evident that journalistic accounts with content specifically tailored to Instagram have been established (Schützeneder & Graßl 2022, 23). One illustrative example is the News-WG account that is analyzed in this thesis.

As Instagram is a platform for self-presentation, journalism is forced to market its posts in such a way that they are both suitable for the platform and comply with established journalistic standards (Schützeneder & Graßl 2022, 24). At the same time, it competes with other accounts that post content that appears journalistic but is not and therefore does not have to adhere to journalistic standards (Schützeneder & Graßl 2022, 24). The advent of these new offerings has resulted in a blurring of the boundaries between journalistic and non-journalistic content, which is supporting an identity crisis in journalism (Meier & Neuberger 2023, 9).

Non-journalistic accounts that nevertheless post journalistic-looking content have the freedom to adapt their topics and content to their own interests and the interests or preferences of their target groups and are not bound by the standards of balanced reporting typically associated with professional journalism (gatekeeping). The blurring of boundaries between professional journalism and influencers disseminating journalistic content has led to the emergence of a new phenomenon. This phenomenon has been described by Meier and Neuberger (2023, 14) as an identity that lies between the two.

Overall, the blurring of boundaries between professional journalism and influencer-driven content represents a fundamental shift in the way information is produced, consumed, and understood in the digital age. To reach the young generation today, public media must also move with the times and adapt their forms of information dissemination to the times. It is therefore interesting to see how they do this, which influencer strategies can be found in their content, and how they adapt and expand these to their content.

3. Research Aim & Research Question

In the contemporary digital environment, the pervasive influence of social media influencers on journalistic content demands comprehensive investigation. While previous studies have primarily examined the negative impact of influencers on journalistic integrity, this work attempts to adopt a novel perspective. Rather than focusing solely on the potential pitfalls, this research aims to illuminate the intricate interplay between influencer strategies and journalistic practices. In particular, the study aims to examine the influence of influencers' ability to build community on journalistic work, with a focus on selected German Instagram channels.
The overarching aim of this thesis is twofold. First, the strategies employed by influencers to cultivate extensive communities on social media platforms will be described and analyzed. An extensive literature review was conducted in order to identify and analyze the strategies used by influencers to cultivate extensive communities on social media platforms. These strategies are presented in the Theoretical Framework chapter (5.3). This was done in order to understand their underlying mechanisms and implications. Secondly, this thesis examines how influencer strategies affect journalistic practices, with a particular focus on selected Instagram channels of public broadcasters in Germany. A content analysis of these channels is carried out to determine the extent to which the content of influencers and journalistic accounts is similar. By examining the content disseminated by these channels, including their thematic focus, stylistic elements, and engagement metrics, the study seeks to measure the degree of influence influencers have on journalistic work.

In addition to content analysis, this study pursues a further qualitative approach in order to examine the intentions and motivations underlying the use of strategies in journalistic contexts in more detail. The study employs semi-structured interviews with the creators of the selected Instagram channels to gain firsthand insights into the motivations behind their content creation decisions. By elucidating the perspectives and experiences of these practitioners, the study aims to enhance comprehension of the intricate interrelationship between influencer dynamics and journalistic norms.

The resulting research questions are as follows:

1. Are influencer strategies used by journalists, if yes, which ones?
2. How do these strategies influence journalistic work?

By systematically investigating these questions, the thesis aims to contribute to a differentiated understanding of the evolving landscape of digital journalism, the diverse influence of influencers in social media journalism, and the adaptation of journalistic standards to them.

4. Literature Review & Previous Research

In the evolving landscape of journalism, understanding the dynamics of professional identity, audience engagement, and the integration of social media platforms like Instagram is paramount. This literature review delves into recent research contributions that shed light on these interrelated aspects, offering insights into the challenges, opportunities, and transformations within the field of journalism.
Journalists’ Professional Identity
Stephanie Grubenmann and Miriam Meckel's research in 2017, titled "Journalists' Professional Identity," provides a comprehensive examination of how the identity of journalists has transformed over time, particularly in the face of significant shifts in the media landscape. In their study, they focus on a Swiss newsroom and conduct interviews with journalists to examine the development of journalism. It provides a comprehensive examination of how the identity of journalists has transformed over time, particularly in the face of significant shifts in the media landscape. To arrive at these findings, the researchers utilized social identity theory and, more specifically, the concept of professional identity (Grubenmann & Meckel 2017, 733). In their study, they answer the question: "Do journalists' professional identities have the potential to serve as a resource to help them to cope with far-reaching change in their work environments?" (Grubenmann & Meckel 2017, 736). Additionally, there is interest in how journalists' professional identities impact their willingness to adapt to change (Grubenmann & Meckel 2017, 736). As a result, they divide their research participants into two groups: journalists who embrace ongoing change and the evolving principles of online journalism, and journalists who resist it (Grubenmann & Meckel 2017, 735). On one hand, there existed a cohort of journalists who expressed skepticism and criticism towards the changing landscape of journalism. These individuals harbored reservations about the implications of these changes and were apprehensive about adapting to new paradigms. On the other hand, there was a contrasting group of journalists who approached the evolving media landscape with optimism and openness. These individuals viewed change as an opportunity for growth and innovation, demonstrating a willingness to embrace emerging trends and technologies (Grubenmann & Meckel 2017, 744).

Audience Engagement
Costera Meijer (2020) describes the development of the "audience turn" in Dutch quality journalism between 1995 and 2020. She divides this development into three stages: In the first stage, it was noticed that more and more topics and news that viewers were interested in were discussed in primetime, and not only those that were considered "appropriate news" (Costera Meijer 2020, 2331). In the early 2000s, the second stage began, in which public broadcasters were to better reflect the lives of viewers and thus also become more relevant for younger viewers and those with a minority background, which led to the appointment of correspondents in Rotterdam and Cairo (Costera Meijer 2020, 2332-2333). Digitization played a major role in the third stage of development. Digital natives, i.e. the age group that grew up with digital media, were used in particular (Costera Meijer 2020, 2335). These were then used to find out
how to attract a digital audience with new forms of distribution, presentation and storytelling (Costera Meijer 2020, 2335). Overall, Costera Meijer (2020, 2336) describes how audiences and users are a central part of the everyday production of news.

Loosen (2023) underscores the evolving dynamics of audience engagement, highlighting the paramount significance of interactivity. Within this context, interactivity transcends mere consumption to encompass active participation in shaping desired content (Loosen 2023, 272).

The advent of digitization, particularly the proliferation of social media platforms, has catalyzed profound shifts in audience-media interactions (Loosen 2023, 273). Audiences now wield unprecedented power to provide real-time feedback, fostering a symbiotic relationship between content creators and consumers (Loosen 2023, 283).

Integration of Instagram in Journalism

Schützeneder and Graßl (2022, 13) highlight how Instagram has reshaped the relationship between audiences and journalism, presenting a novel dynamic. They delve into Instagram’s multifaceted roles as a journalistic tool, serving as both a platform for article production and dissemination, as well as a space for communication and interaction (Schützeneder & Graßl 2022, 15-16). Furthermore, the evolution of journalistic posts on Instagram is discussed, and categorized into three distinct levels. Firstly, there’s the precognitive level, characterized by experimental posts lacking a defined concept. Subsequently, the adaptive level involves the emulation of strategies employed by established players. Finally, the strategic-experimental level marks the development of unique formats tailored to the platform (Schützeneder & Graßl 2022, 23). A significant challenge highlighted is the algorithmic nature of Instagram, which does not prioritize news distribution based on traditional journalistic criteria. Instead, factors such as emotionality, personality, authenticity, and aesthetic appeal play a pivotal role (Schützeneder & Graßl 2022, 23-24). Consequently, successful journalism on Instagram necessitates adaptation to these algorithmic preferences.

Data from 2020 shows a clear dichotomy in news consumption between different age cohorts (Hölig & Wunderlich 2022). Younger users primarily used Instagram as their primary news channel and used the platform’s visual and interactive features to stay informed. In contrast, older demographics preferred traditional media sources such as television, newspapers, and radio for their news consumption, highlighting a divide between generations in terms of media habits (Hölig & Wunderlich 2022, 40). Despite this divide, there is discussion of a rapid increase
in the use of Instagram for news, indicating a potential shift in consumption patterns, which could mean that significantly more people will be using Instagram as a news source by 2024.

**Innovative Instagram-Accounts**

Bettendorf (2020) examines three pioneering Instagram accounts run by public broadcasters, including News-WG and Mädelsabende. In general, she writes about the innovative accounts of public service broadcasting that the main aim of these is to reach young people, and that the content is produced explicitly for these accounts and is not just a new form of broadcasting information that already exists (Bettendorf 2020, 61). She describes the presentation of the accounts and the format of the presenters, who tell journalistic and personal stories at the same time (Bettendorf 2020, 61). The fact that the accounts are paid for by broadcasting fees means that these accounts can concentrate on professional journalism in a form that appeals to young people (Bettendorf 2020, 61).

At the heart of the Mädelsabende concept are the core principles, which are based on weekly topics, each explored from different perspectives. The overarching aim of the format is to bring young women together by looking at topics of interest to them through a personal and humorous lens, creating a virtual safe haven for discourse and interaction (Bettendorf 2020, 62).

A closer analysis of the News-WG account highlights the uniqueness of the communication style. The emphasis is on authenticity, with the dissemination of information giving the appearance of a conversation with a close friend. This unique approach not only increases engagement but also fosters a sense of familiarity and camaraderie among viewers (Bettendorf 2020, 67).

Essentially, Bettendorf's analysis shows the beginnings of both accounts with the state of research in 2020, so this study now provides more up-to-date results. In addition, another account has been added to my study and the accounts are not only presented individually, but also compared with each other.

5. **Theoretical Framework**

This thesis employs three theoretical frameworks: the profession of journalism, the profession of influencers, and the Hybrid Media Theory.

The differences and similarities between journalists and influencers are examined in the context of professional theories. It becomes evident which regulations must be observed in each case and which basic requirements apply to each group with regard to their appearance on social
media. The specific reasons and ways of engaging in social media become clear. In addition, the success strategies of the respective professional groups are delineated, thus providing the necessary criteria for the subsequent analysis.

The theory of hybrid media elucidates the interrelationship between disparate types of media. For instance, the interaction between influencers and journalists on social media is elucidated in greater detail and may be employed as a theoretical framework in the master's thesis.

5.1. Profession of Journalism

This chapter delves into the various dimensions of professionalization in journalism, drawing from scholarly discourse and established frameworks to evaluate the current state in Germany. The profession of journalist is generally not one with boundaries to others. Access to the profession is not legally protected, as everyone should have the opportunity to publish their opinion (Hangen 2012, 1). Nevertheless, there are some things that speak in favor of seeing journalism as a profession and changing this attribution. These include, for example, the fact that journalists perform a public service: Journalists commonly perceive their role as serving the public interest, acting as guardians of the status quo on behalf of the people, who demonstrate their support through financial support (Deuze 2005, 447). They are neutral, objective, and fair and maintain a professional distance (Deuze 2005, 448). In addition, they work largely autonomously and enjoy the privilege of being free and independent (Deuze 2005, 448). Particularly in the distribution of news, journalists' tasks often revolve around concepts of rapidity, quick decision-making, urgency, and operating within an accelerated real-time environment (Deuze 2005, 449). While there is no generally agreed, but perhaps nationally agreed, ethical code of conduct, all journalists have a sense of ethical responsibility. This ethical stance further validates journalists' role as impartial watchdogs of society (Deuze 2005, 449).

Waisbord (2013, 95-96) notes that being a professional means not only having expertise but also doing something for society. This view is shared by Hallin & Mancini (2004), who identified three dimensions of professionalization in journalism: autonomy, distinct professional norms, and public service orientation (Hallin & Mancini 2004, 34-36). Autonomy refers to independent work and independent review of work (Hallin & Mancini 2004, 34). Distinct professional norms mean, for example, that there is a shared ethical understanding (Hallin & Mancini 2004, 35). Public service orientation describes that professions should always be oriented towards public service and thus provide a service to society (Hallin & Mancini 2004, 36).
Another important point is the debate about the quality of journalism. On the one hand, this is about the accuracy, completeness, truthfulness, and universality of what is reported, but on the other hand, it is also about independence, topicality, comprehensibility, entertainment, and feedback opportunities from the audience's point of view (Arnold 2023, 96).

The absence of professional status complicates the definition of ‘journalism’, often described as a "daunting task" due to its nature as a "mega-concept" (Vos 2018, 2). This text adopts the definition, which views journalism as part of the public sphere that provides central mediation and information services in democratic societies (Prochazka 2020, 7). Therefore, journalism stands as a social system that objectively reports on society (Neuberger & Kapern, 2013, 29). It is expected to operate independently from state influence, enabling it to function freely (Nygren & Dobek-Ostrowska 2015, 9). Moreover, it is a structured concept characterized by shared standards and established professional institutions (Nygren 2015, 19).

Journalism is not a protected term in Germany - anyone who works journalistic can call themselves a journalist. However, there are professional standards and rules that must be followed, such as the German Press Code of the German Press Council. This code establishes rules of conduct for journalists and defines the approach to reporting. It refers to the Basic Law and the freedom of the press, which is regulated by law in Germany (GPC 2017, 2). It stipulates that all information that is published must be checked in advance and precise details of the sources must be provided (GPC 2017, 3). Section 7, which is also of interest to this paper, states:

> editorial publications are not influenced by the private or business interests of third parties or the personal economic interests of the journalists. Publishers and editors must reject any attempts of this nature and make a clear distinction between editorial and commercial content. If a publication concerns the publisher's own interests, this must be clearly identifiable. (GPC 2017, 5)

One significant distinction lies in the delineation between journalism and influencer practices. While both may engage in content creation and dissemination, journalism is characterized by its adherence to professional standards, including the rejection of private or business interests that may compromise editorial integrity. Section 15 of the German Press Code prohibits journalists from accepting privileges that could undermine their freedom of choice, further solidifying the profession's commitment to ethical conduct (GPC 2017, 10).

In summary, it can be said that although journalism in Germany works with defined rules of conduct and a code of ethics, there is a lack of rigid rules that distinguish it from other professions. However, the debate surrounding its professional status is fueled by the public service journalists provide, their pursuit of neutrality and independence, the established quality criteria, and the regulations governing their practice.
5.2. Profession of Influencers

Social media influencers are individuals who have garnered fame and recognition through their presence and content on various social media platforms, including bloggers, YouTubers, and individuals known for their popularity on Instagram (Aw & Chuah 2021, 146). The term is derived from the verb to influence so./sth. and refers to the meaning attributed to these people (Altendorfer 2019, 39). Influencers are people who, through their presence in digital networks, outstanding personalities, professional expertise, and active communication, can gain credible authority on certain topics and make them accessible to a wide audience via digital channels (Schach 2018, 31). They are heterogeneously represented in various fields (Hoffjann 2020, 3).

According to Haenlein et al. (2020, 17), an influencer is described as an individual who possesses a substantial and actively involved following on social media platforms, typically only known to those who actively follow them. They earn money with the content they produce through advertising partnerships with companies or direct collaboration between influencers and companies (Altendorfer 2019, 64).

Influencers often succeed by sharing personal aspects of their lives, which creates authenticity. This approach makes advertising campaigns feel more like casual conversations with a friend endorsing a product than typical advertising (Gong & Holiday 2023, 376-377). They present themselves as "normal" and promote the advertised products in authentic, real-life situations (Schouten et al. 2021, 211-212). They build an emotional bond with their fan base by giving deep insights into their private lives through their very personal and entertaining way of communicating, their open nature, and their extroversion (Deges 2018, 15).

It should be critically noted that, unlike journalists, they are not forced to behave in a certain way by codes or similar, even though they operate in the same media environment and have a very wide audience (Altendorfer 2019, 50). Nevertheless, it is important to explain the profession of influencers at this point, as the thesis compares the journalistic profession with that of influencers, and things in the influencer profession that have an impact on journalism.

5.3. Strategies of Journalists vs. Influencers

Journalists' credibility and the trust they garner from their audience are foundational to the profession. This trust is built on several key pillars, as outlined by Arnold (2023). Firstly, accuracy is paramount. Journalists must strive to ensure that the information they present is factual and precise. This includes verifying sources and fact-checking to the best of their ability. Additionally, completeness is crucial. Providing a comprehensive view of a story or issue helps
audiences understand the full context and make informed judgments. Source transparency is another vital aspect. Disclosing sources and the methods used to gather information not only adds credibility to a story but also allows the audience to assess the reliability of the information presented. Universality ensures that journalism serves the public interest and promotes inclusivity (Arnold 2023, 96).

With regard to the audience, Independence is valued, with audiences seeking news sources that are free from bias or undue influence. Timeliness is also important; people expect to receive news in a timely manner to stay informed about current events. Comprehensibility ensures that news stories are presented clearly and understandably, catering to a broad audience. Additionally, the element of entertainment can enhance engagement with news content, although it should never compromise accuracy or seriousness when reporting on important issues. Feedback opportunities are crucial for fostering a dialogue between journalists and their audience, allowing for constructive criticism and the opportunity to address any concerns or inaccuracies (Arnold 2023, 96).

Furthermore, journalists must have a clear understanding of their role and adhere to professional standards (Arnold 2023, 96). This includes compliance with ethical guidelines and codes of conduct, such as those in the German press code. Transparency is also an important thing, which refers to journalistic independence, self-control, and critical reflection (DJV 2018). Competence, i.e. specialist knowledge to gather and report the news accurately and effectively is available (DJV 2018). It is also important that the information disseminated is always viewed critically and discussed and reviewed by those responsible (DJV 2018). Moreover, it is important for journalism that the journalistic craft is mastered, as the handling of facts, the use of the right language, and the correct use of forms of presentation are used (DJV 2018).

Influencers are not bound by ethical codes or voluntary commitments and represent their own opinions, which they communicate to their followers (Altendorfer 2019, 50). They appear approachable, relatable, and act more like long-distance friends (Schouten et al. 2021, 211); they are up-to-date, trendsetters, and have a knowledge advantage in their specific field (Kernen et al. 2021, 358). Studies have shown that trustworthiness and expertise are important factors in influencer credibility (Schouten et al. 2021).

Through active engagement with their followers, influencers cultivate credibility and trust. On the one hand, they address their followers directly and respond to them in the comments, but on the other hand, there is also the possibility that followers can send messages and thus
establish a personal connection (Yuan & Lou 2020, 1). This form of communication is a very important element in building trust (Kernen et al. 2021, 357). Through these interactions, influencers are not just content creators; they become trusted figures who can affect opinions, behaviors, and purchasing decisions. Moreover, the quality of their images plays a pivotal role in the success of their accounts, as influencers consistently produce visually appealing content that is expertly edited to showcase their best selves (Kernen et al. 2021, 358). The use of hashtags under their posts improves discoverability and increases their reach, which enables broader audience engagement (Kernen et al. 2021, 360; Kobilke 2017, 92). Hashtags function as a tool to categorize content, making it easier for users to find posts related to specific topics, trends, or interests. By incorporating relevant hashtags, influencers can tap into existing conversations and communities, thereby increasing the likelihood of their posts being seen by a wider audience. Furthermore, in order to generate reach and be displayed to people who do not yet follow you, it is important for influencers to have a consistent posting habit (Kernen et al. 2021, 360). This usually consists of 1-2 posts a day and posts are made at the times when most people are online (Kernen et al. 2021, 360).

In addition, influencers often serve as role models - they are often the same age as their followers - so younger followers in particular often look to them for guidance (Kernen et al. 2021, 358). They provide advice and recommendations that help the community (Seeger & Kost 2020, 35). It is impressive for followers to see someone like them become so prominent and successful (Kernen et al. 2021, 358). Followers identify with the values of influencers and thus build trust in them, which makes it easier to sell the advertised products (Schouten et al. 2021, 210). Becoming an advertising platform, they act as ambassadors for products and brands, which is now an integral part of companies' communication strategies (Altendorfer 2019, 43).

Influencers usually speak directly to their followers in their posts or stories, which further strengthens the foundation of trust and makes them seem more normal and approachable (Schouten et al. 2021, 211).

5.4. Hybrid Media Theory

Hybrid Media Theory was first mentioned by Chadwick in 2013. Since then, the term has been repeatedly taken up and researched further, as it is a concept that can be applied in various ways. The concept of hybridity is based on the idea of combining different elements (Hallin et al. 2023, 221). This can be taken to mean the development of news media that has resulted from innovative technologies. Emerging media technologies attract new audiences (Chadwick 2017a, 29). With the advancement of technology, a broader reach becomes achievable,
particularly in journalism, where the utilization of "online personas" as news disseminators becomes significant (Chadwick 2017b, 187). Chadwick (2017a, 29) characterizes these advancements in media as a reconfiguration of relationships "among existing media elites, political elites, and publics", with a particular emphasis on the interactions between these entities. Mast et al. (2017, 5) further elaborate on the theory, highlighting the integration of social media into journalists' daily routines as mainstream media no longer hold a monopoly on news dissemination. This blurs the concepts of social media with traditional journalism, which can be seen as a "driving force for innovation" (Mast et al. 2017, 9) and thus fits into the theory of the hybridity of media. Social media platforms enable citizens to participate in and connect around public affairs issues by expressing their opinions in real-time across various platforms and devices (Mattoni & Ceccobelli 2018, 541). Therefore "citizens today are both formally and informally included in media production practices and routines" (Mattoni & Ceccobelli 2018, 541).

The integration between social media and traditional media demonstrates a mutual influence where both groups adopt and adapt certain norms. This reciprocal influence signifies a hybridity in media dynamics (Chadwick 2017b, 193). This hybridity and its impact on media practices will be explored further in this thesis, which requires the identification of specific evidence to support these observations.

In summary, the interaction between influencers and journalists illustrates a reciprocal exchange where each group influences and adopts elements of the other's practices. This dynamic reflects a hybridization within media contexts (Chadwick 2017b, 193). Additionally, this evolving relationship between social media and traditional media signifies a reconfiguration of power dynamics in media spheres, impacting both elite and non-elite actors (Mattoni & Ceccobelli 2018, 541).

5.5. Theoretical Review

The theories presented are all relevant for the analysis of the work. The theories Profession of Journalism and Profession of Influencers are used to compile the categories for the analysis. These are compiled in Chapter 5.3 Strategies of Journalists vs. Influencers and can then be used for the collection of results and the analysis. The following categories emerged for the collection of results: Postings, Trust / Authenticity, Journalistic Quality and Influencer Inspiration. In the analysis, these are examined in more detail and the following categories of analysis were created based on the results together with the theory: Self-presentation, Follower interaction, Hashtag Usage, Posting patterns, Identification, and Addressing the Followers.
Hybrid Media Theory describes the combination of news media with innovative technologies. In a broader sense, this also refers to the blurring lines between traditional journalism and social media, which is the subject of this work. This theory therefore provides a good basis for analyzing the Instagram accounts of public broadcasters.

6. Method & Material

In the master's thesis, two distinct methodologies are employed to derive findings: qualitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews. Initially, an examination is conducted on three Instagram accounts through qualitative content analysis, followed by interviews with the contributors to these accounts.

Qualitative content analysis, as elucidated by Mayring (2022, 13), involves the systematic analysis of fixed communication, guided by established theory and methodological principles. In this context, the analysis is grounded in predefined parameters, focusing on scrutinizing the content of postings across the Instagram accounts and transcriptions of the interviews.

Both methods adhere to a similar overarching structure. Firstly, a clear and specific research question is formulated to delineate the scope and purpose of the analysis. Subsequently, categories are delineated to organize and synthesize the obtained results, facilitating a structured examination. Post-analysis, the presentation of findings is tethered back to the initial research question, fostering a coherent interpretation and discussion of the results (Mayring 2022, 21).

Expounding upon these methodologies will provide a comprehensive understanding of the processes undertaken to glean insights from both the fixed content of Instagram postings and the dynamic interactions within the semi-structured interviews. This dual approach ensures a multifaceted exploration of the research topic, enriching the thesis with diverse perspectives and nuanced insights.

6.1. Qualitative Content Analysis of Three Instagram Accounts

In conducting the content analysis of the Instagram accounts - News-WG, Migratöchter, and Mädelsabende - a meticulous selection process was employed to ensure the suitability of these accounts for the study's objectives. These accounts were chosen due to their affiliation with public broadcasters, reflecting a diverse range of content dissemination strategies within the media landscape. Notably, Mädelsabende, in addition to its connection with public broadcasting, is associated with funk, the online platform catering to the youth demographic under the umbrella of ARD and ZDF. The selection of these accounts was further validated by their established follower base and sustained activity over several years. They post content at
relatively regular intervals so that it was possible to select from an existing contingent. The analysis was limited to reels, as these bests convey the presentation of the hosts. Reels are short videos, between a few seconds and several minutes long, which can be displayed separately on the account pages in addition to the overview of all posts. Care was also taken to ensure that different topics were covered, and different forms of presentation were examined in order to present a complete picture of the account. Reels emerged as the primary focus of scrutiny due to their capacity to encapsulate the essence of hosts’ presentations effectively. While daily stories also offer valuable insights, their ephemeral nature—deleted after 24 hours—poses challenges for comprehensive analysis and tracking. By sampling eight reels from each account, spanning the first four months of 2024, a current snapshot of their content landscape could be created. In total, each account had uploaded between 5 and 6 videos per month, two of which were then selected. This selection was influenced by the topics discussed, in order to show the widest possible repertoire and different types of reels that can be found on the accounts. This temporal alignment not only ensures relevance but also captures the evolving themes and narratives prevalent in their recent posts. The reels were analyzed systematically: Each reel was first saved in Instagram and the direct link to it was saved in an MS Word document. It was then viewed several times to carefully check the visual and textual content. The reels were then coded using predefined criteria derived from the journalist and influencer success strategies defined in section 5.3, including the presentation of the hosts, the address in the video itself and in the caption, the interaction with the followers in the comments, possible effects and the design of the videos, hashtags, and the use and indication of sources. Coding was done manually in the MS Word document, with notes made for each criterion. Themes and patterns were identified and categorized to understand the presentation and interaction strategies. To ensure consistency and reliability, an intra-coder reliability test was conducted, where the same analysis was conducted again at a different time and the results were compared to those previously conducted. An 80% or more match is expected for reliable analysis. Any discrepancies were assessed and resolved. The data was analyzed to gain insights into how each account used these elements to effectively engage their audience and to ensure a comprehensive understanding of content strategies.
6.1.1. News-WG

Translation:

News-shared flat by BR24

- Your daily dose of news.
- Bye bye half-knowledge, hello backgrounds!
- Politics explained easily in the shared flat - by Minusch, Maxi, Helene & Max.

Figure 1: News-WG Instagram account

The News-WG is an account of the Bayrischer Rundfunk (br) and is managed by four presenters: Helene, Max, Maxi, and Minusch. The account has existed since September 2018 (Bayrischer Rundfunk n.d.; Bettendorf 2020, 65) and has 173,000 followers (as of May 4, 2024). With a target demographic aged between 16 and 25 years, as revealed in an interview with Reinert, the News-WG carves a niche by weaving news updates seamlessly into the fabric of everyday life. By simulating discussions within their (albeit simulated) shared living space, the presenters offer viewers an intimate glimpse into the world of current affairs. This format, as outlined in Bettendorf's analysis, eschews the frantic pace of breaking news cycles in favor of a deeper exploration of events and their contexts (Bettendorf 2020, 65).

WG (Wohngemeinschaft) is the German word for a shared flat. The name of the account comes from the fact that the moderators film from their (fake) flat-sharing community to give the impression that they are discussing news during their daily lives together (Bettendorf 2020, 65). As can be read in the description of the account, the goal is not to spread breaking news, but to provide information about the news and background, and thus to convey an understanding of it (Bettendorf 2020, 65).

The format has already won several awards and received nominations: Axel Springer Prize for Young Journalists 2019, two awards at the prestigious European competition "Prix Italia" (2019) - in the category "Web Factual" as well as the "Special Prize in Honor of the President of the Italian Republic", Golden Blogger 2019 - "Best Instagram Account of the Year" and Smart Hero Award 2019 - 2nd place in the category "Diversity and Equal Opportunities" + Audience Award (Bayrischer Rundfunk n.d.).
6.1.2. Mädelsabende

Translation:
**Girls' evenings**
Let’s talk - about feelings, insecurities, taboos, and everything that moves you and us! Dani, Delia, Paula & Team! @funk - by ARD&ZDF

Mädelsabende, a digital platform launched in October 2017 by Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR), has since become an influential voice in discussing feminist issues among young women. It is part of Funk since September 2019 (Bettendorf 2020, 62). With around 2,500 posts (including reels) and 324,000 followers (as of May 4, 2024), the account is the largest of the three examined accounts. Its content revolves around feminist themes, engaging primarily but not exclusively with young women aged 14 to 29. The focus is on the three hosts Dani, Delia, and Paula, who report on their own experiences in the form of stories, posts, and reels and provide information on feminist topics.

The account received the Grimme Online Award for the idea, editing, and target group communication in 2018 and the Smart Hero Award in 2018.

6.1.3. Migratöchter

Translation:
**Migrant daughters | SWR**
❤ Diversity, empowerment & your stories.
¶ Imprint, netiquette, data protection

The Migratöchter account was initially launched in 2021 under the name *Naber? Was geht!* (What’s up!). In 2023, the name was then changed to Migratöchter, as the content was no longer limited to Turkish-Kurdish culture but included many different minorities. Migratöchter belongs to the public broadcaster Südwest-Rundfunk (SWR) and, with around 1,000 posts (including reels) and 53,300 followers (as of May 4, 2024), is the smallest of the three accounts examined. It deals with topics that primarily concern people with a migration background. On the one hand, it deals with different cultures in a humorous way, but on the other hand, it does
important educational work and conducts interviews with people from different cultures who talk about their experiences. The account's target group is a little older than that of the other two channels and they mainly try to reach women between the ages of 25 and 35.

Migratöchter also has recurring hosts that report. However, unlike the other two accounts, these are not mentioned directly in the account description. The account has not yet received any nominations or awards.

6.2. Interviews

Interviews were a crucial component of this research, providing valuable insights from individuals directly involved in the creation and management of the Instagram accounts under study. The selection of interviewees was deliberate, aiming to encompass diverse perspectives and roles within the accounts' operations.

Helene Reiner, as the co-founder and presenter of News-WG, offered insights into the inception, objectives, and content curation strategies of the account. Kübra Idi, serving as the partner manager for the Migratöchter account at SWR, provided perspectives from the organizational and managerial standpoint, shedding light on collaborative efforts and content partnerships. Verena Lammert's experience as the founder and former team member of Mädelsabende provided historical context and firsthand knowledge of the account's evolution and content production processes.

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach, allowing for flexibility in questioning while ensuring key topics of interest were explored in-depth. A questionnaire was prepared in advance (Appendix II), which included the same questions for each interviewee, as well as questions specific to each account. The remote interviews were facilitated via Zoom, allowing for flexible scheduling and geographical accessibility. Each interview session was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy in data representation. MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software, was employed to facilitate systematic coding, categorization, and analysis of the interview transcripts.

6.3. Validity and Reliability

Ensuring the validity and reliability of the research findings was of great importance throughout the study. Several measures were taken to increase the trustworthiness and credibility of the data collected and analyzed.
First, findings were drawn from multiple sources and methods to increase the robustness of the research findings. By using a mixed-methods approach and combining the results of qualitative content analysis of Instagram accounts with data from semi-structured interviews, a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon was achieved.

Second, member checks were conducted to mitigate researcher bias and increase the credibility of the interpretations. Preliminary findings and interpretations were shared with respondents, if they so wished, to obtain their feedback and validation, and to ensure consistency with their perspectives and experiences.

Third, in accordance with data protection regulations, particularly the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), strict protocols were followed in the handling and storage of interview data. Participants were informed of the purpose of the data collection and their consent was obtained before the interviews were conducted. Measures were offered to anonymize and protect the identity and personal data of respondents to ensure their privacy and confidentiality. However, all participants have given their written consent and are therefore named.

6.4. Limitations

Limitations of this study include its focus on Instagram as a single platform. Future research could examine the role of other social media platforms, such as Twitter or TikTok, in shaping journalistic and influencer practices. In addition, more formats could be studied to provide a broader picture and more opinions on the topic. International comparisons could also be made, comparing Instagram accounts that operate similarly in other countries. Furthermore, the small sample size and the implementation of a qualitative and not a quantitative content analysis is also a limitation. Not having a quantitative content analysis is a limitation because it affects generalisability, objectivity, and precision. The mixed-methods approach which combines quantitative and qualitative methods enhance the study by providing triangulation which strengthens validity and mitigates bias. Quantitative data adds breadth, allows for pattern identification, and supports the robustness of qualitative findings. This combination ensures that insights are both detailed and broadly applicable, increasing the reliability and overall rigor of the research.
7. Results

7.1. Results Content Analysis

7.1.1. Postings

The three accounts have no fixed posting days, which leads to a variable number of uploaded movies during the analysis period - 5-6 reels per month. The Migratöchter account uploaded 29 reels, News-WG 28, and Mädelsabende 20 during the analyzed period.

A comparison of the content of the posts on each account reveals similarities. For instance, the individuals depicted in the video and any interview subjects are displayed directly as the cover image. While the cover images of News-WG and Mädelsabende appear to be excerpts from the accompanying video, a distinct methodology is evident in Migratöchter. The cover images of the videos exhibit a uniform background, with the hosts or interviewees positioned in the foreground. It can be concluded that the images in question are not merely excerpts from the videos, but rather, they are specifically produced photographs.

The duration of the videos under examination is not consistent. The longest reels are found in News-WG, where the shortest video is 01:08 minutes long and the longest is 02:48 minutes long. In Migratöchter, the shortest video is just 9 seconds long, while the longest is 1:28 minutes. In Mädelsabende, it can be observed that all videos are under a minute long, with a range of 14 to 42 seconds. In the case of Migratöchter, however, it can be observed that the comedic videos are significantly shorter than those featuring portraits or interviews.
For all accounts, the caption serves to provide concise explanations or supplementary information about the video in question. In addition, most of them contain a question at the end that is intended to stimulate discussion in the comments section, such as the following: “What do you think? Is it cool when stars make political statements or are you rather annoyed by it?” (News-WG, Taylor Swift, 02.02.2024). In all cases, the caption either briefly describes the content of the respective video or provides further information on the respective topic. In the News-WG, it is noticeable that the subtitle is consistently signed by the respective presenter of the video, and the viewers are addressed in the plural "you" (2nd pers. pl.). The form of address is exactly the same for Mädelsabende. However, the caption is significantly shorter than in News-WG. In some posts, additional information or study results are described, while in other posts only a single question is posed to the community to encourage comments.

In Migratöchter, viewers are addressed as "you" (2nd pers. sg.), and some contributions are signed with the name of the moderator.

All accounts use hashtags with keywords that are tailored to the content of the videos. The Mädelsabende and Migratöchter accounts also consistently use the hashtag of the account name, while the News-WG does without this and mainly uses terms from the content. A striking feature of the Mädelsabende account is the use of the hashtags "#Mädelsabende" and "#Maedelsabende", in which the umlaut was written out. This strategy appears to be used with the intention of achieving greater visibility in search engine optimization (SEO).
7.1.2. Trust / Authenticity

**Video Style**

The News-WG videos present hosts in a consistently relaxed and authentic manner and avoid overly scripted presentations. Instead of the typical newsroom setup, they opted for a cozy sofa arrangement, fostering an atmosphere more akin to a friendly conversation. The inclusion of emojis and stickers depicting politicians adds a casual touch, making the information feel more approachable. This then looks like the following screenshot, where what is being said is clarified with the help of images in the form of stickers, emojis, and arrows.

![Image of a screenshot with stickers and emojis](image.png)

*Figure 7: News-WG Inclusion of stickers, emojis, and arrows (Masterplan, 11.01.2024)*

The videos can be divided into two categories. In the first category, the host is the primary subject and speaks directly to the camera, providing information to the viewers. In contrast, there are also somewhat freer videos in which the use of "acting" is employed to clarify content. One illustrative example is the segment on the protection of the constitution, in which the host, Minusch, employs acting to elucidate the content in a more accessible manner (News-WG, Constitutional protection, 01.02.2024). Another illustrative example is the video on the prohibition of dancing during the Easter weekend (News-WG, Dance ban, 28.03.2024). In this video, the hosts Helene and Max act out the bans on such activities during public holidays in Germany in a humorous manner. The humorous videos, which nevertheless offer quality input, make the hosts appear authentic and as if they do not take themselves too seriously.
Migratöchter presents a combination of serious videos featuring interviews and portraits with and of people with a migrant background, who talk about their experiences and story. Additionally, it includes brief comedic segments that address everyday situations, prompting the question of whether the community is also familiar with such scenarios. In addition, special videos are created for certain holidays, as the analysis of the video on breaking the fast shows (Migratöchter, Breaking the Fast, 23.03.2024). Furthermore, videos are produced on topics that primarily appeal to the migrant community, such as the video commemorating the attack that occurred four years ago in Hanau (Migratöchter, Memorial Demonstration Hanau, 19.02.2024). Another form of video is the cooking video, in which people from different cultures present dishes from their respective cultures and share recipes, such as the following:

![Figure 8: Migratöchter Cooking video](Kimchi Kimpab, 14.04.2024)

This indicates that the account is not solely focused on the Turkish-Kurdish migration background, as is the case in the majority of videos, but that other cultures should also be included.

Mädelsabende does this in a very similar way. The most striking aspect of this account is its tendency to portray serious and important topics in a humorous manner. In addition, most of the videos in this account portray only one host, which means that one person represents several people (as in: Mädelsabende, Single-Attraction, 26.04.2024). Additionally, the individual in question engages in a considerable degree of role-playing, feigning conversations with various individuals and listening to their opinions or voice messages (Mädelsabende, New Year, 02.01.2024). While ostensibly engaged in the act of listening to messages or conversing on the telephone, the presenter frequently films herself in everyday settings, thereby enhancing the perceived authenticity of the content.
Language

The language utilized in the videos is largely consistent across all accounts. While attention is paid to ensuring correct sentence structure and grammatical correctness, the language employed is relatively informal. One prime example of this is observed in the videos produced for Mädelsabende, where the language adopted reflects the youthful vibrancy and informal nature that resonates with their primarily young, female audience. This linguistic approach isn't just about correct grammar and sentence structure; it's about speaking the language of the community, using expressions and slang that they use in their everyday conversations. In this way, content creators create a sense of connection and camaraderie with their viewers, fostering deeper engagement and ensuring continued engagement.

A notable distinction can be found in the approach taken by the News-WG videos. Here, the audience is directly engaged through addressing them in the content itself. Whether soliciting opinions on the topic at hand or enticing viewers with promises of more similar content upon subscription, the direct address adds a personal touch, inviting viewers to actively participate in the conversation. This approach creates a sense of community involvement, turning passive viewers into active participants in the content creation process.

In contrast, the other two accounts maintain a more indirect approach to audience engagement. While still utilizing informal language in captions and descriptions, direct engagement with the audience within the content itself is less frequent. Instead, the focus remains on the content itself, with occasional prompts or invitations to engage further found in the accompanying text. This subtle difference in approach reflects varying strategies in audience interaction, tailored to the specific goals and preferences of each account.

Identification

The two accounts, Mädelsabende and Migratöchter, are designed to facilitate viewer identification with the content. For instance, the Mädelsabende channel presents scenarios that are likely to be familiar to the target audience, who are also likely to have an opinion of them. Consequently, viewers are able to empathize with the hosts' reactions, which in turn facilitates their own sense of being seen. By evoking these feelings in the viewers, a sense of community is created, which should be generated within the community.

In the case of Migratöchter, this goes even further, as the content is aimed specifically at women with a migration background aged between 25 and 35 and offers them a platform on which their
voices and experiences take center stage, as can be seen in the video Migramothers (03.01.2024), for example. Only people who are in similar situations can relate to this content.

Moreover, the sense of identification is a consequence of the host's presence. Mädelsabende tackles taboo topics head-on, encouraging open dialogue and discussion. By addressing sensitive issues in a candid and approachable manner, the hosts invite viewers to engage in conversations that may otherwise be avoided. The videos are presented in a manner that makes them appear more approachable as if the hosts are sharing their own thoughts on the topics and experiences.

With News-WG, this identification works more through the basic scenario of life in a shared flat. The hosts create a vibe that's less formal and more like a talk between friends, making it easy to relate to what they're saying. This relaxed style of presentation and the delivery of information, while the hosts are sitting on the sofa, make it seem authentic and close to everyday life.

Communication Strategies
The communication strategies employed by the accounts are comparable in their effectiveness and conscientiousness. All of them demonstrate an acute awareness of the importance of effective communication within the comment section, where a significant proportion of comments are thoughtfully responded to. This practice fosters a palpable sense of being seen and heard, thereby reinforcing trust and nurturing a vibrant sense of community among followers. Furthermore, a question is frequently posed in the caption of the videos or within the videos themselves (News-WG) for a response in the comments section. It's very similar to Mädelsabende. Personal communication mainly takes place in the comments section. Viewers are often only addressed directly via the caption to the respective posts and not in the video itself.

However, Migratöchter distinguishes itself further by adopting a proactive approach beyond the confines of the comment section. They take the initiative to send personalized direct messages to new followers, expressing genuine gratitude for their support. This small yet meaningful gesture creates a warm, personalized welcome for newcomers, immediately fostering a sense of belonging and affinity with the community from the very start. Such personalized interactions go a long way in solidifying the bonds between the account and its followers, contributing significantly to the overall sense of inclusivity and camaraderie.
7.1.3. Journalistic Quality

The journalistic quality is consistently upheld, despite the numerous humorous elements present in the accounts. For instance, the News-WG consistently cites a variety of sources in its videos when appropriate. Such references are indicated at the side of the video, thus allowing viewers to ascertain the source of the information at all times. Additionally, the Mädelsabende account employs studies in select videos, referencing them in the course of its narrative. The sources can be identified in the accompanying caption.

News-WG: (AfD ban, 16.01.2024)

Mädelsabende: (Apologies, 13.03.2024)

In addition, all videos are subtitled so that the content can be understood without sound. The Easter Reaction video (30.03.2024) from News-WG is an exception. Subtitles ensure accessibility, as the videos can also be viewed and understood by people with hearing translation:

What other types of apologies do you know? ☺
When making a good apology, you have to pay attention to a lot of things - according to science, by the way.
According to a study by Ohio State University, a good apology should show that you regret the matter, describe your perspective and take responsibility for your mistakes. A concrete offer to make amends also helps.
Source: Jeff Grabmeier, 2016, “The 6 elements of an effective apology, according to science”
difficulties. In the case of the News-WG, there is also the fact that they always show pictures of the people being discussed in the form of stickers. This ensures that every person watching the video has a face to associate with the celebrities or politicians being discussed. This also facilitates comprehension, which enhances engagement. Additionally, News-WG has produced videos in collaboration with the Instagram account of Tagesschau. Tagesschau is a well-established news channel of the public broadcaster ARD.

Furthermore, the logos of both the account and the broadcasting organization responsible for the video can be observed on all posts. This direct affiliation with the public broadcaster ensures that even those who are not otherwise familiar with the accounts can recognize the journalistic nature of the content.

Migratöchter ensures quality through the professional appearance of the portrait and interview formats. For example, the interview with Ana and Erkan (Migratöchter, "Foreign Bride", 13.01.2024) is professionally filmed from different perspectives, and a variety of different portrayals were chosen, which speaks for a professional production.

7.1.4. Influencer Inspiration

Among the accounts, there are always videos that appear to be inspired by current trends. A video from the News-WG, for instance, represents a notable exception to the other informative posts. The video was uploaded on Easter Sunday (News-WG, Easter Reaction, 30.03.2024), and accordingly, the two hosts analyze past content they have published on Easter in previous years and provide commentary on it. The video employs a format that is both humorous and reminiscent of the reaction format commonly seen on social media. The deliberate lack of subtitles, in this case, serves not only as a stylistic choice but also as a strategic means to emphasize the uniqueness of the video, highlighting the News-WG's tendency to push the boundaries of conventional content distribution methods.

Mädelsabende emerges as a paradigmatic case study in the realm of trendsetting and trend assimilation within the digital milieu. By leveraging their acute awareness of prevailing social media trends, particularly exemplified by the #punchingtrend (Mädelsabende, Alcohol, 12.04.2024) and the #ofcourse trend (Mädelsabende, I’m a woman, 09.02.2024), Mädelsabende ingeniously infuse their content with elements that resonate deeply with their audience. Through a meticulous examination of their content trajectory, we observe a strategic deployment of viral songs (as in: Mädelsabende, Care-Work, 01.03.2024), underscoring their cognizance of auditory engagement as an augmentative dimension to visual storytelling.
Migratöchter makes little use of the prevailing social media trends. Their short, humor-filled reels seem more in line with the content commonly associated with content creators than traditional journalistic output. At first glance, these videos do not appear to convey journalistic information. However, beneath the surface, they play a crucial role in fostering a sense of community among viewers. Through personable hosts and engaging content, Migratöchter fosters a connection that goes beyond the mere dissemination of information and creates an environment where viewers feel understood and represented.

7.2. Results Interviews

7.2.1. Postings

On the one hand, all accounts receive inspiration for topics through team meetings, where upcoming topics are set and discussed. On the other hand, the community is a great source of inspiration, which is integrated through various possibilities offered by the platform. Additionally, individuals within each editorial team are aware of the trends on social media and can contribute topic inspiration from Instagram and TikTok. In the case of Migratöchter, it was also emphasized that they are dependent on inspiration from the community, as they cannot cover all cultures and perspectives on their own and therefore need to be made aware of possible content by the community (Interview Idi, 40). The creation of posts takes different lengths of time depending on the topic. For example, humorous reels are recorded and posted more quickly than videos, for which a lot of research has to be done in advance in order to create high-quality journalistic content.

The timing of posting varies. As evidenced by the content analysis, accounts do not adhere to a specific schedule for video content. Instead, they post videos when the topic is current. The News-WG also prioritizes publishing content when it is needed, rather than when the algorithm suggests it is the optimal time. The length of individual videos or stories also varies, depending on the amount of information to be conveyed about the topic in question. Nevertheless, it was also posited that the insights gleaned from the accounts indicate that they sometimes consider the time of day at which the content is published: “[W]hen you see, okay, most people are online between 5 and 6 p.m., then it's only logical that you post your content during this time“ (Interview Reiner, 96-97).

Additionally, the other two accounts indicate that they utilize the algorithm to disseminate their content to the greatest possible audience. Idi states: “We want to reach as many of our target group as possible, which means we look at how we can use the algorithm to our advantage.”
Consequently, they disseminate their content at times when the majority of their community is online. Nevertheless, they do not post multiple items on a daily basis, as this is not feasible from an editorial standpoint and would not meet the standards of their journalistic enterprise. Lammert also attests that the social media editors contribute their suggestions regarding the algorithm in team meetings and that the posting times are subsequently adjusted in accordance with these suggestions.

Notwithstanding the fact that all accounts are to a certain extent guided by the algorithm, it is also asserted that if the content is well executed and of high journalistic quality, it will find its way and achieve reach even in the absence of consideration of the algorithm.

7.2.2. Trust / Authenticity

Video Style
In addition to the journalistic guidelines, the design of the individual posts is relatively free, giving the individual formats the opportunity to play with the platform's tools and use them in different ways. Reiner describes that in the beginning, they were 100% free in their design. They are now part of the BR24 brand, where they have a corporate design and a style guide that partly dictates the design. At the beginning of the account, the concept was used more as an experiment, as there were no comparable formats. As a result, there was little opportunity within the channel to design content for social media, and the editorial team has only evolved over time as the account has become more successful and the work more extensive, to the point where it is now supported by graphic designers.

Most of the videos on the Migratöchter account are humorous short reels that are used for identification purposes. While the basic principles of journalism serve as a guide, there is plenty of room for creative expression, with the channel refraining from strict design guidelines. This allows writers to explore innovative ways to appeal to their audience while staying true to their journalistic roots.

Lammert describes how everything posted on girls' nights out follows a script. Every aspect is scrutinized by the editorial team. Following guidelines is paramount to ensure that every piece of content is not only entertaining, but also informative and well-researched. The commitment to precision and quality is evident in the meticulous work that goes into every video, photo and story that is published.

Language
All accounts utilize language that is also used by viewers in the respective target group.
Reiner describes in the interview that they made a conscious decision to use everyday language when developing the account. She is therefore of the clear opinion that they can reach the target group better with the help of the language used by them and that the language is part of the packaging of the account and their form of journalism.

This is exactly the same for the other accounts. As can be seen in the content analysis, Mädelsabende in particular mirrors language that is very close to the everyday language of the target group, which is part of the basic idea of the accounts and is intended to better reach the young target group.

**Identification**

In all cases, the focus is on the followers identifying with the hosts. In the case of News-WG, this is particularly evident in the shared flat idea itself. The genesis of the account coincided with the individuals involved residing in shared flats, which they sought to replicate in the Instagram format. In this instance, the identification is derived from the fact that the individuals involved were of a similar age to the target demographic when the account was established, thereby enabling them to incorporate their own needs into the account's design.

In the case of migrant daughters, the name alone serves as an identifying feature. At the outset, the channel was known as ‘Naber? Was geht?’, which translates as "What's going on?" in English. The channel was renamed Migratöchter in 2023 and was found to appeal to a broader audience and not solely to Turkish-Kurdish culture. The community self-identifies as "Migratöchter," or women with a migration background. This is also reflected in the content of the videos they post. The brief, comedic videos are designed to elicit a sense of shared experience, as expressed by Interview Idi. “We want to create the feeling of 'you know the feeling too', in other words, we want to develop this identification and I think that is very important for our form of journalism” (Interview Idi, 155-157). Moreover, a significant proportion of the content is derived from the editors' personal experiences, which enables them to draw upon a wealth of relatable material from the everyday lives of women with a migrant background. “Sometimes [the videos] can be serious, sometimes entertaining, the purpose is for people to talk about them, for the community to say ‘Oh, I know that’, ‘I know how my mother feels’ and so on.” (Interview Idi, 159-161). This approach enables the creators to recreate realistic scenarios, thereby enhancing the authenticity of the content for the intended audience.

At Mädelsabende, identification is primarily created by the hosts: “I made sure that we represented diversity in the cast, that we could appeal to different young women with different
hosts and thus bring in different perspectives through the team.“ (Interview Lammert, 121-122). Through this diversity of hosts, more women can feel addressed, different topics are discussed and there is generally no ideal image that is emphasized, but rather differently shaped perspectives.

Communication strategies
Communication with the community and interaction with individuals is of paramount importance to all three accounts, and a significant amount of resources are allocated to this end. The strategies employed by the three accounts are largely similar. Each account ensures that comments are consistently addressed and that followers are able to engage with the account in a two-way manner.

Furthermore, each account provides followers with the option to submit topic requests, which are duly acknowledged and implemented following a review by the team. The Instagram platform is particularly conducive to effective community management, as it facilitates direct interaction with followers. This was one of the primary reasons that the Mädelsabende and Migratöchter accounts chose to exclusively share their content on that platform, rather than utilizing other platforms as they had previously tested (Interview Lammert, 15-18; Interview Idi, 20-23).

In particular, the News-WG and Migratöchter accounts attach great importance to replying to the direct messages sent to them. They endeavor to read and respond to every message. In her interview, Reiner notes that the responses are often very surprised and delighted, as viewers do not expect their messages to be answered. “If you look at it from a purely strategic point of view, it's actually unwise to invest time and effort in a direct message like this“ (Interview Reiner, 202-204). Nevertheless, it is of significant importance to them, as Reiner asserts, and it serves to foster a more robust connection to the community. At Mädelsabende, the objective was initially to reply to each message individually, too. However, due to the size of the account and the volume of messages it receives, this is no longer feasible. Nevertheless, an attempt is made to read each message and they are sorted by topic. Subsequently, the messages are utilized as a source of inspiration for new posts and topics, as well as to respond to frequently asked questions about a specific topic in the form of a story. This approach ensures that the insights gained through research are accessible to a broader audience, rather than being limited to a single individual.
7.2.3. Journalistic Quality

The journalistic quality of all accounts is guaranteed by a team of editors and social media managers who are responsible for the creation of the articles. In the News-WG, at least two, and on occasion, even three persons are involved in the creation of articles, thereby ensuring that no single individual bears sole responsibility. The third person is typically a social media manager who was not involved in the research for the posts and therefore views the finished product from the perspective of the audience. This methodology ensures that the researchers are not unduly influenced by their own work, that the information is readily comprehensible, and that an external perspective is incorporated.

At Mädelsabende, a minimum of three persons are consistently engaged in investigating a specific topic, with a designated editor serving as the primary arbiter of the topics under consideration: “We have a team of producers and researchers in the background who also did the research for the stories. In the end, we always teamed up our hosts with someone. There was always a team of three or so who researched […] plus an editor who always approved the [work]” (Interview Lammert, 125-128). At Migratöchter, the aforementioned approval, fact-checking in accordance with the "four-eyes" principle, verification of the target audience match, assessment of alignment with the channel's values, and evaluation of the ease of comprehension are conducted by the partner management.

In particular, Helene Reiner from News-WG emphasized that although the presentation on Instagram is a distinct form of journalism, it is still conducted by journalists who adhere to the same standards and operate within the same qualitative journalistic format as other news formats. “[T]he work itself is not different from other formats, only the packaging is different” (Interview Reiner, 42-44).

Verena Lammert of the Mädelsabende account similarly asserted that the account's primary objective is to maintain the highest journalistic standards: “[W]e are public broadcasters, we are financed by license fees, we have to take our audience seriously” (Interview Lammert, 69-70).

A similar situation obtains at Migratöchter, where the primacy is given to journalistic work and the end product. They adhere to all journalistic criteria and guidelines, yet Idi also acknowledges that it is a continual balancing act between what the Instagram algorithm desires and what is most beneficial for the channel and the journalistic product. She prioritizes the
display of advertisements. This presents a challenge when it comes to collaboration or portraying other individuals or groups. She asserts that the channel does not feature any form of advertising, yet it consistently receives requests from various groups to provide coverage. The question of the extent to which the interest in such portraits is editorial or commercial in nature is a recurring one.

A comparable phenomenon can be observed in the context of Mädelsabende, which has historically collaborated with content creators, particularly at the inception of their accounts. The prerequisite for such a collaboration is that the influencers are not compensated, as it is not a collaboration but rather a form of reporting. They engage in this activity of their own volition, driven by a desire to disseminate their subject matter. Furthermore, the account in question was subjected to a preliminary examination with regard to the content that it had previously disseminated. “For us, it was important that when you come to the channel, you actually find content and not just advertising. If the channel was too promotional, we actually said it wasn't for us.” (Interview Lammert, 106-107).

The accounts are perceived by outsiders in a variety of ways. Reiner delineates how, in the nascent stages of their development, the primary concern was that they would not be accorded the requisite respect within the journalism industry. Over time, however, the account has become established and developed a reputation, such that there is no longer any question within the industry as to whether they are truly journalists or a hybrid model towards influencers. The accounts of Mädelsabende and Migratöchter do not describe these experiences. In the case of Mädelsabende, Lammert notes that the account has rapidly established a niche within the industry and has also secured its position by winning journalistic awards.

7.2.4. Influencer Inspiration

It can be posited that the content of the three accounts was inspired by the content of influencer accounts. The concept of designing the accounts in this manner was inspired by the style of successful Instagram accounts of influencers. Reiner describes the rationale behind the account as follows: the intention was to bridge the gap between the more serious and clean accounts of news channels on the one hand and those of influencers with beautiful images of food (Interview Reiner, 18-21). In order to achieve this, a news account was created in conjunction with a different and more appealing design for a younger demographic.

Looking back on the early stages of the project, Lammert recalls how the young team was inspired by the dynamic and engaging way influencers curated their content. “So we were
influenced by the storytelling, the wording, how it's filmed, how the cuts are laid out, whether the story is told long or calmly. What we then added was simply this research component at this point, which is what journalism is all about.” (Interview Lammert, 78-80). In addition, the architecture of the account was deliberately designed to cater to the preferences of the young women in the target audience and the central role they play in shaping trends and driving engagement on social media platforms.

The Migratöchter account similarly reflects a conscious effort to tap into the pulse of social media discourse. Drawing inspiration from the ever-evolving landscape of Instagram and TikTok, the creators undertake a comprehensive analysis of the content that resonates most profoundly within their community (Interview Idi, 58-61). This iterative process informs their content strategy, enabling them to curate a narrative that not only reflects their unique perspective but also resonates deeply with their audience.

In addition, individual pieces of content bear the stamp of influencer formats that have proven to be particularly effective. Reiner highlights the use of an established reaction video format as a strategic means of measuring its effectiveness in her context. She emphasizes the multi-layered nature of the News-WG content, highlighting that the account goes beyond the mere dissemination of news to encompass a variety of topics ranging from political discourse to insights into shared flat life experiences - a conscious decision aimed at fostering a sense of connection and inclusivity within the audience.

8. Analysis & Discussion

In this chapter, all aspects of the work will be brought together. In synthesizing the findings of the content analysis and interviews with the theoretical frameworks of the profession of journalism, influencer profession, and Hybrid Media Theory, a comprehensive understanding of the intersection between traditional journalistic practices and contemporary influencer strategies emerges. This convergence sheds light on how journalists publishing on social media platforms, particularly on Instagram, to keep up with changing audience need and behaviour, navigate their roles, responsibilities, and audience engagement tactics. With the help of this analysis, the research questions *Are influencer strategies used by journalists, if yes, which ones?* and *How do these strategies influence journalistic work using the example of journalistic content on three Instagram channels of public service media in Germany?* will be answered. The categorization of analysis results, as delineated in Chapter 5.3, serves as a framework for evaluating the quality characteristics essential to both journalism and influencer domains. For journalists, these qualities encompass accuracy, source transparency, independence, timeliness,
self-control, and critical reflection. In contrast, influencers are evaluated based on criteria such as self-presentation, follower interaction, hashtag usage, posting patterns, identification, and follower engagement strategies.

8.1. RQ 1: Are influencer strategies used by journalists, if yes, which ones?

In order to answer this question, the individual quality criteria of influencers must be incorporated into the content analysis and the analysis of the interviews and compared with these results.

8.1.1. Self-presentation

The journalistic accounts News-WG, Mädelsabende, and Migratöchter have adopted this influencer-inspired approach to increase their credibility and authenticity. News-WG, for example, presents its content in a unique setting: an apartment designed to give the impression that the hosts live in it together. This domestic setting breaks with the conventional norm of journalistic content, which usually involves formal studios or on-site reporting. By bringing journalism into a domestic setting, the News-WG uses a familiar and everyday environment to connect with its audience on a personal level. This strategy makes the presenters seem more approachable and natural and fosters a stronger sense of community among viewers.

Mädelsabende also uses this approach effectively. The videos are often set in the hosts' own homes and give the impression that the presenters are casually sharing their own experiences and thoughts. This is seamlessly blended with well-researched journalistic content, creating a mixture of personal narrative and factual reporting. As evident from the interview with Lammert, the style of filming, speaking, and acting in these roles has been heavily influenced by influencers. This fusion of influencer techniques with journalistic integrity results in content that is both engaging and informative.

Migratöchter follows a similar strategy. Many of their reels are set in everyday settings. The interview with Idi showed that inspiration from social media plays an important role in their production process. By adopting the informal and personal style found in influencers, Migratöchter increases the accessibility and authenticity of their journalistic work.

By presenting themselves as normal people sharing real experiences, these accounts aim to be more appealing to younger audiences. This shift not only makes the content more personable, but also strengthens the connection between the journalists and their viewers, fostering a sense of trust and community. The integration of influencer-inspired techniques into journalistic
content represents a significant development in the way news is communicated, which is also described in the theory of hybrid media. This theory describes the transformation of journalism through new technologies and the convergence of social media with traditional journalism.

8.1.2. Follower interaction

For the journalistic accounts, communication and interaction with the community are equally important as they are for influencers. They don’t see engagement with their audience as a secondary task but as an important priority. Like influencers, journalists use the comments section to initiate and engage in conversations with their readers. This public interaction allows them to answer questions, clarify information, and demonstrate transparency and accountability. In addition, as discussed in the interviews, the interaction helps to find new topics that interest the audience, allowing the accounts to respond even faster to requests and suggestions from the community. For News-WG and Migratöchter, reading and responding to direct messages is a matter of course. This practice underscores their commitment to accessibility and responsiveness and demonstrates a willingness to engage with their audience on a personal level. In this way, they go beyond the traditional role of disseminating information and instead foster a sense of community and mutual respect.

The goal of this approach is to build a strong bond with their audiences. By emphasizing direct engagement, the journalists are attempting to bridge the gap between the media and the public. This is largely thanks to the Instagram platform, which has made community management very easy. This personal approach helps to build trust and relationships. Through these interactions, journalists position themselves not just as reporters, but as active participants in a shared discourse. This enriches journalistic work and adds a human touch that makes their work more credible.

In essence, both influencers and journalists recognize that communication and interaction are key to building and maintaining a loyal audience. For influencers, it’s about creating a personal brand that followers can connect with on an emotional level. For journalists, it’s about fostering a sense of community and trust that enhances the credibility of their reporting. By embracing direct engagement, both groups are able to cultivate deeper, more meaningful relationships with their audiences, ultimately enriching the overall experience and effectiveness of their respective fields.
8.1.3. Hashtag usage

All three profiles analyzed use hashtags in their posts. Both Mädelsabende and Migratöchter incorporate hashtags that include their brand names. This branding strategy not only reinforces their identity but also creates a unique hashtag that followers can use to find or tag related content. News-WG only uses content-specific hashtags. This approach helps in drawing a diverse audience interested in the specific content being discussed, potentially increasing engagement and interaction with each post.

The strategic use of hashtags by these profiles serves a dual purpose. First, it enhances the visibility of their posts by ensuring they appear in relevant search results and hashtag feeds. Second, it helps attract a larger audience to their accounts by connecting with users who share similar interests or who are searching for content related to the hashtags used. This not only boosts the reach of individual posts but also contributes to the overall growth and engagement of their social media presence.

8.1.4. Posting patterns

The analysis of the accounts revealed a departure from the established norms observed among influencers. Contrary to the recommended frequency of posting, these journalistic accounts exhibited a markedly different pattern. Rather than sticking to a set schedule of regular posts, these accounts posted around 5-6 reels per month, which does not meet the recommended frequency for optimal reach and engagement that Instagram (Meta) recommends of at least 10 reels per month to achieve reach (Instagram Creators, n.d.). This is because, as Idi said in the interview, it is impossible for the team to manage. Nevertheless, all accounts pay attention to the times at which they publish them and are guided by the algorithm accordingly. Despite this attention to timing, the primary focus of these journalistic accounts deviated from the conventional influencer strategy. Rather than prioritizing consistency for algorithmic optimization, their emphasis lay on the timely publication of content aligned with journalistic standards of relevance and topicality.

This approach underscores a fundamental difference in objectives between influencers and journalistic accounts. While influencers prioritize consistency and frequency to maximize visibility and audience growth, journalistic accounts prioritize editorial standards of timeliness and relevance, even if it means deviating from platform-driven best practices. This nuanced understanding highlights the diverse strategies employed within the realm of social media influence, shaped by distinct goals and professional standards.
8.1.5. Identification

It is very important to all three accounts examined that viewers can identify with them. News-WG exemplifies the importance of relatability through its presentation style and the lifestyle it portrays. The concept of a shared flat is a common living situation among young adults, especially students and young professionals, which mirrors the reality of many in the target demographic. This setting not only makes the content more relatable but also fosters a sense of community among viewers who live in similar circumstances.

With Migratöchter and Mädelsabende, it works on the one hand through the content, which aims to enable viewers to relate, and on the other hand through the chosen host presence. By consciously including hosts from various backgrounds, the account ensures that multiple perspectives are presented, which helps a wider audience identify with the content. This commitment to diversity is crucial in creating an inclusive environment where viewers feel seen and represented. Additionally, the content of Mädelsabende is tailored to resonate with the experiences and interests of its viewers, further enhancing the sense of connection and relatability. Migratöchter gains identification by providing a platform for underrepresented groups. Through them, the community has found an account they can identify with and share their experiences.

The factors of relatability and identification are crucial to the success of journalistic reports such as News-WG, Migratöchter, and Mädelsabende. By reflecting the realities and values of their audiences, these reports can build strong, trusting relationships with their viewers, which is essential for both effective journalism and audience engagement.

8.1.6. Addressing the Followers

The journalistic accounts follow a very similar approach to the influencers. By addressing their followers directly with "you" (2nd person singular) or "you" (2nd person plural), these accounts create a conversational tone that fosters a stronger connection with viewers. This approach is particularly evident in the subtitles to the videos, where the presenters engage with their audience in a way that resembles a friendly conversation. A notable strategy of these accounts is the use of the presenters' first names in the caption, as seen particularly on News-WG. This personal touch not only humanizes the hosts but also contributes to a sense of closeness and familiarity. By signing off with their name, hosts effectively invite viewers into their world and reinforce a sense of camaraderie and trust.
In addition, the language used in these accounts is tailored to the everyday language of the target group. This linguistic customization is particularly pronounced on platforms such as Mädelsabende, where colloquial terms and expressions typical of the age group in question are seamlessly integrated into the content. By speaking the language of their audience, presenters not only facilitate communication but also foster a shared cultural identity that strengthens viewers' sense of community.

Overall, the deliberate use of inclusive language, personal signatures, and accessible vocabulary underscores the commitment of these journalistic features to foster an environment of accessibility, authenticity, and connection with their viewers. By mirroring the successful strategies of influencers, these accounts manage to foster a stronger bond with their audience, thereby enhancing viewer engagement and loyalty. This approach not only enhances the relatability of the content but also builds a trusting and loyal audience base, essential for the success of contemporary journalistic endeavors.

It should be noted that these strategies are used by influencers because they are encouraged to do so by the Instagram platform and the algorithm requires this to be successful. Instagram describes in its guidelines how best to operate on the platform to reach the most people with their posts and thus generate new followers. This means that journalists do not necessarily just adopt the strategies of influencers but adapt to the platform accordingly. Nevertheless, it can be said that the inspiration came from influencers, and the type of presentation was also adopted from them, as became clear in the interviews. It can therefore be said that the original ideas of the accounts were inspired by influencers and that similarly presented content can still be found, but that much is also done this way because it is wanted by the platform and the journalists adapt to it in order to reach the best and most people. The algorithm and Instagram's guidelines therefore affect both journalists and influencers. It's important to recognize that while influencers can serve as a source of inspiration, journalists bring their own expertise and journalistic integrity to the table. Despite adopting certain stylistic elements reminiscent of influencers, the core values of accuracy, credibility, and ethical reporting remain paramount.

8.2. RQ 2: How do these strategies influence journalistic work?

The integration of influencer strategies affects the work of journalists in several ways. Adopting influencer-inspired presentation styles is changing the way journalists present themselves to their audiences. By choosing to film in familiar settings, such as their homes, and by presenting themselves as part of a community rather than as detached figures, journalists are attempting to connect more deeply with their audience. This approach humanizes the journalistic process and
makes it more engaging and accessible to viewers who might find traditional journalistic formats intimidating or inaccessible.

The emphasis on interaction with followers reflects practices that are common among influencers but have different journalistic goals. By actively responding to comments and messages, journalists foster a sense of dialog and connection with their audience. This not only encourages audience engagement but also provides journalists with valuable insights into their audience's interests and concerns, which can impact future content production and editorial decisions. Audience interaction has always been a crucial component of traditional journalism, but the advent of social media platforms like Instagram has made it easier and more immediate. Journalists can now respond to news and comments in real time, facilitating a more dynamic and interactive relationship with their audience. This practice resonates with Habermas' concept of the public sphere, which views journalism as a space for public discourse and engagement. Social media platforms have expanded this public sphere, making it more accessible and immediate, thereby enhancing the role of journalism in fostering informed public dialogue.

In principle, however, the journalistic standards remain the same. As Reiner said in the interview: The work as a journalist is the same, only the packaging is different (Interview Reiner, 40-42). This statement emphasizes that while the methods of presenting information and interacting with the audience have evolved, the basic principles and quality of journalism have remained unchanged. The change in presentation style influenced by influencers does not compromise the integrity or rigor of journalistic work. Rather, it represents an adaptation to modern means of communication and ensures that journalistic standards are maintained regardless of the medium. Consequently, the core of journalistic quality remains intact despite the influence of new media formats and is unaffected by these changes. Moreover, the integration of these new styles and platforms can enhance the reach and impact of journalism. By leveraging the widespread use of social media, journalists can disseminate information more broadly and engage with diverse audiences who may not consume traditional news media. This expanded reach can help bridge informational divides and contribute to a more informed and connected society.

9. Conclusion

All in all, it can be said that influencers have an impact on journalism on Instagram. Influencer strategies proved to be a strong source of inspiration for the Instagram accounts analyzed in this thesis, but they were adapted with specific modifications and conditions to uphold the journalistic responsibilities of public broadcasters. In the content analysis of the three German
public Instagram accounts - News-WG, Mädelsabende, and Migratöchter - strategies were found that are obviously inspired by influencers. The interviews with Helene Reiner, Verena Lammert, and Kübra Idi only confirmed this. Nevertheless, it is clear that journalistic quality was ensured, and journalistic standards were observed in all Instagram accounts.

The Hybrid Media Theory describes the phenomenon revealed by the analysis very well. The emergence of innovative forms of journalistic publishing is indicative of the transformation of journalism in the digital age and the attempt to develop new ways of bringing journalism to all age groups.

This work highlights the intricate interplay between journalistic and influencer practices on Instagram, as well as the broader implications for media professionals and audience engagement. By embracing the dynamics of hybrid media and understanding the evolving roles of journalists and influencers, we can navigate the complexities of digital media consumption and foster meaningful connections with audiences in the digital age. The three accounts examined are good examples of innovative ideas that use Instagram as a publishing venue for quality journalism.

In summary, the rise of influencer culture has affected the presentation and community engagement strategies of contemporary journalistic accounts in the examples presented in this study. By emulating the personable and approachable demeanor of influencers, these platforms have successfully cultivated a more inclusive and participatory media ecosystem in which the audience is not just a passive consumer, but an active participant in the storytelling process - without abandoning their journalistic standards, which they seem much more conscious of upholding than traditional journalists.
References


Used Reels

News-WG


Mädelsabende


Migratöchter


Appendix

I. Codebook Interview Analysis

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<td>4</td>
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<td>Interaction with Influencers</td>
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II. Interview Guides

a. Interview with Helene Reiner (News-WG)

General information

1. History of the creation of News-WG
2. What was your role?
3. How did you come up with the idea for the account?
4. What was your goal with the account?

Topics

5. How did you come up with your topics?
   a. What inspires you?
6. Are you active on Instagram/TikTok and know about trends?
   a. Do you also collect ideas for your own account?
7. How long are the topics prepared?
8. What does the process look like - from the idea to the post?

Posts

9. What do you pay attention to when posting?
   a. At certain times?
   b. How many times a day?
   c. Fixed days for reels/posts?
10. How free are you in the design?
    a. How much does the broadcaster (br) have to say?
    b. What about cooperations with e.g. the Tagesschau account?
11. Do you pay more attention to the quality of the images and videos or are they authentic?

Interaction

12. How important is communication with followers to you?
13. Who replies to messages and comments?

Strategies

14. An important point for a good relationship between audience and media maker is an almost personal relationship between each other ...
   a. What strategies do you use at News-WG to create this feeling?
   b. What is your strategy to be authentic?
   c. How do you build trust with your audience?
15. Do you use strategies such as addressing the audience/followers directly, as it is successful with influencers?
16. Example Easter reaction video: do you do it because you enjoy it or because you actively think about it as a strategy used by influencers and liked by followers?
17. You made a video about whether Taylor Swift can influence the US election. Are you interested in the topic yourself, or did you just do it because she is a global star and appeals to a wide range of followers?
18. How do you manage to be authentic and at the same time fulfill the demands of journalism?
19. Do you have strategies to avoid going too much in the non-journalistic direction?
20. Do you get feedback from people who think you are more of an influencer than a journalist?
   a. If so, what does that do to you?
   b. Do you perhaps want to be seen as an influencer rather than a journalist?

**Socio-economic background**

21. Age
22. Gender
23. Educational qualification
b. Interview with Kübra Idi (Migratöchter)

General information
1. History of the creation of Migratöchter
2. What was your role?
3. How did you come up with the idea for the account?
4. What was your goal with the account?

Topics
5. How did you come up with your topics?
   a. What inspires you?
6. Are you active on Instagram/TikTok and know about trends?
   a. Do you also collect ideas for your own account?
7. How long are the topics prepared?
8. What does the process look like - from the idea to the post?

Posts
9. What do you pay attention to when posting?
   a. At certain times?
   b. How many times a day?
   c. Fixed days for reels/posts?
10. How free are you in the design?
    a. How much does the broadcaster (swr) have to say?
11. Do you pay more attention to the quality of the images and videos or are they authentic?

Interaction
12. How important is communication with followers to you?
13. Who replies to messages and comments?

Strategies
14. An important point for a good relationship between audience and media maker is an almost personal relationship between each other ...
   a. What strategies do you use at Migratöchter to create this feeling?
   b. What is your strategy to be authentic?
   c. How do you build trust with your audience?
15. Do you use strategies such as addressing the audience/followers directly, as it is successful with influencers?
16. How do you manage to be authentic and at the same time fulfill the demands of journalism?

17. Do you have strategies to avoid going too much in the non-journalistic direction?

18. Do you get feedback from people who think you are more of an influencer than a journalist?
   a. If so, what does that do to you?
   b. Do you perhaps want to be seen as an influencer rather than a journalist?

Socio-economic background

19. Age

20. Gender

21. Educational qualification
c. Interview with Verena Lammert (Mädelsabende)

General information
1. History of the creation of Mädelsabende
2. What was your role?
3. How did you come up with the idea for the account?
4. What was your goal with the account?

Topics
5. How did you come up with your topics?
   a. What inspires you?
6. Are you active on Instagram/TikTok and know about trends?
   a. Do you also collect ideas for your own account?
7. How long are the topics prepared?
8. What does the process look like - from the idea to the post?

Posts
9. What do you pay attention to when posting?
10. How free are you in the design?
    a. How much does the broadcaster (wdr/funk) have to say?
11. Do you pay more attention to the quality of the images and videos or are they authentic?

Interaction
12. How important is communication with followers to you?
13. Who replies to messages and comments?

Strategies
14. An important point for a good relationship between audience and media maker is an almost personal relationship between each other ...
   a. What strategies do you use at Mädelsabende to create this feeling?
   b. What is your strategy to be authentic?
   c. How do you build trust with your audience?
15. Do you use strategies such as addressing the audience/followers directly, as it is successful with influencers?
16. How do you manage to be authentic and at the same time fulfill the demands of journalism?
17. Do you have strategies to avoid going too much in the non-journalistic direction?
18. Do you get feedback from people who think you are more of an influencer than a journalist?
   a. If so, what does that do to you?
   b. Do you perhaps want to be seen as an influencer rather than a journalist?

Socio-economic background

19. Age
20. Gender
21. Educational qualification
III. Consent Form Interviews

Consent form for study assignments at
Södertörn University

Information to participants
You have been asked to participate in the study about *Influencers' impact on journalism: An investigation into the strategies adopted by journalists*. The study is being conducted as part of my education in the Master Programme in International Journalism at the department of Journalism at Södertörn University. Under the GDPR, Södertörn University is the personal data controller when personal data is processed as part of a study assignment. This document provides information about how your personal data will be processed as part of this study.

Personal data that will be processed
For the purpose of this study, your personal data that will be collected and processed are:

- Name
- Gender
- Age
- Degree
- Occupation
- Interview responses
- The aim of the thesis

The aim of this thesis is to examine selected German Instagram accounts in order to find out whether influencer strategies can be found in them. For this purpose, a content analysis will be conducted as well as interviews with those involved in the accounts.

How will personal data be stored and secured during work on the thesis
The Interviews will be recorded and subsequently stored on Office 365 associated with the university student account (Microsoft).
How long will personal data be processed?
Your personal data will be processed until the study assignment is completed and graded as a pass. After this, your personal data will be deleted. Your name or anything else that could identify you will not be included in the results.

Your rights under the GDPR
Södertörn University is the data controller for processing your personal data. Under the GDPR, you are entitled to access your personal data that is being processed in the study (extract from the register) and, where necessary, have erroneous personal data corrected. You may also request that information about you is erased and that the processing of your personal data is limited.

If you wish to use any of these rights or recall your consent, you should contact the relevant student or their supervisor. Their contact details are provided below.

Complaints
If you have questions or complaints about how your personal data is processed, you are welcome to contact Södertörn University’s data protection officer via dataskydd@sh.se. You are also entitled to make a complaint to the Swedish Authority for Privacy Protection (IMY) if you are unhappy with the university’s personal data processing. IMY can be emailed at imy@imy.se or you can call them at +46 (0)8 657 6100. You can contact Södertörn University by emailing registrator@sh.se or by calling +46 (0)8 608 4000.

Contact details for the student and supervisor:

Student: Ina Kern, xxx@xxx, +4xx xxxx

Supervisor: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Katja Schupp, xxx@xxx +xx xxxx
Consent to participation in the study on *Influencers' impact on journalism: An investigation into the strategies adopted by journalists*

I have read and understood the information about the study and consent to participating in the study on *Influencers' impact on journalism: An investigation into the strategies adopted by journalists*. I am aware that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I can terminate my participation in the study without providing a reason until the publication of the thesis’s research planned on the 21st of May 2024. I was given the opportunity to ask questions, and these were answered to my satisfaction. By signing this form, I choose to participate in the study and consent to Södertörn University processing my personal data in accordance with the relevant data protection legislation and the information provided.

Place and date:

__________________________________________________________________________

Signature

__________________________________________________________________________

Name in block capitals

__________________________________________________________________________