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Abstract

Commercialization of the media refers to the increasing importance of market considerations in the daily work of media professionals. Media organizations need to find ways to maintain the quality promise of their brands as an economically successful business. The increasing market orientation of media companies challenges their dedication to good journalism. The media brand identity approach is a good starting point from which to analyze this decision making in a commercialized and complex environment. By introducing the MBAC (“media, brands, actors, and communication”) model, a new approach is offered toward better theoretical understanding of brand identity-driven decision making. Responsibilities and tensions between the journalistic and the business side of news production are presented, and the complex environment in which decisions are made, implemented, and defended are elaborated on.
Brand Identity-Driven Decision Making by Journalists and Media Managers—The MBAC Model as a Theoretical Framework

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Brand Identity-Driven Decision Making by Journalists and Media Managers—The MBAC Model as a Theoretical Framework

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Commercialization of the media refers to the increasing importance of market considerations in the daily work of media professionals. Media organizations need to find ways to maintain the quality promise of their brands as an economically successful business. The increasing market orientation of media companies challenges their dedication to good journalism. The media brand identity approach is a good starting point from which to analyze this decision making in a commercialized and complex environment. By introducing the MBAC ("media, brands, actors, and communication") model, a new approach is offered toward better theoretical understanding of brand identity-driven decision making. Responsibilities and tensions between the journalistic and the business side of news production are presented, and the complex environment in which decisions are made, implemented, and defended are elaborated on.

The media signal the quality of their news coverage through their brands. If they do so successfully, the audience can expect them to produce news coverage of considerable quality. From a normative perspective, it is crucial that citizens get this information about political and economic developments. Thus, the media make an important contribution to the functioning of modern democratic societies. They convey information, create publicity, criticize, and, to a certain extent, control politics, the economy, and the actors involved in those processes. In addition, actors present their views.

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the media and foster public discourses. Thus, the media inform (McNair, 2007, p. 21), control as watchdogs or fourth estate (Sigal, 1973, pp. 77–78), “... advocate for actions, policies and laws believed to be in the public interest ...” (Anderson, 2007, p. 40), and act as a forum for debates (McNair, 2007, p. 21). These contributions of the media correspond to democratic and general public theories focusing on the deliberative function of publicity (Chambers, 2001; Cook, 2005; Curran, Iyengar, Brink Lund, & Salovaara-Moring, 2009). Although the media also offer entertainment and contribute to community building, we focus only on the information function of the media.

The financial crisis has clearly shown that the media are closely connected to economic development and its consequences for businesses that invest in advertising. Advertising is still the dominant revenue model of the traditional mass media. Publishers and broadcasters depend largely on advertising and suffer severely when companies downsize their communication budgets due to (cyclical) downturns. The majority of media companies respond to the crisis with cost-cutting activities. Hard news coverage is one of the first victims when it comes to saving costs because it is costly in terms of labor and because it is not amenable to advertising. As a result, advertising-friendly contexts such as soft news coverage, technology and innovation journalism, and entertainment become more important; or, as the Chief Executive Officer of the German TV company ProSiebenSat.1, Thomas Ebeling, put it at the end of 2009, “We do have an economic problem with news.” News for him is a business that needs to be subsidized.1 Entman (2010) argued that this finally leads to a downward spiral: “The more news production strays from the core function of enhancing democracy, the more potential consumers learn they have little reason to invest their free time consuming serious political journalism. So they don’t, and newspapers and the stock market continue redirecting their resources” (p. 104).

Theoretically, this area of conflict is part of the ongoing and rather normative debate on the commercialization of the media. Commercialization of the media generally refers to the increasing importance of market considerations in the daily work of media companies and raises questions about how news coverage is challenged by the market orientation of media companies (Baker, 2002; Gerth, Rademacher, Pühringer, Dahinden, & Siegert, 2009; Hamilton, 2004; Siegert, Meier, & Trappel, 2005).2 One of the main consequences of commercialization is that the media address the audience as consumers and not as citizens and that they tend to produce more advertising-friendly and less critical content. This leads to a “news that sells” philosophy (Hamilton, 2004) and to “market-driven” (McManus, 1994) or “market-oriented” (Underwood, 2001) journalism. However, there is still a lack of theoretical understanding about the decision making of editors and media managers in this complex and commercialized media environment. The model we present in this article argues that decision making is strongly
driven by the brand identity of either media companies (“corporate brands”) or single media outlets (“product brands”). From an economic perspective, this helps us to understand the complex environment in which branded media outlets work and how they face the challenge of the increasing interlinking of journalistic news making and marketing. From a normative perspective, we have to ask whether, despite this dynamism, citizens still receive the information needed to participate in democratic processes such as voting, debating, and community service. Hence, both the quantity and the journalistic quality of the coverage are relevant. Taking the consequences of commercialization into consideration, we basically assume that the deliberative function of the media can never be fully guaranteed—neither in quantitative nor in qualitative terms—when the system depends on privately owned and profit-oriented media companies.

However, as McManus (1994) noted, quality orientation and market orientation are not mutually exclusive in principal: “Serving the marketplace is not always incompatible with serving the public, just frequently” (p. 327). Some media outlets such as the The New York Times (United States), CNN (United States), Le Monde (France), Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (Germany), or Neue Zürcher Zeitung (Switzerland) still profit from their historically grown brands and quality images. They still implement quality as the core element of their brand identity. So, quality can still be a choice. However, the environment in which quality brands operate today might become more complex and challenging.

Starting from the assumption that media companies continually produce news coverage of good quality only when such an orientation is part of their media brand identity, we propose a model based on the media brand identity concept to shed light into the circumstances of branding, decision making, and news production in the media. This model, the “media, brands, actors, and communication” (MBAC) model, is introduced in the following section. In the third section, we turn to the core elements of the model. In another section, we explain the environment of the work of media professionals. Finally, we discuss some empirical possibilities by means of which the model can be tested.

**MEDIA, BRANDS, ACTORS, AND COMMUNICATION: THE MBAC MODEL**

Based on the brand identity approach (discussed later), our MBAC model (see Figure 1) sets out to conceptualize the role of media brands in the daily work of editors and media managers within the constraints of a rather complex environment. The environment in our model consists of structures, external and internal actors, and their behavior. The MBAC model was developed in the context of an explorative study that was part of an extensive research project.
On a structural macrolevel, media organizations are influenced by four main market drivers proposed by structure–conduct–performance (SCP) approaches (Hendriks, 1995; McQuail, 1992): the social environment, the competitive environment, the regulative environment (especially important for electronic media), and the technological environment (Hendriks, 1995, p. 65). As we are analyzing the behavior of media companies in their production of hard news coverage, we add some specific drivers. Depending on the area of news coverage, we need to take into account characteristics of this specific area of coverage (e.g., political topics, economic analysis, education, etc.) and the involvement and behavior of relevant decision makers and their consultants, as well as intermediaries (such as citizens’ initiatives, unions, parties, etc.).

To fully understand why the media content is presented as we find it, we need to look closely at the way media professionals take decisions and how news is produced within media organizations. This requires considering both sides of news production: the editorial, as well as the business, side. According to Entman (2005), traditional media pursue two central objectives:

(1) reporting on important events, people, and issues, particularly those involving governmental institutions and actors, in ways that are accurate and balanced, and (2) generating sufficient advertising and circulation revenue to make a profit regarded by the stock market or private owners as acceptable. (p. 58)
In the concept of media brand identity, the two objectives are aligned with each other. This is also the case even if some media companies neither explicitly pursue a brand strategy nor hire professional brand managers (Gerth, 2010; Shaver & Shaver, 2008).

The MBAC model is a framework that allows for the explanation of the behavior of media companies and the performance that results from this behavior (i.e., media content). With the link to the concept of brand identity, we can argue that it is economically rational for some media companies to cover news in a quality-orientated manner. By including quality as a part of their brand identity, media outlets find the audience that is ready to pay, at least with attention, for this sort of coverage. Compared to both early and recent developments of the SCP model (Albarran, 2002; Czygan & Kallfaß, 2003; Hendriks, 1995; McQuail, 1992), our approach has the advantage of explicitly linking the editorial side with the business side. Earlier models of news production either consider this important connection insufficiently (e.g., Tuchman, 1978), remain abstract (e.g., Shoemaker & Reese, 1991), or focus only on effects on the audience (e.g., Cho, Shah, McLeod, McLeod, Scholl, et al., 2009). Entman (1989, pp. 125–140) and McQuail (1992) were among the first scholars to develop an interdependent concept that addressed this connection. McManus’s (1995, 2009) model of commercial news production follows an approach that is similar to the MBAC model. It not only links business and journalistic factors but also refers to the problem of media as accumulated experience and credibility and to some extent makes a reference to media brands. However, these factors play only a subordinate role in his model.

**THE CORE ELEMENTS OF THE MBAC MODEL**

In communication science and media management literature, brand identity has been discussed as an approach that can be applied to media with convincing results (Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2001; Kamann, 2003; McDowell, 2006; Ots, 2008; Siegert, 2001). First, as already mentioned, it allows the consideration of both economic and journalistic aspects and links both for a better understanding of media management. Second, it takes into account certain problems of media markets, such as market failure, and proposes institutional arrangements for their relief. In principle, media companies as a whole could be media brands (corporate brands), but the concept unfolds more explanatory power when applied to single media outlets (product brands; e.g., titles, programs, or channels). In addition, the concept refers to media brands as a promise of quality that signals particular and specific values and benefits (McManus, 1995; Siegert, 2001). In the case of media, it also refers to decision-making processes within newsrooms and to the organizational structure. As Sylvie (2007) pointed out, basic journalistic values are
crucial for decision making within newsrooms. These values differ among
different types of media and different political and cultural contexts (e.g.,
Baran & Davis, 2006; Breed, 1955; Curran & Seaton, 2010; McQuail, 1992);5
and journalistic values are an important element of the quality promise of
media brands.

Our concept of media brands directly refers to the arguments of D. A.
Aaker (1996), who distinguished between brand identity, brand positioning,
and brand image. We now elaborate more on these three different aspects
of branding. We explain how they are connected to each other and further
elaborate the process of decision making in this environment.

Media Brand Identity

Media brand identity is defined by managers and strategists within the media
companies. Brand identity summarizes what a media company or media
outlet is and what it stands for. The marketing literature provides various
concepts of brand identity (e.g., D. A. Aaker, 1996; Arvidsson, 2006; Elliott
& Percy, 2007). Most of these concepts commonly refer to brand identity as
the soul of a brand. Even if media professionals (especially those managing
small media companies) do not label their activities as “brand manage-
ment,” they still have certain beliefs, values, and competencies. Therefore,
we need to complement the concept of media brand identity by the concept
of “hidden brand identity” (Gerth, 2010).

From an empirical perspective, Esch’s (2007, p. 102) “brand wheel”
allows for structuring the main dimensions of brand identity: Brand com-
petence (brand history and background, market position, and brand assets)
as the center of his concept is encircled by brand attributes, brand bene-
fits, brand tonality, and brand iconography. Applied to the media (Korner,
2009, pp. 76 & 203), brand attributes include, on the one hand, the thematic
orientation of a media outlet, such as the overall selection of topics (diver-
sity), the geographical orientation, and the editorial position.6 On the other
hand, media brand attributes include the way topics are processed and pre-
sent. This presentation is deeply dependent on standards of professional
ethics, normative guiding principles of journalism, and the ordinary amount
of background investigation behind a story. Last but not least, the journalistic
style includes characteristics such as background coverage and comments,
the nature of the language used, and the treatment of visual images (pic-
tures, cartoons, and figures) in the presentation of the news. Media brand
attributes also include economic aspects such as the price–performance ratio
or, more implicitly, the amount of budget available; the intensity of financial
control; and the structure of financing from sales (e.g., user fees and spon-
soring). In summary, thematic orientation, economic aspects, and work and
presentation style add up to the overall composition of the media outlet that
then is consumed by a specific target group.
Media brand attributes support media brand benefits as the traditional gratifications according to the uses and gratifications approach, such as information, education, entertainment, follow-up communication, or prestige. Media brand iconography makes attributes and benefits visible and, therefore, includes, for example, corporate design such as fonts, labels, icons, and colors. Media brand attributes, benefits, and iconography are supplemented by brand tonality. Brand tonality usually compares a brand with a person (brand personality) and asks for quality characteristics, such as dynamism, seriousness, and trustworthiness or a modern or traditional outlook (J. L. Aaker, 1997; Kim, Baek, & Martin, 2010).

Many media organizations promote quality as a fundamental part of their brand, but only a few make journalistic quality a fundamental and actively developed, implemented, renewed, and internally trained part of their brand identity. Our argument is that, whether or not a media outlet provides a reasonable amount of news coverage with considerable diversity in topics, arguments and actors are dependent on the media brand identity. Furthermore, only when quality is deeply grounded in the brand identity and actively sustained inside media companies can it survive as a core element of the news coverage. If news that sells (Hamilton, 2004) is the most important premise of journalistic production, the quality of the coverage is different from the premise of informing the public or criticizing the authorities.

Media Brand Position

Media brand position is “the part of the brand identity and value proposition to be actively communicated to the target audience and the one that demonstrates an advantage over competing brands” (D. A. Aaker, 1996, pp. 71 & 176). The economic value that a brand adds to a product is commonly referred to as brand equity (Elliott & Percy, 2007). To persuade the audience that the media outlet offers a unique selling proposition, media management must communicate the key characteristics defined in the media brand identity. In doing so, media companies want to

1. Differentiate their outlets from those of their competitors. They not only protect the media outlet—to some extent—from imitation, but also stabilize and increase demand in the long term.
2. Structure the internal decision-making and production processes. Media brands can serve as a central principle to combine editorial and management activities.
3. Signal a certain quality and thereby support the media outlet as experienced and credible. They offer the audience and the advertising industry dependability and orientation.

The positioning of the media brand is part of the marketing and advertising activities (McDowell, 2006). Furthermore, the product itself certainly
contributes to the brand positioning. With reference to our model, such positioning is effected via the media content. Media content is, thus, a mirror of brand identity and the most important way of promoting it. For example, a large number of own (foreign) correspondents is one way a media outlet might promote quality in its hard news coverage. Media output consists of both manifest and latent components. The manifest components are clearly expressed in the media product itself (e.g., a newspaper article, TV program, or radio report): the quantity and diversity of news coverage. The latent components involve the non-visible development of the coverage and the efforts behind it—the quality and intensity of the production process. On this level, one could analyze whether the story was made public as a result of active investigation or, rather, as a reaction to a press release.

Media Brand Image and Reputation

The objective of media brand position is to plant certain associations and images of the media outlet into the minds of the target groups (Esch, Krieger, & Strödter, 2009). However, even when media management thoroughly defines the brand identity and tries to position the media brand accordingly, there is no guarantee that the recipients will perceive the brand as intended. The perception of media users could be in line with media management’s intention, or recipients could have other, unintended images and associations triggered by the media outlet. The “media brand image” is the result of how recipients actually interpret the brand identity (Chan-Olmsted, 2006, p. 60).

In this context, the term media brand reputation is used for the purpose of the analysis of the brand image on an aggregated level, standing for the sum of the different brand images of all the media recipients. In public debates, the media offer a platform for the discourse between elites and experts. The audience, public relations (PR), and advertising actors, as well as sources and, in some cases, even owners and investors, reflect their attitudes partly based on the news coverage of the media. Moreover, PR and advertising messages conveyed by the media can trigger both intended and unintended reactions from the audience. For example, in the case of political debates, they can have a mobilizing or demobilizing effect. Thus, it is essential for media management to continuously monitor whether the brand image (brand reputation) fits the brand identity.

Damage to a media brand’s image (D. A. Aaker, 1996, p. 75) can lead to a downturn in the audience market that might exceed any savings made through cheaper production. Damage to a media brand’s reputation, thus, is to be expected when segments of the audience, which are able to evaluate journalistic quality based on their own specific experiences, react negatively to disappointments in quality (Siegert, Rademacher, & Lobigs, 2008). The fact that media organizations are aware of such audience segments and their
potential reactions already leads to appropriate coverage. There is, therefore, an economic incentive to produce news coverage dedicated to journalistic quality criteria when that is part of the media brand identity. The audience continues to buy or consume a media outlet only if the brand delivers what it promises.

Decision Makers Responsible for Brand Management

As already mentioned, two central groups of professionals are responsible for pursuing a passive-hidden or active-visible brand strategy: those responsible for editorial creativity and those responsible for management. Both groups work in a multifaceted, recursive field of interaction with each other (as well as with various external influences, such as advertising, PR, sources, and the audience, as shown later; McManus, 1995). The editorial department makes decisions about how to cover the news. With regard to financial commitment, a management perspective is crucial for the handling of news coverage: The budget available and the mix of different sources of financing (advertising, sales, subscription, subsidies, and sponsoring) influence a media company’s openness to cooperation with PR or advertising from either big enterprises or political organizations. Management is responsible for acquiring and distributing financial resources within the organization. This is true even when the editor-in-chief of an organization is a member of the management or has been entrusted with management duties. Some media organizations recently have even redefined management and editorial responsibilities (e.g., managing editors or newsroom managers).

The two sides of journalistic production are represented equally in the MBAC model. This does not mean, however, that each side has the same influence on all decisions. The closer a decision is to its area of responsibility, the more influence this side has. Regularly, the relationship between the journalists and media management is rather conflictive because of the potential discord between journalistic professional standards and market considerations (Hamilton, 2004; McManus, 1994; Underwood, 2001; Zaller, 1999). Quality suffers when, for example, media companies avoid critical coverage of powerful advertisers because of their dependence on ad expenditure. However, obviously, only financially successful media companies have sufficient resources to produce news coverage of good quality. The relationship between the editorial and the business side, therefore, is centrally located in the MBAC model. One central purpose of the model is to better understand how media professionals react to tensions between editorial objectives and market orientation and how they can maintain the commitment of their brand identity to good journalism in an economically successful manner.
EXTERNAL INFLUENCES ON MEDIA BRAND MANAGEMENT

Citizens and Consumers

Journalistic output is aimed toward the addressed audience in at least two different ways simultaneously: first, as target groups, as paying consumers of the media, and as consumers of advertised goods and services. The recipients, on the one hand, buy a media outlet itself (e.g., subscription), thereby contributing directly to the media company's financial success. On the other hand, media act as an advertising vehicle and attempt to address consumer-relevant values and attitudes. For the majority of media organizations, advertising is the main source of revenue. In the print sector, still, the second largest financial source is direct sales (Doyle, 2002). In both cases, however, success depends on the consumer. To be financially successful, media organizations try their best to cover the spectrum of consumer preferences; to provide corresponding media brand benefits; and, therefore, reach as many readers, listeners, users, or viewers of the target group as possible. Many media companies use various instruments to collect data on consumer expectations in relation to areas of coverage and then orient the brand accordingly. Quite a few decisions on brand attributes are made based on consumer expectations (e.g., the language style, the level of complexity of the language, or the importance of the topic).

Second, the audience is addressed as citizens that need to be informed in order to participate in democratic processes and community service. In this case, the political value system and the political attitude of the audience are addressed, and the media can aim for either the mass audience or specific target groups. Although the media segment the audience primarily in terms of consumer-relevant criteria, geographic segmentation would be particularly interesting in terms of political coverage because local, regional, and national political events and players are of primary interest to the audience. In addition, media organizations need to have an idea of how informed the audience already is about the topics of the news coverage to plan the amount of background and analysis they will offer.

The relationship between citizens and the media brand, as well as between consumers and the media brand, is only indirectly recursive. Media organizations have an influence insofar as they can draw the citizen's and consumer's attention to special topics; connect discussions; and cause deliberation, involvement, and identification through the quantity and quality of the coverage. However, there is only limited interaction between the audience and journalists (e.g., through letters to the editor; see Wahl-Jorgensen, 2007). Here, the Internet and new forms of citizen journalism might change the game, but not so for traditional media.
PR and Advertising

Editors, reporters, and media managers orient their actions either directly or indirectly to the advertising industry and PR, even if their motives for doing so differ: The editors and journalists depend on PR as a source of coverage, just as management depends on advertising as a source of revenue. Thus, both the editorial and the business sides are committed to advertising and PR and to the corresponding companies, organizations, agencies, and consultants.

The relationship between PR and media organizations can first be characterized as an adaptation of communication strategies to the needs of the media (in the case of political PR, this process is referred to as mediatization of politics; Kepplinger, 2002; Lundby, 2009; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). For example, effective PR needs to convey messages to a large audience and needs to choose the right (media) channels for doing so. PR seeks a credible and reliable editorial environment in which to place the messages and to transfer the credibility of a certain media outlet to its own messages (Baker, 2002; McManus, 1995). Today, PR professionals know how to design appealing messages for the media, but they have “relatively little control over the environment into which it is inserted and the uses to which it will be put” (McNair, 2007, p. 38). However, there are still some organizations, such as small political parties, trade unions, interest groups, other civil society organizations, small businesses, and so forth, that do not have the resources to professionalize their PR work. Thus, they sometimes struggle to get attention by the media equal to that of big organizations. One way out of this dilemma is to become part of bigger networks such as business associations or political coalitions.

Second, in view of the resources available to PR and because of the media’s financial restrictions, the media’s dependence on PR material is also evident. In a market-oriented media system, the editors and media managers are under great pressure to reduce costs and, therefore, to look for low-cost content. Such information is made available by PR, and it is substantially less expensive than investigating and editing services. PR material is either adopted in its entirety or enriched with own investigation, weighted, and contextualized. The extent of editors’ efforts in dealing with PR material has very much to do with the media company’s financial strength and the values of the media brand. In highly competitive media markets, managers will always be tempted to cut back reporting and editing services, as the system of PR continues to provide journalists with free material prepared to suit their needs (Ruß-Mohl, 1994, p. 317).

The MBAC model, therefore, assumes a reciprocal adaptation and impact between PR and the media (Kepplinger, 2007; McNair, 2007). The relationship is consequently recursive, but it does not necessarily have to be balanced. Whether one side or the other is dominant depends on the area of news, on the media brand identity, and on the level of professionalism
of the PR (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001). The same is true for the relationship between advertising and media organizations. However, because advertising is the dominant revenue model of the media, the impact of advertising on the media is obviously much stronger than vice versa.

Sources and Owners and Investors

The relationship between the sources and the media, as well as the relationship between owners or investors and the media, is likewise recursive. Sources keep exclusive information ready for journalists. The sooner sources are regarded as experts on an issue, the better the chance they will find their way into the media coverage. From the perspective of political actors, for example, ideal news coverage would mention the issue exclusively in combination with the expert (Kaid, 2004).

The impact of owners and investors on the media is obvious. In the literature, this issue was mentioned years ago with reference to the newspaper industry (Blankenburg & Ozanich, 1993; Hirsch & Thompson, 1994). Ownership structure has an impact on the goals, incentives, and pressures facing managers. Thus, privately (family) owned media groups and publicly owned groups operate in different ways:

When asked to rate the importance of various yardsticks for evaluating the performance of newspaper companies, securities analysts rated earnings consistency, financial health represented by the balance sheet, and management quality highest, whereas publishers still bravely rated community service, editorial quality, product quality, and company image as being most important. (Hirsch & Thompson, 1994, p. 151)

The importance of the different yardsticks depends on the type of investor (e.g., for the European market, see Gerth & Trappel, 2008). In addition, against the background of commercialization, political economists argue that there is an increasing number of reasons for nonprofit media organizations, such as public service broadcasters and foundations, to produce democratically desirable news content (Baker, 2007, p. 37).

DISCUSSION AND OUTLOOK

The MBAC model was designed to contribute to a better theoretical understanding of the brand identity-driven decision-making processes within media organizations. Against the background of commercialization, the underlying purpose here was to get a better understanding of circumstances in which privately owned and profit-oriented media organizations maintain the quality promise of their media brand identity in an economically successful manner. According to our argument, this is the case if coverage of
a considerable amount is produced, if news production follows the quality orientation that is a part of the media brand identity, and if this brand is actively promoted both internally and externally. This can be done for different purposes: differentiating the own product from competing products, structuring internal decision-making processes, or signalling. If the implementation and the positioning of the brand identity are successful, quality news coverage should also be successfully sold. We believe that brand management is increasingly important for media companies as trends in the media industry such as globalization, fragmentation of audiences, and increasing audience-attention competition accelerate, creating a jungle of competing ideas, competing products, converging technologies, and new patterns of media usage. Brands provide the orientation needed by audiences to make choices.

Our model is designed to be empirically tested in the next step. Accordingly, we present some thoughts about how this model can be operationalized. Quite similar to the traditional SCP model, hypotheses can be found in four different areas: (a) interaction between the editorial and the business side of news production; (b) influence of structural determinants on the brand identity and the decision making within media organizations; (c) the relationship of editors and managers with external influences; and (d) the connection between brand identity, decisions, and media output. Empirical examinations are possible for all of the relationships indicated by the arrows in the model; between the various fields; and, to some extent, within the fields. The individual fields can be considered as variables or sets of variables. Whether a variable is an independent or a dependent variable is described by the direction of the arrow. Two-sided arrows, therefore, indicate a recursive relationship between two variables. To test the MBAC model, we need to implement a multimethod approach. Based on secondary document and data analysis (corporate documents, legal documents, national statistics, etc.), we can only analyze decision making by interviewing experts within the media companies or by observing editors and managers in their daily work. To get an idea of the media output, we need to include content analysis as an additional empirical method.

We think that the MBAC model is a useful and promising approach by which to further analyze the circumstances of news production in a commercialized and complex environment. However, the next step has to be testing the model by means of empirical work.7

NOTES

1. See www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/922/496240/text; N24 as a German language news channel belongs to the portfolio of ProSiebenSat.1, among other more entertainment-focused channels.

2. However, these theoretical debates find their way into the research area of political communication only to a certain extent. For examples, see Entman (1989), McManus (1995), and Underwood (2001).
3. The starting point for our research was guideline-based expert interviews with media representatives in the context of a referendum campaign in Switzerland and the analysis of the corresponding media content. The 28 experts represented the most important media organizations of the press and TV sectors. We conducted a 1-hr, face-to-face interview before the referendum and a shorter follow-up interview after the vote with each of the experts. The interviews were part of the “National Center of Competence in Research Challenges to Democracy in the 21st Century,” funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (see www.nccr-democracy.uzh.ch).

4. The structure–conduct–performance model can be traced back to the tradition of industrial economics theories profoundly affected by authors such as Mason (1939) or Bain (1959).

5. Sylvie (2007) identified a total of five value systems to which journalists orient their activities: brand positioning, journalistic values, consumers, organizational values, and social values. Journalistic values remain, by far, the most important for editors. In these value systems, country-specific, cultural, or even organizational differences can exist. However, if one considers media brands as extensive management concepts, these value systems are tied into the media brand identity for the purpose of uniformity of corporate identity, corporate culture, corporate behavior, and corporate communication.

6. Just as Donsbach and Patterson (2004, p. 256) discussed, the political position of an editorial department does not have to represent the sum of the political views of journalists and editors. In their cross-national study, they showed, on the contrary, that, in the United States, there is no connection between the political opinion of journalists and their view of the position of their own editorial departments. The correlation between individual behavior and organizational position was stronger in Europe, particularly in Italy.

7. In the second phase of research of the National Center of Competence in Research (2009–2013), we test the model in an international comparative perspective.

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