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News Platformisation in a Distorted Media Market: The Case of Hungary

ABSTRACT

This study examines how independent Hungarian online news media navigate the dual pressures of platformisation and a politically and economically distorted media market. While digital platforms have globally reshaped news production, distribution, and monetisation, in Hungary these dynamics are intensified by strong state influence over media ownership and the allocation of advertising revenues, which systematically disadvantages independent outlets. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, the study combines an analysis of publicly available financial data from four leading Hungarian news portals with semi-structured interviews conducted with journalists, editors, and media managers. The findings reveal that independent outlets operate under markedly heterogeneous business models, ranging from advertising-based approaches to hybrid strategies that integrate subscriptions, reader donations, grants, events, and merchandising. The results suggest that declining access to advertising revenues—due to both politically selective state allocation and the growing dominance of global digital platforms—has driven the diversification of revenue models. At the same time, platform dependency remains a central structural constraint, prompting a shift from reach-oriented to engagement- and brand-focused strategies, alongside increased investment in proprietary distribution channels. The Hungarian case demonstrates that platformisation is deeply shaped by national political and market conditions, giving rise not only to an alternative distribution ecosystem but also to diverse and adaptive business models aimed at sustaining economic viability and editorial independence.

KEYWORDS: platformisation, news media, distorted market, Hungary

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STRESZCZENIE

Platformizacja mediów na zaburzonym rynku medialnym. Przypadek Węgier

W niniejszym badaniu przeanalizowano, w jaki sposób niezależne węgierskie serwisy informacyjne radzą sobie z podwójną presją wynikającą z platformizacji i polityczno-ekonomicznych zniekształceń rynku mediów. Podczas gdy platformy cyfrowe na całym świecie zmieniły sposób tworzenia, dystrybucji i monetyzacji wiadomości, na Węgrzech dynamika ta jest spotęgowana przez silny wpływ państwa na strukturę własnościową mediów i podział przychodów z reklam, co systematycznie stawia niezależne serwisy w niekorzystnej sytuacji. Badanie łączy analizę publicznie dostępnych danych finansowych z czterech wiodących węgierskich portali informacyjnych z częściowo ustrukturyzowanymi wywiadami przeprowadzonymi z dziennikarzami, redaktorami i menedżerami mediów. Wyniki pokazują, że niezależne media działają na podstawie zróżnicowanych modeli biznesowych, od podejść opartych na reklamach po strategię hybrydową, które łączą subskrypcje, darowizny od czytelników, dotacje, wydarzenia i sprzedaż gadżetów. Wyniki sugerują, że malejący dostęp do przychodów z reklam, spowodowany zarówno selektywnym przydzielaniem środków przez państwo, jak i rosnącą dominacją globalnych platform cyfrowych, doprowadził do dywersyfikacji modeli przychodów. Jednocześnie zależność od platform pozostaje głównym ograniczeniem strukturalnym, skłaniającym do przejścia od strategii zorientowanych na zasięg do strategii skupionych na zaangażowaniu i marce, a także do zwiększonych inwestycji we własne kanały dystrybucji. Przypadek Węgier pokazuje, że platformizacja jest głęboko ukształtowana przez krajowe uwarunkowania polityczne i rynkowe.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: platformizacja, media newsowe, Węgry, zaburzony rynek mediów

Introduction

In discussions of press freedom and media pluralism, the state of the Hungarian news media is frequently interpreted through the lens of the country's political system, commonly described as an illiberal democracy, a hybrid regime, or a competitive authoritarian system (Griffen, 2020; Bleyer-Simon, Polyák, & Urbán, 2025). The conditions that undermine media pluralism and press freedom also profoundly shape the business models and market strategies of Hungarian news media, particularly those of independent outlets. Newsrooms operate within a structurally distorted media market in which political power relations significantly influence media ownership structures and the allocation of advertising revenues, systematically favouring outlets controlled by the state or owned by actors closely aligned with the governing party. These distortions

of market competition substantially constrain the economic sustainability and strategic autonomy of independent news organisations (see Baker, 2012).

Beyond these domestic structural constraints, the global process of platformisation in news production, distribution, and consumption further affects the Hungarian news media landscape. Platform logics increasingly shape newsroom business models and operational practices, influencing how news is accessed, distributed, and monetised, while intensifying dependence on a small number of dominant digital intermediaries.

Against this backdrop, this article examines the role of digital platforms in the strategic practices of leading Hungarian news outlets, with a focus on their functions in news distribution, audience traffic generation, and news brand building. Drawing on interviews with social media managers, editors-in-chief, and marketing managers at selected Hungarian news organisations, and complemented by an analysis of publicly available financial data for the examined companies, the study provides insights into platform-oriented content distribution strategies, experiences of platform exposure and dependency, and the approaches adopted to mitigate these dependencies within a media system that occupies a distinct yet structurally disadvantaged position in Central and Eastern Europe.

News Platformisation

In platform studies, a growing body of scholarship has examined the platformisation of news as a specific manifestation of the broader societal and economic trend of platformisation (van Dijck et al., 2018; Nieborg & Poell, 2019; Nielsen & Fletcher, 2023). In this literature, platformisation is generally understood as the increasing structural importance and influence of digital platforms in shaping how communication, information access, and cultural production, including journalism, are organised. Platforms have become central infrastructures across multiple sectors, reshaping not only the distribution of news but also its production, monetisation, governance, and measurement, as well as the imaginaries surrounding public communication (van Dijck et al., 2018; Nielsen & Fletcher, 2023).

Among digital platforms, social media occupy a particularly prominent position in the circulation of news, representing some of the most widely used gateways to online information (Newman, Arguedas, Robertson, Nielsen, & Fletcher, 2025). Scholars suggest that the rise of social media platforms has led to profound structural changes in journalism, reshaping not only the technological conditions of news production but also its economic, organisational, and editorial dimensions (Bell & Owen, 2017; Napoli, 2018; van Dijck, Poell, & de Waal, 2018).

Research shows that platformisation unfolds unevenly across national contexts. Nielsen and Fletcher (2023) demonstrate that countries with similar levels

of social media use differ significantly in the extent to which news consumption is platformised, as well as in audiences' reliance on direct access via news websites and applications. These variations are partly explained by path-dependent factors, particularly the historically strong position of national newspaper markets, which is associated with lower levels of platformisation. Accordingly, platformisation should be understood as a global process that takes diverse national forms, highlighting the need for further country-specific research (Nielsen & Fletcher, 2023).

Early accounts describe how news publishers initially welcomed social media platforms for their unprecedented reach, advanced audience analytics, and perceived neutrality as distribution intermediaries, while largely underestimating the long-term implications of platform dependence (Bell & Owen, 2017; Napoli, 2018). Over time, however, platform logics increasingly shaped editorial and distribution practices, positioning platforms as *de facto* editors through algorithmic governance and engagement-based incentives (Bell & Owen, 2017; van Dijck et al., 2018; Napoli, 2018; Nieborg & Poell, 2019). Growing disillusionment followed as publishers recognised the loss of infrastructural control and the asymmetric power of platforms, prompting more cautious and diversified strategies aimed at rebuilding direct relationships with audiences (Bell, 2018).

A central analytical consequence of platformisation is platform dependency, which captures the extent to which news media organisations rely on digital platforms and their opaque algorithmic systems for audience reach and traffic generation (Nieborg & Poell, 2019; Meese & Hurcombe, 2020). The relationship between platforms and news organisations is widely understood as asymmetrical, exposing publishers to structural risks related to visibility, monetisation, and control. In response, news organisations have diversified both distribution channels and revenue models by introducing paywalls, subscriptions, newsletters, events, and ancillary products to mitigate dependency and compensate for declining advertising revenues. Consequently, social media are increasingly used not as primary distribution channels but for traffic generation, brand building, and audience engagement, particularly among younger users. While these dynamics are well documented in Western contexts, less attention has been paid to how platform dependency unfolds in politically distorted media markets in Central and Eastern Europe.

State of the Hungarian News Media

The development of the Hungarian news media system has shared several characteristics with other post-socialist countries in the region, including the instrumentalisation of the media by political elites, frequent state intervention in the media market, and high levels of political polarisation and clientelism

(Dobek-Ostrowska, 2012; Hallin & Mancini, 2012). Between 1996 and 2010, albeit following different trajectories, the phenomenon of “party colonisation of the media” emerged across Central and Eastern Europe, referring to political parties’ efforts to gain control over media institutions. According to Péter Bajomi-Lázár, this can be understood as “a strategy aimed at extracting from the media resources such as airtime, frequencies, positions and money, and channelling them to party loyalists in order to reward them for various services” (Bajomi-Lázár, 2013, p. 76). This direct targeting of regulatory authorities and public service broadcasters by political parties should be distinguished from the concept of “political parallelism,” which is understood as “the extent to which the media reflect distinct political orientations in their news and current affairs reporting, and sometimes also in entertainment content” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 28).

In Hungary, this form of multi-party influence over the media developed between 1996 and 2010, coming to an end with the return of Fidesz to power under Viktor Orbán in the 2010 parliamentary elections. The government led by Orbán secured a parliamentary supermajority and subsequently amended the media law. Through these reforms, the governing party gained comprehensive control over the restructured media system. Whereas in the preceding period the influence of competing political parties over the media had mutually limited their respective power and maintained a relatively diverse and balanced media environment, this unilateral control led to a severe distortion of the media system (Bajomi-Lázár, 2013).

As a result, the development trajectory of the Hungarian media system and public sphere diverged from that of other countries in the region. Today, Hungarian news outlets face particularly fundamental challenges shaped by the media policy environment that has emerged during the fifteen years of Fidesz rule. Griffen (2020) summarises the four principal elements of the “Orbán model,” which aim to manipulate media market mechanisms to consolidate power while preserving plausible deniability. According to Griffen, the main components of this model are:

1. state capture of the media through the forcible closure or effective government takeover of once-independent media; 2. manipulation of the media market through the abuse of state resources and regulatory power; 3. delegitimisation and exclusion of independent journalists; and 4. preservation of the illusion of media freedom” (Griffen, 2020, p. 58).

The Hungarian media landscape includes both public and private outlets and is characterised by a high degree of political parallelism (Bleyer-Simon et al., 2025). Large segments of the Hungarian media are directly or indirectly controlled by the governing party, with many market actors, including privately

owned and formally independent outlets, operating under substantial political influence. State advertising, including expenditure by state-owned and government-aligned companies, is disproportionately high and is systematically used to reward politically allied media outlets (Bátorffy & Urbán, 2020; Horváth, Kovács, Polyák, & Urbán, 2024). Public service media operate under government control and are frequently instrumentalised to target critics of the government and the ruling party. Community and local media are similarly subject to government influence and pressure, further constraining pluralism at the sub-national level (Bleyer-Simon et al., 2025). Media audiences are highly polarised: a substantial proportion of users consumes news in accordance with their political preferences (Polyák et al., 2022).

Media pluralism and press freedom in Hungary are widely assessed as being under severe pressure, with multiple reports pointing to democratic backsliding and a highly distorted media environment. The Media Pluralism Monitor 2025 classifies all key dimensions of the media system as posing medium-high to very high risks, highlighting strong market concentration, declining revenues, limited access to public subsidies, and increasing uncertainty surrounding foreign funding, while also noting the government's effective influence over formally independent regulatory bodies (Bleyer-Konrad et al., 2025).

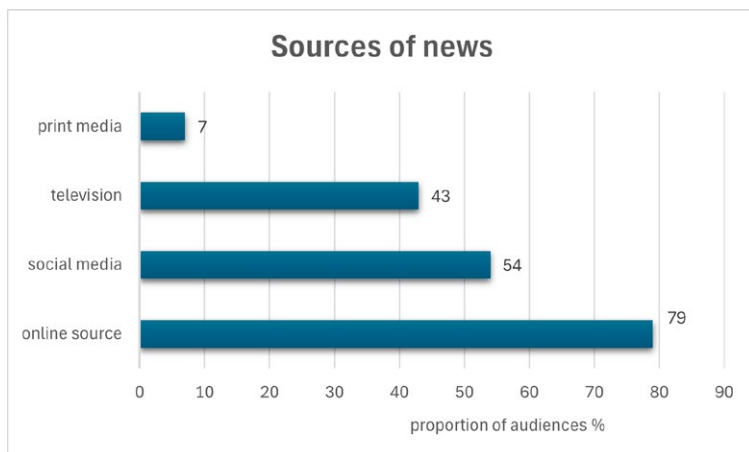
Social Media and News Consumption in Hungary

While the state of journalism and news media globally is perceived as undergoing “an accelerating shift towards consumption via social media and video platforms,” which is further “diminishing the influence of institutional journalism” (Newman et al., 2025), the extent and dynamics of news platformisation are significantly shaped by audience media-use patterns.

Internet penetration in Hungary stands at 92%, while only 8% of the population aged 18 and over are willing to pay for online news. Overall trust in news media and journalism is among the lowest in Europe (22%) and has continued to decline. The proportion of respondents who consider public service media to be trustworthy is 23%, representing a significant decrease from 30% in the previous year (Newman et al., 2025). Data indicate that social media use in Hungary is nearly universal among internet users aged 16 and above, with particularly high uptake among younger audiences, including more than half of those aged 18–49 using TikTok (NMHH, 2025). However, the role of these platforms in news consumption varies significantly: Facebook clearly dominates as the primary gateway to news, with YouTube also playing a notable role, while platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook Messenger—despite their widespread use—are far less central to news access, and the use of X remains marginal (Newman et al., 2025).

According to the most recent Digital News Report, more than three-quarters of Hungarian audiences' access news through online sources, while fewer than one in ten rely on print newspapers to stay informed (Newman et al. 2025).

Figure 1. News sources among Hungarian audiences.



Source of the data: Newman et al., 2025.

The latest report of the National Media and Infocommunications Authority indicates that, among the five online news sources most frequently used by respondents, Facebook (50%) and YouTube (32%) were the most commonly cited, followed by the news websites: index.hu (23%), telex.hu (21%), and 24.hu (19%). Instagram was also mentioned by 19% of respondents as a regular news source. Regarding online news portals, the majority reported consulting index.hu, telex.hu, and 24.hu at least weekly (NMHH, 2025). Based on the proportion of audiences who read them weekly, the most popular online news outlets are telex.hu 28%, index.hu 27%, 24.hu 24%, 444.hu 23%, hvg.hu 19%, rtl.hu 19%, and origo.hu 18% (Newman et al., 2025).

In the print media market, the leading company is Mediaworks Hungary Zrt., owned by the government-aligned Közép-Európai Sajtó és Média Alapítvány (KESMA), which reported net revenues exceeding approximately EUR 145 million in 2024. The second-largest annual revenues were generated by Ringier Hungary Kft. and Blikk Kft., owned by the same company, with a combined revenue of approximately EUR 19.3 million. Third place was held by Central Médiasoport Zrt., with revenues of EUR 36.5 million and a growth rate of 3,2% (NMHH 2025).

The Hungarian advertising market totalled EUR 980 million (0.47% of GDP) in 2024. Within this market, global platforms account for nearly two-thirds (65%) of online advertising revenues, of which social media platforms represent 28%.

Among the largest advertisers, commercial companies rank first (27.5%), followed by distributors of medicinal products (27.5%), while the third-largest advertiser is the Hungarian state (15.2%). This has a significant distorting effect on the market due to the exclusive allocation of state advertising to state-controlled or government-friendly media outlets (NMHH, 2025). Therefore, independent media outlets have developed new financing models. The most common forms include paid content (e.g., paywalls), subscriptions, event organisation, donation-based funding, merchandising, and the provision of exclusive content, such as frontline reporting and political analysis podcasts.

In this context, Newman et al. (2025) observe that “in countries where press freedom is under threat, alternative ecosystems also offer opportunities, at their best, to bring fresh perspectives and challenge repressive governments.” The present study examines whether this proposition holds in the Hungarian context.

Research and Method

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. It combines semi-structured interviews with an analysis of the financial data of the examined media companies. However, it should be noted that the research engages with commercially sensitive information; therefore, data collection was limited to publicly available sources, and interviewees provided general responses to preserve the confidentiality of business-related information.

For this analysis, four of the most widely read independent news outlets were selected in order to identify the challenges they face in operating within a deeply distorted media market, shaped both by the political and economic influence of the state and by the pressures associated with the increasing platformisation of news distribution.

To provide an objective account of these challenges, the study draws on a review of publicly available financial data¹ of the selected media organisations. In particular, the annual financial statements of the respective publishing companies were examined, offering insight into the structure and development of newsroom revenues and expenditures.

To gain insight into journalists' and editors' perspectives, we conducted four semi-structured interviews with individuals employed by the selected Hungarian news media outlets, including journalists, editors-in-chief, marketing managers, and social media managers responsible for social media and platform strategy. The interviews were conducted between 11 and 21 December 2025, with three conducted in person and one in writing. All interviewees were

1 <https://e-beszamolo.im.gov.hu/oldal/kezdolap>

anonymised, and only general descriptions of their organisations are provided to protect confidentiality.

Discussion

The four most widely read online news outlets included in the study—defined as those read on a weekly basis by the largest proportion of respondents—are telex.hu (28%), Index.hu (27%), 24.hu (24%), and 444.hu (23%) (Newman et al., 2025). Details of the news outlets included in the study are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Comparative organisational profiles of the news outlets under study (authors' own compilation)

COMPARATIVE ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILES OF DIGITAL NEWS OUTLETS



The publishing companies behind the examined media outlets also differ in size and organisational structure. While some publishers own multiple titles or media portfolios, others operate a single newsroom, resulting in significant variation in the revenue and expenditure profiles of the outlets under study. Based on company records and annual financial statements, it can be observed that the examined Hungarian media companies rely on multiple sources of revenue. However, the most notable differences lie in the composition of these revenue streams, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Revenue structure of the four Hungarian news portals, 2023–2024

Year	Staff	Net sales revenue		Grants and subsidies		Net profit		Additional revenue sources	
		HUF million	EUR million	HUF million	EUR millio n	HUF millio n	EUR millio n	HUF million	EUR million
telex.hu									
2023	94	786	2.02	101	0.26	16	0.04	Reader revenue 504	Reader revenue 1.29
2024	112	1100	2.82	140	0.36	19	0.05	Reader revenue 521; 1% tax donation 580	Reader revenue 1.33; 1% tax donation 1.48
444.hu									
2023	62	802	2.06	150	0.38	-50	-0.13	Reader revenue 42	Reader revenue 0.11
2024	70	1100	2.82	173	0.44	125	0.32 n	Reader revenue: 35	Reader revenue: 0.09
Centrál Médiasoport (24.hu)									
2023	406	6300 (total revenue 14 000)	16 (total revenue 35.9)	0	0	2300	5.9	0	0
2024	406	6300 (total revenue 14200)		0	0	2500	6.41	0	0
index.hu									
2023	81	1800	4.62	0	0	12	0.031	Intl. funding 29, other funding 2	Intl. funding 0.07; other funding 0.005.
2024	89	1900	4.9	0	0	10	0.03	Other funding 1.7	Other funding 0.004

Source of data: Hungarian Ministry of Justice² (authors’ own compilation).

2 <https://e-beszamolo.im.gov.hu/oldal/kezdolap>

It is worth noting that two of the four news portals (telex.hu and 444.hu) operate online shops where they sell branded merchandise, thereby further diversifying their revenue streams. Among the publishers examined, Centrál Média csoport and the publisher of Index primarily rely on advertising revenues. The position of Centrál Média csoport is considerably more complex than the other publishers, as it not only operates 24.hu. Its portfolio comprises a further 18 online outlets, 14 print magazines, and more than 20 special issues, collectively reaching nearly 6 million consumers monthly.³ The media products within this portfolio operate predominantly on advertising-based revenue models and do not make use of grant funding. It is also important to note that, in the case of Index.hu Zrt., a significant share of advertising revenues is not realised within this company but is recognised within the sales system of Indamedia.

The patterns identified in the financial analysis are further corroborated by the interviews conducted for this study. These findings indicate that independent online news outlets in Hungary operate according to markedly heterogeneous business models. While some organisations rely predominantly on advertising revenues, others employ hybrid arrangements that combine multiple income streams. Consequently, distinct monetisation strategies and content production practices emerge, shaped not only by the broader political and economic environment but also by the size, profile, and institutional background of each outlet.

Among the editorial offices included in the sample, even the online news portal owned by the largest independent media holding company has recently undergone a fundamental transformation of its business model. Previously operating within a purely advertising-based revenue structure, the outlet shifted towards a hybrid model incorporating reader contributions, subscriptions, and paywalls. According to interviewees, this shift was driven by the distorted nature of the Hungarian advertising market and the increasing extraction of advertising revenues by global digital platforms. In the current media environment, state or government-linked advertising is largely confined to outlets that are either state-owned or politically aligned, resulting in the allocation of advertising expenditure along political and personal networks rather than market principles. As one interviewee emphasised:

We do not receive any state advertising, nor do we factor it into our business model. For more than a decade, the advertising market in Hungary has been severely distorted, with advertising revenues being redirected toward pro-government media outlets (Social media manager).

In addition to the politically selective allocation of advertising resources, independent outlets face mounting pressure from global technology companies whose platforms increasingly capture advertising revenues, thereby exacerbating

3 <https://sales.centralmediacsoport.hu>

the financial vulnerability of news organisations. Simultaneously, the proliferation of new digital platforms has further fragmented an already polarised and saturated media market. As one editor-in-chief observed:

We operate in a media environment where global actors control at least 60% of online advertising revenues—a share that continues to grow year by year—while the remaining 40% must be divided among all other actors. This is particularly challenging given the constant emergence of new, small competitors that also vie for attention and revenue (Editor-in-Chief).

Declining advertising revenues have also had a direct influence on content production strategies. The same editor-in-chief reported a substantial decline in audience reach:

The average reach of the newspaper has dropped dramatically. In 2020, we reached around one million unique users per day; today, that number is at most 600,000. This decline made it clear that we needed a new strategy to survive.

In response, the outlet introduced monthly and annual subscription schemes providing subscribers with access to additional articles, podcasts, newsletters, and discounts. Furthermore, it developed an application targeting highly committed readers, which interviewees identified as playing a central role in sustaining traffic and fostering audience loyalty.

By contrast, other outlets adopted diversified and risk-sharing business models from the outset. One journalist-owned news portal combines reader donations, market-based advertising revenues, and grant funding. An additional income stream derives from the Hungarian “1% personal income tax” scheme,⁴ which has generated substantial revenues in recent years. This outlet operates without a paywall and does not offer exclusive paid content; instead, it relies on freely accessible newsletters and a proprietary application. As the social media manager explained:

All of these tools help us address as many readers’ needs as possible and deepen reader commitment.

Hungary’s first online newspaper, by contrast, has continued to operate under a traditional advertising-based model since its founding. Its strategy prioritises high page views, large numbers of unique users, and traffic maximisation, which is reflected in the volume of content produced. According to the outlet’s own statements, it receives little or no revenue from state advertising contracts

⁴ Hungarian taxpayers have been entitled to designate 1% of their personal income tax to associations, foundations, and public benefit foundations.

yet sustains its operations without reader revenues or paid content. Content production within this model is characterised by large-scale news output designed to maximise the visibility of advertising inventory. Notably, the outlet does not operate a newsletter, which its representatives attribute to the specific characteristics of Hungarian news consumption.

Interviews with the deputy editor-in-chief of another independent public affairs outlet revealed that the introduction of a subscription model was motivated not only by revenue considerations but also by a desire to safeguard editorial independence. Subscription income, according to this interviewee, reduces reliance on state, governmental, or advertiser expectations. At the same time, the transition in the business model did not fundamentally alter editorial routines:

Our editorial meetings are not about what readers want us to produce, but about reporting on daily events, public affairs, and the news (Deputy editor-in-chief).

Nevertheless, subscription-based models introduce structural constraints. The size of the editorial staff and the scope of journalistic activity are closely tied to subscription revenues, while expansion and technological development frequently depend on access to external grants:

Subscriptions determine how much work we can take on and how many people we can employ. It is common for one person to perform multiple roles. Expansion is only possible if we receive grant funding (Deputy editor-in-chief).

Across all interviewed outlets, maintaining a presence on multiple platforms is a shared objective aimed at enhancing visibility, expanding audience reach, and strengthening brand identity. Facebook has historically served as the primary driver of traffic, while X remains marginal in Hungary due to its limited and specialised user base; other platforms play a more supplementary role. However, interviewees reported a significant decline in Facebook's traffic-generating capacity due to algorithmic changes, prompting a shift from reach-oriented strategies to those focused on engagement and brand building. Despite this, Facebook remains the most influential platform, particularly among older users, while Instagram and TikTok are primarily used to reach younger audiences and support brand building. YouTube offers opportunities for long-form content but also entails renewed risks of platform dependency.

Another recurring feature is the limited separation between journalism and social media management, with journalists often directly involved in content distribution and guided by audience metrics. Social media platforms also function as tools for news gathering and agenda-setting, with Facebook operating as a quasi-public communication space and, increasingly, as a pre-filter in the news production process.

At the same time, substantial differences persist between outlets, reflecting variations in financial resources, staffing levels, and editorial capacity. As one interviewee noted:

Ideally, we would tailor content to each platform, but we simply lack the capacity. Our social media team consists of two full-time employees and one intern, who handle all related tasks (Deputy editor-in-chief).

While some outlets adopt a pragmatic, performance-driven approach to platform use, others conceptualise platforms as distinct communicative spaces conducive to community building. Overall, the operation of independent online news media in Hungary is shaped by the combined pressures of a structurally distorted advertising market and ongoing processes of platformisation. Politically selective state advertising, the growing extraction of revenues by global digital platforms, and audience polarisation constrain both economic sustainability and strategic autonomy. In response, outlets increasingly adopt diversified, hybrid business models—particularly subscription- and reader-based approaches—which serve not only economic purposes but also help safeguard editorial independence.

At the same time, platformisation follows a distinct trajectory in Hungary. While social media—especially Facebook—remain central to news consumption, their declining effectiveness as traffic drivers has prompted a shift from reach-oriented to engagement- and brand-focused strategies, alongside investments in proprietary channels. These findings highlight that platform dependency in Hungary is not only technological or economic but also a politically mediated structural constraint.

Conclusion

Our study has shown that, in Hungary, the effects of platformisation are inseparable from the political and economic structure of the media system. Independent news organisations operate under dual constraints: global platform dependency and a domestically distorted advertising market shaped by state influence. Under these conditions, the emergence of hybrid business models reflects both adaptation and necessity. Diversified revenue strategies (including subscriptions, reader contributions, and alternative income sources) enable outlets to compensate, at least in part, for restricted access to advertising markets while reinforcing editorial independence. At the same time, the shift towards engagement-oriented strategies and proprietary distribution channels illustrates ongoing efforts to mitigate platform dependency. The Hungarian case thus demonstrates that platformisation is not a uniform global process but is deeply conditioned by national political and market environments. Rather

than simply producing an “alternative ecosystem” of news distribution, it gives rise to context-specific, adaptive configurations of media sustainability.

Limitation and Future Research

This study has several limitations, including the small number of news websites analysed and its exclusive reliance on interviews. The relatively small number of interviews further limits the explanatory power of our conclusions. The generalisability of our findings is also constrained by the fact that all interviewed journalists work for independent news portals, as we were unable to access staff from outlets within the government-supervised media conglomerate (KESMA). A more comprehensive understanding of the diverse strategies employed by Hungarian online news media would require an examination of the operational and social media practices of outlets benefiting from substantial state advertising. Future research mapping the business models and operational strategies of these media could provide deeper insights into the dynamics of the Hungarian online news landscape.

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