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# The power of perception: How scientific experts' understanding of media logic affects their media-related behavior

## Die Macht der Wahrnehmung: Wie das Verständnis wissenschaftlicher Expert:innen von Medienlogik ihr medienbezogenes Verhalten beeinflusst

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**Abstract:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, journalists were heavily reliant on contributions from scientific experts. Despite the often productive collaboration between scientists and journalists, journalistic practices are largely at odds with scientific routines, making scientists not always willing to act as experts in the news media. Against the background of mediatization theory, we argue that their willingness to play by the media rules depends to a large extent on their assessment and understanding of how the news media work. Through in-depth interviews with 24 Austrian scientific experts, we investigated what they perceive as news media logic and how this shapes their responses to media requests. Interviewees exhibited a reflective understanding of news media logic. Findings suggest that experts' perceptions of how different media work not only affect their decision whether to reject or accept media requests. In addition, they also shape their individual preparation for media engagements.

**Keywords:** Science communication, COVID-19, qualitative research, mediatization, media logic

**Zusammenfassung:** Während der COVID-19-Pandemie waren Journalist:innen stark auf Beiträge von wissenschaftlichen Expert:innen angewiesen. Trotz der oftmals produktiven Zusammenarbeit zwischen Wissenschaft und Journalismus stehen journalistische Praktiken häufig im Widerspruch zu wissenschaftlichen Arbeitsroutinen – was dazu führt, dass Wissenschaftler:innen nicht immer bereit sind, als Expert:innen in den Nachrichtenmedien aufzutreten. Vor dem Hintergrund der Mediatisierungstheorie argumentieren wir, dass ihre Bereitschaft, sich auf die „Spielregeln" der Medien einzulassen, maßgeblich von ihrer Einschätzung und ihrem Verständnis der Funktionsweise von Nachrichtenmedien abhängt. Anhand leitfadengestützter Interviews mit 24 österreichischen Expert:innen untersuchen wir, wie sie diese Medienlogik wahrnehmen und inwieweit diese Wahrnehmung ihr Verhalten gegenüber Medienanfragen beeinflusst. Die Interviewten zeigten ein reflektiertes Verständnis von Medienlogik. Die Ergebnisse deuten darauf hin, dass die mediale Einschätzung der Expert:innen nicht nur ihre Entscheidung beeinflusst, ob sie Medienanfragen annehmen oder ablehnen, sondern auch ihre individuelle Vorbereitung auf mediale Auftritte prägt.

**Schlagworte:** Wissenschaftskommunikation, COVID-19, qualitative Forschung, Medialisierung, Medienlogik

## 1. Introduction

Scientific experts constitute a valuable source for journalistic work (Albaek, 2011, p. 336). Journalists consult experts from different fields to verify facts (Boyce, 2006, p. 890) and convey credibility (Manning, 2001, p. 265), as well as objectivity in their reporting (Huber, 2014, p. 34). Moreover, experts provide background information for covering complex issues (Atton & Wickenden, 2005, p. 349). Particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, journalists have been largely reliant on scientific experts as they met society's increased need for trustworthy, health-related information (e.g., Leidecker-Sandmann et al., 2021, p. 348; Morani et al., 2022, p. 2513). However, scientists cannot be assumed always to accept news media requests and to be willing to serve as media experts. While journalists have the upper hand in how they present expert voices in the news (Wien, 2014, p. 5), they depend on experts' willingness to play by the rules of the news media (Wien, 2014, p. 12). Such willingness is highly dependent on how experts assess how media function (Shine, 2022, p. 2372). Thus, whether and how scientists engage with news media requests is guided by how they *perceive* journalism to work, rather than necessarily how journalism actually works (Marcinkowski, 2014, p. 6). Therefore, to understand the exposure of different sources in the reporting on COVID-19, it is necessary to determine how scientific experts evaluate and understand news media routines.

While numerous quantitative studies have identified the relevance and structure of expert sources in the news before (e.g., Albaek, 2011, p. 342; Niemi & Pitkänen, 2017, p. 5), including during the COVID-19 pandemic (Leidecker-Sandmann et al., 2021, p. 347; Mellado et al., 2021, p. 1278), we still have an incomplete understanding of which factors actually determine how scientific experts respond to news media inquiries. Relevant research on scientists' general willingness to engage in public outreach has focused in particular on scientists' motivations and what fundamentally prompts them to appear in the news media as experts (e.g., Besley et al., 2018, p. 560). Despite their basic willingness for media appearances and their motivation to help people understand complex issues (Atton & Wickenden, 2005, p. 349), there are indications that general motivations interact with other considerations that can make scientists reluctant and deterrent (Howell & Singer, 2017, p. 17). In this context, scientists' understanding of how news media work is of particular importance (Shine, 2022, p. 2374). In this vein, we argue that scientists' willingness to share their expertise via mass media is likely influenced by their evaluation of the media coverage on scientific issues. The quality of public discourse on urgent science-related matters depends largely on how scientists understand media structures and practices (i.e., the news media logic), how they evaluate the appropriateness of reporting, and how this affects their media-related behavior. With some notable exceptions addressing related subjects such as scientists' views of mass media (Besley & Nisbet, 2013, pp. 649) and interactions between scientists and journalists (Besley et al., 2018, p. 5; Peters, 2008, p. 116), we lack knowledge about what exactly scientists perceive as news media logic and how this influences their responses to media inquiries. We do not yet know whether and how scientists distinguish different news media or-

ganizations in pluralistic media landscapes (Seethaler et al., 2023, p. 6), characterized by actors from the core and periphery of the journalistic field (Maares & Hanusch, 2023, p. 1271), and how exactly such perceived diversity or uniformity may shape their media-related behavior. Our study addresses these research gaps. The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting high relevance and density of scientific expertise in the news media therefore offer an ideal opportunity to determine how scientific experts perceive news media and the way they function, as well as how they adapt to them in their media appearances. As in other areas of society, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed structures in the relationship between the public and science like a magnifying glass (Chohan, 2023, p. 163); it is therefore particularly suitable for uncovering previously concealed structures. It can also be understood as a critical turning point, as the experiences of scientists with the news media during the COVID-19 pandemic were particularly intensive and relevant (Joubert et al., 2023, p. 3). Therefore, it can be expected that respective experiences will have a particularly enduring impact on scientists' assessment of the news media. The COVID-19 pandemic is certainly an extreme case, but one that can be expected to have a lasting effect, contributing to a better understanding of the cooperation between experts and journalists.

In this article, we draw on the concept of mediatization, proven fruitful in explaining why and how actors in different social domains, including science (e.g., Allgaier et al., 2013, p. 1; Post, 2008, p. 1; Post, 2015, p. 180; Väliverronen, 2021), adapt to media. It emphasizes that media-related measures serve specific purposes for these domains, and adaptations are always based on perceptions (Donges & Jarren, 2014, p. 10) – particularly presumed media influences and perceived media logics (Nölleke & Scheu, 2017, p. 200). Based on interviews with 24 Austrian scientific experts, we investigate what they perceive as news media logics and how these perceptions shape their media-related strategies, which can be considered core facets of mediatization.

## 2. Cooperation between scientific experts and media

Scientific experts have long played an important role as sources in the news (Boyce, 2006, p. 890). In the mutual relationship between experts and journalists, both sides can potentially benefit (Brants et al., 2010, p. 28): Experts are rewarded with public visibility that extends beyond the scientific community, responding to increasing demands for public engagement of the sciences in modern societies (Besley et al., 2018, p. 575). Conversely, journalists benefit from experts as they provide credible and reliable information, adding a flavor of objectivity to reporting (Albaek, 2011, p. 338). During the COVID-19 pandemic, journalists were particularly dependent on such expertise and relied heavily on scientists as expert sources (Mellado et al., 2021, p. 1261). Studies found that among scientists, experts from medical disciplines, especially virologists and epidemiologists, were particularly present in news media coverage (Eisenegger et al., 2021, p. 38; Leidecker-Sandmann et al., 2021, p. 349; Maurer et al., 2021, p. 6).

Given that it is the "journalists who ultimately write the stories and decide what to include and what not to include" (Strömbäck & Nord, 2006, p. 156),

journalists act as gatekeepers for expert sources. Previous research has found that in most cases, journalists tend to take the initiative to contact experts (Albaek, 2011, p. 335). Rather than simply passively relaying expert knowledge in their reporting, journalists actively construct expertise according to certain requirements and routines (Huber, 2014, p. 106). However, even though the journalists decide who to invite to the dance, they depend on a dance partner to accept the invitation. Hence, they depend on the willingness of scientific experts to appear in the news media (Huber, 2014, p. 107).

Such willingness cannot be taken for granted: While both journalists and scientists have something to gain, it is not guaranteed that they get along. While various studies indicate that the actual collaboration is usually successful and satisfying (Besley & Nisbet, 2013, p. 650; Peters, 2008, p. 115), research also pointed out the delicate nature of the relationship, as both professions are rooted in cultural differences (Peters, 1995, p. 33; Weingart, 2022, p. 290). In that regard, scientists often cannot communicate effectively with journalists, as public communication does not conform to established norms of scientific communication. Scientists differ from journalists in their preferred reporting style and tend to have a more paternalistic attitude towards audiences, expecting media to support their goals (Peters, 1995, p. 37). Previous research has also shown that scientists are mostly pleased with their news media contacts (Peters, 2008, p. 115) and tend to accept journalistic practices (Peters, 2013, p. 14107). Among the reasons for this willingness to engage are scientists' intrinsic desire for the public to understand science and external pressures for public engagement from politicians, funding agencies, or employers (e.g., Allgaier et al., 2013; Dudo & Besley, 2016). Many scientists have recognized potential benefits of being visible in the news media, increasing media exposure for scientific experts (Allgaier et al., 2013, p. 4; Besley et al., 2018, p. 568; Joubert et al., 2023, p. 2).

This increasing media orientation of scientists can be seen as a crucial facet of the broader process of mediatization of science (Harjuniemi, 2024, p. 230; Väliverronen, 2021; Weingart, 2022, p. 290). To increase visibility in the media, scientists adapt to the news media logic and use promotional strategies to this end (Groot & Maassen van den Brink, 2019, p. 133; Wien, 2014, p. 9).

## 3. Perceived media logic as a facet of mediatization

For more than two decades, scholars have referred to the "sensitizing concept" (Lunt & Livingstone, 2016, p. 464) of mediatization to conceptualize the changing relationships between science and media (Väliverronen, 2021, p. 7). Mediatization addresses the increasing importance of media for cultural practices and social domains, such as politics, sports, and science (Kunelius & Reunanen, 2016, p. 370). Two strands of research have emerged with different research foci and theoretical roots – both concerned with the evolving role of media in society: While the social constructivist approach is mainly interested in how media technologies shape everyday practices, the institutionalist approach is concerned with how non-media actors adapt to the functioning of big media organizations that provide visibility and thus public attention (Hepp, 2013, p. 619).

Importantly, the concept emphasizes that media do *not* colonize social domains by imposing their rules on them (Hepp et al., 2015, p. 317), but that actors in social domains actively utilize media services to achieve their strategic objectives (Marcinkowski & Steiner, 2014, p. 76; Strömbäck & van Aelst, 2013, p. 345). In that sense, mediatization "defines the transition from a reactive to an active way of dealing with media logic" (Marcinkowski, 2014, p. 8); to emphasize this active role, scholars have introduced the term "self-mediatization" (Philipps, 2024; Strömbäck & Esser, 2014a, p. 21)

In journalism studies, the institutionalist approach to mediatization research (Hepp, 2013, p. 615) has proven to be a fruitful concept to understand and explain indirect and structural effects of media in society. Corresponding research focuses on news media (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014b, p. 243) and examines how actors in domains such as politics (e.g., Esser & Strömbäck, 2014, p. 3) and sports (e.g., Ličen et al., 2022, p. 931) take journalistic demands into consideration and adapt their media-related strategies accordingly. Media-related actions are only taken when social actors believe that media exposure affects the pursuit of the function of the domain in which they are operating. While the concept of media logic is highly contested in general mediatization research (Brants & van Praag, 2017, p. 395), the institutionalist tradition, in which this paper situates itself, clearly focuses on media channels that can provide public attention, a function that used to be monopolized by big (news) media organizations and that is (extended) to digital channels such as social media in the digital age (Hjarvard, 2014, p. 124).

Concerning science, previous research indicates that scientists' public engagement is primarily motivated by a desire to serve the interests of the scientific domain. Scientific actors seek to manage public attention to obtain strategic objectives, like building rapport with the public (Dudo & Besley, 2016, para. 1) and pursuing career goals (Wien 2014, p. 10). When news media are perceived as an appropriate tool to manage public attention, scientists proactively adapt to media demands, so news media become increasingly important for science. There are also indications that, particularly in times of crisis, scientific experts are not only driven by strategic objectives to appear in the news media, but also perceive an ethical obligation to share their expertise publicly in order to counteract uncertainties in society (e.g., Donovan, 2021, p. 6; Dudo & Besley, 2016, p. 18; Joubert et al., 2023, p. 16; Nölleke et al., 2023, p. 551). It can be assumed that this is also, to some extent, the case in the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, even such rather altruistic motives for engaging with the public can be understood as facets of mediatization, since they, just like more strategic motives, are based on the notion that media presence ultimately influences the function of science in society. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that not every media-related action should be understood as an indicator of mediatization. Especially in crises, characterized by an extreme demand for scientific expertise from various societal stakeholders (e.g., Donovan, 2021, p. 7), scientists cannot always thoroughly weigh their decisions on how to act in public. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic confronted scientists with communicative tasks, the handling of which cannot be explained by mediatization alone.

As Nölleke et al. (2021, p. 738) have argued, the increasing importance of media is not only reflected by actors striving to *achieve* public attention through the news media; mediatization also entails defensive strategies through which actors actively seek to *avoid* media exposure (Strömbäck & Nord, 2006, p. 147). Concerning scientists' willingness to act as expert sources, the acceptance and rejection of media inquiries should be considered facets of mediatization, as they are ultimately based on a cost-benefit analysis. It is finally up to the scientists to decide whether they perceive public visibility as beneficial or harmful.

The concept of self-mediatization refers not only to whether or not actors in social domains adapt to media demands. It also points to the need to pay attention to specific perceptions on which these media-related strategies rest, namely presumed media influences (Strömbäck, 2011, p. 430) and perceived media logic (Nölleke & Scheu, 2017, p. 195). Regarding the former, mediatization can be viewed as a response to what "actors perceive as a powerful media environment" (Esser & Matthes, 2013, p. 199). Actors will only adjust their strategies if they attribute to the media the power to influence relevant stakeholders in a way that is important for achieving strategic goals (Scheu, 2019, para. 8; Strömbäck & Nord, 2006, p. 153). For the latter, actors' adaptations to news media's demands are always shaped by their understanding of how these news media work. As Marcinkowski (2014, p. 8) put it: "[A]ctors can obviously only orientate themselves towards what they consider to be the logic of the media." To understand how scientists respond to media inquiries, it is critical to also consider their perceptions of media logic. Even in the institutionalist tradition, what constitutes media logic is not undisputed. Building on Altheide and Snow's (1979) original definition, scholars have referred to the "modus operandi of mass media" (Hjarvard, 2018, p. 65) and the "operational logic of media" (Esser & Matthes, 2013, p. 177), which encompasses "the rules and norms that govern the news media" (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014b, p. 245). In an attempt to capture the different facets that potentially shape perceptions of how news media function and yet are open to other emphases, Nölleke and Scheu (2017, p. 204) have distinguished journalistic practices, individual actors (journalistic roles), and organizations (journalistic structures). In this study, we build on this systematization.

We argue that the perception of news coverage serves as the orientation horizon for scientists to determine whether it is beneficial or detrimental to appear as scientific experts in the news media (Scheu, 2019, para. 14). In this context, as the Thomas theorem emphasizes, situations are defined as real and are also real in their consequences if they are perceived as real (regardless of whether they actually are) (Meyen et al., 2014, p. 34). In this paper, we address both aspects of this theorem: First, we examine how scientific experts *define* the situation, i.e., what they perceive as media logic; and second, what *consequences* they draw from this, i.e., how this perception affects their media-related actions and, e.g., which strategies are used in news media appearances to fulfill the expert role. Therefore, the following research questions are posed:

*RQ1: How do scientific experts perceive the news media logic?*

*RQ2: To what extent does scientific experts' perception of the news media logic influence their interaction with news media?*

## 4. Methodology

To answer our research questions, we conducted in-depth interviews with 24 scientists featured as expert sources in Austrian news media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Austrian media system is a relatively typical model found in countries across Central and Western Europe (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 69; Hanitzsch et al., 2019, p. 237). It is characterized by the co-existence of public and private media. As a rather small country, Austria's media landscape is comparatively narrow and dominated by a few media groups, particularly the public broadcaster ORF. Similarities to other Western European countries not only relate to the media system, but were also evident in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic: Austria was affected by COVID-19 as much as other countries, with the government taking measures to restrict everyday life and imposing four nationwide lockdowns (Czypionka et al., 2020, p. 281).

For this study, the COVID-19 pandemic presented an ideal case: An extraordinary, unprecedented crisis generated a societal demand for scientific knowledge, leading scientists, in particular, to step into the media spotlight to publicly share their expertise (Leidecker-Sandmann et al., 2021, p. 349). While studies have shown that media drew on scientists from a variety of disciplines, they also found that journalists were particularly reliant on medical scientists such as virologists and epidemiologists (Eisenegger et al., 2021, p. 38; Joubert et al., 2023, p. 16; Leidecker-Sandmann et al., 2021, p. 347). During the COVID-19 pandemic, some virologists and epidemiologists became "live celebrities for the first time" (Leidecker-Sandmann et al., 2021, p. 357). Against this background, it is particularly instructive to examine how perceptions of news media logic and initial experiences with media contacts shaped scientific experts' responses to news media inquiries.

To identify such scientific experts, a detailed search was first conducted in the APA-OnlineManager library, an archive of all Austrian daily newspapers as well as weekly and monthly journals, which also contains transcripts from radio and TV news (APA-DeFacto, 2022, para. 1). We searched for articles and transcripts that appeared in Austrian news media during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020 to March 2021), using the search terms "corona expert", "epidemiologist", "virologist", "microbiologist", "public health", "health expert" and "bioethicist"[1]. To ensure that only scientific expert sources were included in the analysis, the results were subsequently checked again individually. To ensure the authority of the scientific expertise, experts who did not have a recognized scientific area of expertise were excluded.

1 Originally, we used the following German search terms: Coronaexpert, Infektiolog, Epidemiolog, Virolog, Mikrobiolog, Public-Health, Public Health, Gesundheitsexpert, Bioethik

That way, we identified 71 scientific experts, 24 of whom we finally interviewed. When selecting respondents, we applied purposive sampling to ensure variance, particularly in terms of gender and news media experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. Concerning gender, previous research indicates that female scientists receive far less news media attention than their male colleagues (e.g., Eisenegger et al., 2021, p. 38; Hubner, 2023, p. 1025; Niemi & Pitkänen, 2017, p. 5; Shine, 2022, p. 2365), partly due to the lower proportion of women in science in general (Holman et al., 2018), as well as their comparatively greater reluctance to accept media inquiries (Howell & Singer, 2017, p. 17; Shine, 2022, p. 2371). Although we did not achieve an even gender distribution, 7 of the 24 interviewees identified as female, which represented a slightly higher proportion than their actual share in the COVID-19 coverage – at least in the neighboring countries of Germany (Prommer & Stüwe, 2020) and Switzerland (Eisenegger et al., 2021, p. 40). Concerning news media experience, we assumed that different degrees of media exposure might be explained by different assessments of news media coverage and differing perceptions of how news media work. The number of news media appearances in our final sample ranged from 1–81. While it may be argued that a small number of news media appearances may not suffice for the objectives of this study, it is important to underscore that scientific experts, even with limited media exposure, may have developed an understanding of media logic and deliberately opt to decline or only infrequently engage with media requests. For instance, the withdrawal of one particular scientific expert following a single news media appearance highlights the impact of their experiences with media logic on their direct media-related behavior. Therefore, the insights gleaned from experts with fewer news media appearances are valuable for exploring the relationship between perceived media logic and media-related behavior as well.

Just as the number of news media appearances varies, so does the diversity of media outlets where scientists were featured as scientific experts. These encompass a spectrum from private broadcasting and public broadcasting to quality newspapers. Only few interviewees acted as experts for tabloid newspapers. Of the interviewees, 15 worked at universities or scientific institutions, 5 were employed in hospitals as doctors, and 4 worked in the private health sector.

As social distancing measures did not allow for face-to-face meetings, we conducted interviews via Zoom, which has proven adequate in qualitative research, particularly in interview studies (e.g., Reñosa et al., 2021, p. 2). Interviews were conducted by one of the authors of this paper from April to June 2021 and lasted between 30 and 70 minutes, with an average of 50 minutes. The interviews were conducted in German. We employed a semi-structured interview guideline that contained a total of 30 questions. Given this article's focus, we only report on one part of this larger study. In addition to questions about perceptions and experiences with the news media during the COVID-19 pandemic, the interview guideline also dealt with the relationship between scientific experts and political decision-makers.

Specifically, to address our research questions, we asked interviewees about their handling of news media inquiries (Q16 & 17), their interactions with journalists (Q 15, 18 & 19), their assessments of news media coverage (Q 1 & 2, 8–10),

their understanding of news media routines (Q 11, 16–19), and potential conflicts between scientific and news media logic (Q 18).[2] The perception of news media logic was addressed at different stages of the interviews, attempting to address the more general and less critical topics at the beginning and later the more specific and individual topics, such as the interviewees' perception of their own media appearances. The overarching question of how interviewees perceive the news media to work was addressed by stimulating narratives throughout the interview (e.g., by asking about general assessments of science reporting and individual experiences with news media contacts). A considerable part of the interview contained concrete follow-up questions on news media logic; as these questions were asked depending on the course of the interview, their exact proportion is difficult to determine. Although reciprocal effects of the questions cannot be excluded, this interview structure served to counteract potential effects, e.g., distress caused by potentially negative experiences with news media, as far as possible.

Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and anonymized, then thematically analyzed using MAXQDA software.

While deductive categories emerged from the interview guideline to answer research question 1 ("evaluation of reporting", "differentiation of news media" & "perception of the functioning of news media") and research question 2 ("handling of news media inquiries" & "satisfaction with news media appearances"), specific, context-dependent subcategories were identified inductively by relying on the interviewees' discourses (Kuckartz, 2014). In our results section, we also report on the subcategories of these main categories. Table 1 in the appendix contains the coding system, including the code description, number of codings, examples, and coding instructions. To maintain anonymity, interviewees were given a code indicating their gender (m or f) and a progressive number.

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Perceived media logic

In answering RQ1, in the interviews, it became apparent that the scientific experts' ideas about how the news media work are based on their general assessment of the quality of news media coverage and their own experiences with news media inquiries. Concerning the former, the interviewees' understanding of the news media's logic became particularly evident when they evaluated different news media differently. Interviewees were aware of the diversity of the media landscape, guiding their decisions on how to deal with media inquiries.

#### *5.1.1 Assessment of media coverage*

Most interviewees agreed that science journalism has played a major role during the COVID-19 pandemic. One scientific expert said: "I believe that science journalism in particular has played a good and important role. Also, to communicate

2 The interview guideline can be found in the appendix of the manuscript

not only the findings themselves, but also the classification of the findings" (m12). Here, legacy media in particular were considered to have had a significant impact: "The traditional media [...] play a big role. These are the important players" (m2). Most interviewees assessed the news media coverage of COVID-19 as positive overall. Some said they thought the reporting was well-balanced and objective, and were satisfied with the coverage. One expert stated: "I think that the media coverage has actually been quite good from the beginning until today, in my perception" (m15).

Interviewees also recognized the complexity and difficulty of understanding and effectively reporting scientific issues, as one expert stated that: "It's not that easy for a journalist to read medical scientific papers now, it's quite a challenge" (m1). Most of the experts were particularly positive about how scientific findings were communicated. One expert said he was positively surprised by the fact that "it has been possible to explain to even the most ignorant person in this country what a PCR, a CT value, and a pandemic is and what a host is, an antibody, and whatever other terms have been explained there" (m3).

Nevertheless, our interviewees also expressed criticism of the reporting and identified three key points. First, they argued reporting was too negative and therefore dangerous, as it "divides the population to an extent that I have never seen before" (m4). Second, they criticized the news media's tendency to balance opinions, even if they were hostile to science. One expert referred to this false balance, stating:

> *If science agrees 90 percent of the time, you can still find a counterpart to everyone who says something. And that totally distorts the public's perception because people believe that science is not in agreement. But just because there are a few contrarians doesn't mean that the science is not unanimous. (m10)*

Third, experts were concerned about the frequency of reporting, which they assessed as too high. One interviewee said: "In terms of quality, very good. But it's too much quantity that you can't escape [...] you really have to turn it off at home" (m2).

These criticisms were, in turn, linked to the perceived functioning of news media. The fact that news media focus on negative news, try to present balanced opinions, and report so extensively on COVID-19 did not surprise the interviewees, as indicated by comments such as: "That's just how media work" (m15), and: "That's simply their job" (m1).

Further, our interviewees differentiated between different news media outlets and different journalists. Quality news media were rated positively across the board, while the assessment of tabloid news media was more diverse. Among quality news media, the Austrian public broadcaster ORF was praised in many interviews for its coverage of COVID-19. "The ORF plays a big role, and I think they do it quite professionally; they try to inform objectively" (m1). In addition to ORF as a whole, the ORF science editor was frequently praised for his work. This focus on particular journalists and an individual weighing of their competencies became evident throughout the interviews. Thus, scientific experts decided whe-

ther to accept news media requests not only based on the inquiring news media outlet but also based on the individual journalists who contacted them.

Regarding the tabloid news media, the assessment varied greatly depending on the outlet. One expert said he had had low expectations of the tabloid, but "I was surprised about the development of the tabloid news media and positively surprised. I have never seen that before, with partly very serious reporting and very source-related reporting" (m5). Another interviewee emphasized the varying quality of tabloid reporting, saying: "Tabloid media are very different in quality, and *Servus TV* is below every line. They simply worked very dubiously" (m1). Generally, *Servus TV* – an Austrian TV station that aired a highly debated discussion format with scientific experts and COVID-19 deniers – was rated very critically. This particular program caused displeasure among most of the experts interviewed.

### *5.1.2 Analytical understanding of media logic*

What can already be deduced from the respondents' assessments of the quality of reporting becomes particularly evident when they were asked about their experiences in dealing with news media inquiries. Even though they recognize differences in reporting, they identify a lowest common denominator of a media logic, which guides how they deal with news media inquiries. This lowest common denominator encompasses three factors that they ascribed as an underlying mode of news media's functioning.

The first factor was related to the form of information needed by experts, namely that news media prefer clear statements. After all, scientific topics are by no means easy to grasp, and science often does not provide unambiguous answers, yet our interviewees felt that such unambiguous statements were needed for news media coverage. One expert said: "We scientists always tend to put everything into perspective, and media just want clear statements" (f1). Another expert added: "Journalists need simple truths. Yes, no, left, right, up, down, more or less. None of what I deal with scientifically is definite" (m4).

The second factor related to the way the news media present scientific findings. Interviewees found that expert statements were often abbreviated and experts were urged to truncate scientific findings as much as possible: "There are those news people who often condense you to single statements, who want to know something quickly" (m5).

The third factor related to the goals news media want to achieve with their reporting. Interviewees felt the news media were hunting for ratings and made their reporting dependent on current hypes instead of long-term priorities. In this regard, our interviewees were particularly critical of the focus on commercial goals instead of the correct conveyance of scientific knowledge. For example, one expert said: "That has nothing to do with content and meaning; it's purely a matter of audience ratings" (m4).

These three factors are also related to how productive the cooperation between journalists and experts was assessed. Many experts expressed that the news media logic could inhibit and complicate cooperation. "Of course, in the speed of

the process, mistakes also happen, if I may say so. And these can of course also fuel the conflict between science and media", said one expert (m15). Nevertheless, experts recognized they had to adapt to the news media logic to be able to convey the content: "If you don't allow yourself to be instrumentalized in certain circumstances, you can't get your message out to the people" (m5).

Besides the basic analytical understanding of a news media logic, it must be emphasized that the scientific experts perceived nuances and differences between different news media and their functioning. The format of the medium, but also the target audience, the editorial bias, and the journalistic ethos were perceived differently by the interviewees and thus triggered different responses to inquiries from different news media. For example, one interviewee emphasizes the different resources of news media

> *Of course, you have to see that different media, whether print, radio, or whatever, have different resources and demands. If you only have 500 characters to write a text, that's different from a one-hour interview on television, where you can perhaps present scientific findings in more detail and better understandably (m2).*

Another scientific expert adds, "Media have different audiences, and they produce for them. They have an editorial line and have to give them what they want. And it can mean that statements are shortened because the audience isn't interested or pays less attention" (f4). Another interviewee also considers that the journalistic self-perception can differ and that "someone who works at the *Standard* or *ORF* really wants to report qualitatively well and makes more effort to present the scientific statements clearly. That is perhaps different with the *Krone* or *Heute* [...] they also want clear statements, but that can also be in a sensationalist way" (m6).

### 5.2 Media-related behavior

In answering RQ2, our data suggest that interviewees' perception of news media logic served as their lighthouse to navigate an increasingly diverse media landscape. In this regard, they base their decision to accept or reject news media inquiries on their assessment of the quality of reporting. One expert described his approach to accepting media inquiries as follows:

> *In the beginning, it was rather selective, what is a quality medium for me and what is not. So Ö1 always. Falter: with pleasure. Standard at that time also with pleasure. Presse: yes. I was very active in the Wiener Zeitung. Kronen Zeitung from the beginning: no. They were furious there. Kleine Zeitung: no. (m14)*

Another expert made a distinction between accepting or rejecting news media inquiries based on the perceived competence of the journalists in the respective medium, saying:

> *There are some journalists who have really acquired an enormous amount of expertise in the last year and with whom it is really fun to do interviews. When requests from these journalists come in, I usually agree and pick up the phone. (m9)*

But even where they felt comfortable with certain news media or journalists, the interviewees stated they do not accept their requests willingly and without reflection, but adapt to avoid being controlled by external influences. Here, their understanding of how the news media works is the general benchmark. With that regard, interviews revealed six strategies:

The first strategy was to simplify the language and the topic so that it was understandable for the journalists and their audience. One expert said: "You should try to report in an understandable way […]. I have to translate my work into understandable German and often present complicated contexts in a way that people can understand" (m1).

But they also adapted their language to the specific outlet that interviewed them, again indicating interviewees were aware of news media diversity and their differing needs. For example, one expert stated:

> *It is important to be able to express oneself in an understandable way, depending on the level of the medium and the audience. Of course, I speak differently in the Standard than when I do an interview with the Kronen Zeitung. […] You have to be able to adapt to the audience. (f4)*

The second strategy experts used in interviews was to try to remain neutral and objective. One interviewee stressed the importance of neutral statements for one's credibility and emphasized that "as an expert you should not provoke, because the more neutrally you convey your expertise, the more credible it is" (m14). Another expert saw private reasons as justification for the neutral statements, saying: "Giving personal opinions about anything and consequently violating my life or privacy is out of the question. One should be rather reserved. In Austria, it is not desirable to speak out about certain things" (m3).

The third strategy could be summarized as adapting to the medium and their expectations of the interview in terms of the content and the course of the conversation that the journalists strive for. One expert said: "So you should look at what kind of medium it is and what the aim of the medium or the program is because that's what you have to be able to sell" (f3). Another expert added he adapted to news media as well: "I sometimes have the impression that we are some kind of actors. Maybe that's a bit exaggerated, but we are part of a system and have a certain role" (m8).

The fourth strategy was to stick to the personal field of expertise in interviews. One scientific expert said, "It is better not to comment on issues that do not concern one's own area of expertise. Journalists sometimes like to tempt you to comment on the politics of the day or even say something negative about some politician" (f4). Another interviewee summarized his interview tactics, saying: "My recommendation is 'proper preparation prevents poor performance' and only say what you know" (m2).

The fifth strategy was to adapt to audience expectations. Stated one interviewee: "I always try to pass on things in the interviews that people can hold on to. That the listener, who has to be served, also comes out of this experience with a realization" (m2). Another expert stressed the importance of adapting to the audience and to "limit yourself to the most important things and formulate a take-home message" (f7).

The sixth strategy experts used was the pre- and post-interview preparation, and they kept control over what was said after the interviews. One interviewee highlighted its importance:

> *What is simply important is that you really think about the topic you are talking about beforehand and see a little bit in the discussions in public what kind of questions come up. […] You have to know what the direction of the medium is, what kind of audience they usually have. (f5)*

Additionally, individual follow-up was also important, and "when it comes to written media, that you get the text in advance for proofreading" (m7). Furthermore, some interviewees followed up the interviews, such as one who tried to learn for future news media appearances and said: "And one should quite simply question. I go inside myself and look: What I said and how I said it, was that OK, or did I convey something somewhere that wasn't quite right?" (f6).

## 6. Discussion

Our findings indicate that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Austrian scientific experts recognized core elements that constitute media logic and altered their media-related strategies, respectively.

Overall, our interviewees recognized the background structures of various media and how to differentiate between them. Our results resonate with previous studies, which found that scientists recognized a media news logic (Besley & Nisbet, 2013, p. 649) and understood the politicization of scientific findings during the COVID-19 pandemic (Post et al., 2021, p. 497). One reason may be that our sample included scientific experts with considerable news media experience. Previous studies have shown that such groups tend to be more media literate than those with less contact with the news media (Besley & Nisbet, 2013, p. 650).

Our findings add value to previous studies through new insights into how news media logic is perceived on two levels. On the first level, the differentiation and evaluation of different news media forms the basis for a more detailed understanding of news media and media logic and whether scientific experts consider it beneficial or detrimental to appear as experts in the respective news media. In this context, quality media in particular were evaluated positively, which is consistent with the results of previous research (Magin, 2020, p. 1). A surprising finding, however, is that our interviewees viewed the overall coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic positively. Past research has typically found experts to exhibit a negative attitude toward news media, with scientific experts often blaming the news media for fostering insecurity and conflict in society (Young & Matthews, 2007, p. 135).

Regarding RQ1, we found that academic experts identified differences between journalists with different competencies (perception of journalistic roles) and different media organizations, characterized in particular by different economic constraints affecting the way they address (different) audiences (perception of journalistic structures). Beyond these differences, however, interviewees recognized a kind of lowest common denominator of media logic that mainly relates to journalistic practices. Five aspects stood out in particular: Our interviewees felt that the news media (1) focused on negativity and (2) created a false balance of opinion in their COVID-19 coverage by giving too much weight to (in their view) illegitimate viewpoints. They also criticized the news media for (3) reporting too intensively on the COVID-19 pandemic, which did not do justice to the complex scientific processes involved and led to them seeking too many expert voices too often. Regarding the employment of experts in the news media, respondents believed that journalists (4) prefer clear statements and (5) abbreviate expert knowledge.

These perceptions, which differ in intensity from outlet to outlet, crucially influenced experts' handling of news media inquiries, which can be considered a facet of mediatization (Weingart, 2022, p. 290). In that regard, news media do not impose their logics on social actors (i.e., scientists in our case) – these actors adapt to what they perceive as the news media logic in such a way that they can (still) achieve their goals (Marcinkowski & Steiner, 2014, p. 6). While we have not specifically addressed the nature of the motivations, studies show that in times of crisis, in addition to publicity or external expectations by stakeholders or policymakers, scientists also perceive a sense of responsibility towards society and thus accept media requests (e.g., Dudo & Besley, 2016, para. 1; Nölleke et al., 2023, p. 552). While this could also be considered a facet of mediatization, one should be careful to interpret all results through the mediatization lens. The COVID-19 pandemic represented an unprecedented situation characterized by a lot of pressure on scientists from various societal stakeholders (Joubert et al., 2023, p. 4). In this situation, some decisions were made intuitively and not always based on thorough considerations. While the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a magnifying glass on the one hand, as it invited scientists to reflect on their media-related behavior, on the other hand, not all scientists had the opportunity to reflect and weigh their decisions (Chohan, 2023, p. 163). We also know that the coverage of COVID-19 was exceptional and did not necessarily represent typical coverage features (e.g., Chohan, 2023, p. 164). Therefore, it is questionable whether all media-related actions were based on rational assessments of the various media requests, and the perception of media logic has a longer half-life.

In answering RQ2, the understanding of how news media work, in particular, determined how scientific experts dealt with news media. By reducing news media in particular to needing clear statements, shortening statements, balancing opinions, preferring negativity, and sticking to the potentially most promising topics in terms of reach and audience ratings, our interviewees recognized a typical way news media function. The scientific experts discursively negotiated how to deal with these facets of a news media logic and employed *offensive* and *defensive* strategies to deal with news media requests. For example, the strategies of adapt-

ing language to the medium as well as the general adaptation to the expectations of the respective medium and to audience expectations can be conceptualized as offensive strategies for dealing with journalists (Scheu, 2019, para. 15). In contrast, the strategies proposed in this paper of remaining neutral, focusing on one's own area of expertise, and engaging in both pre- and post-interview preparation can be classified as defensive strategies that aim to avoid risks and maintain control in media relations (Marcinkowski & Kohring, 2014, p. 5).

In interpreting our results, it is important to keep in mind that our sample included scientists who only became public experts due to the COVID-19 pandemic and scientists who had at least some news media experience before the COVID-19 outbreak. However, the particular experiences from the COVID-19 pandemic seemingly affected both equally. Even already news media-experienced scientific experts mentioned that the intense collaboration and high number of news media requests made them reflect on how to deal with the news media because "you can't do everything anyway: it's too much" (f5). Similarly, one interviewee said, "I've never experienced it to this extent. The phone was ringing all the time, even at night, the media were calling to get my opinion" (m1). It seems that the unique situation of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting collaboration between journalists and scientific experts made a significant contribution to how they understand and perceive news media logic.

## 7. Conclusion

This study aimed to gain a better understanding of experts' perceptions of news media. In particular, we were interested in whether scientific experts perceive a media logic and how it influences their media-related behavior. Against the background of mediatization (Marcinkowski, 2014, p. 6), we expected that especially the subjective perception of a news media logic is crucial for whether and how one adapts to news media and less what media logic is, since "the first aspect of mediatization is perception" (Donges & Jarren, 2014, p. 189).

Our results clearly show that scientific experts recognize key elements of a news media logic. This perceived media logic is learned by scholars and based, first, on the evaluation of reporting, particularly based on scientific experts' experience with news media appearances and their use of media (Strömbäck, 2011, p. 432), and, second, on an analytical understanding of how the news media function. At the evaluation level, coverage of COVID-19 was rated positively overall, with quality media consistently rated most positive. For tabloid media, the evaluation differed across outlets. At the analytical level of news media logic, interviewees identified three ways news media function: They shorten statements, require clear statements, and are thematically oriented toward audience metrics.

The results show that this perceived news media logic impacts how scientific experts deal with news media. On the one hand, it influences how they handle news media inquiries. On the other hand, they develop certain behaviors when dealing with news media to facilitate collaboration and protect themselves from potential negative consequences of the coverage. By identifying core elements of a perceived news media logic among scientific experts and revealing how these per-

ceptions influence their news media-related strategies, this study contributes to the further clarification of the relationship between journalists and scientific experts. The strategies for interacting with journalists identified in this study point to a broader understanding of (offensive and defensive) mediatization strategies that could be explored further in future research.

Future research should also pay closer attention to the fact that media logic – even from an institutionalist perspective – is not limited to the functioning of news media. To manage public attention through news media visibility, scientists are no longer dependent on coverage by journalists but can convey their information via own (e.g., social media) channels. Scientists have already embraced digital media as tools for science communication (e.g., Denia, 2021, p. 290). The same applies here, as we have argued for adapting to news media: Engagement via social media channels is largely influenced by the assessments of these channels and the understanding of how they work. Future research should identify what scientists perceive as core elements of such a network media logic (Klinger & Svensson, 2015, p. 1242) or social media logic (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 11) and how this understanding shapes their social media activities. Initial findings from this study clearly suggest scientific experts were highly critical of COVID-19 discussions on social media and tended to be rather reluctant regarding their own efforts on these platforms.

Like all studies, ours does not come without limitations. Despite our best efforts to include more women in our sample, we could not achieve equal distribution. There is a lack of female perspective on this topic. There may thus be gender differences in the perception of media logic that we were still unable to unearth (Shine, 2022, p. 2374). Moreover, we focused here only on experts in Austria, and studies elsewhere are needed. While we are confident that our findings are transferable to other Western countries that share many similarities in media systems and the societal role of journalism (Hanitzsch et al., 2019, p. 237), it would be interesting to compare countries with different media systems and journalism cultures and to investigate how the scientific experts' perception of news media – and subsequently – their response to news media inquiries is affected. We deliberately focused on medical scientists, who appear to have dominated much of the COVID-19 coverage. Journalists also turned to experts from other scientific disciplines, and these scientists likely have different perceptions of media logic, particularly those also frequently cited on other topics and those who investigate media logic(s) in their work, namely communication scholars. It would be valuable to compare scientists with different academic backgrounds in terms of their understanding of and for media logic.

A further limitation relates to the finding that most interviewees reported exclusively positive experiences with news media and journalists during COVID-19. Satisfaction with news media appearances likely affects how future media inquiries are handled, which might have introduced some bias. Future research should pay particular attention to scientific experts who have (publicly) complained about media reporting to investigate how different experiences affect their understanding of how the news media work and their willingness to serve as expert sources. In this study, we deliberately focused on scientific experts who agreed (at

least once) to serve as expert sources during COVID-19. It would be worthwhile exploring what scientists with no news media experience perceive as media logic and how these assessments, which are not based on experience, shape their response to media requests.

Finally, the specific context of the COVID-19 pandemic poses a further limitation of this study. The results are not necessarily transferable to science communication in general. The COVID-19 pandemic is an extreme case, and our interviewees were not always able to base their media-related decisions on thorough assessments of various possibilities and sometimes had to act intuitively. Not all perceptions and strategies we have identified can automatically be understood as mediatization elements as a long-term process. It would be interesting to see whether our respondents confirm or overturn their assessments of news media logic and thus their media-related strategies in more everyday situations. We know from other areas that the COVID-19 pandemic served as a magnifying glass, revealing otherwise hidden relations (Chohan, 2023, p. 163), which is what we wanted to uncover in this study. However, we are fully aware that the situation was extraordinary, and future research should pay particular attention to how such a crisis changes the relationship between scientists and the news media in the longer term and to what extent it could even trigger a new wave of mediatization.

In times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, media-related actions are likely motivated by different reasons than in everyday science communication. Future research should pay more attention to the situativity of various types of motivations, such as moral obligations or strategic goals, that prompt scientific experts to appear in the news media.

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## Appendix

### **Appendix 1.** Interview guideline

Einstieg: Einschätzung der Qualität der Information durch Medien und Politik

1. **Welches Zwischenzeugnis stellen Sie aus Ihrer Perspektive als [Bezeichnung ergänzen] der medialen Berichterstattung über die Pandemie aus? Wie beurteilen Sie die Qualität der Berichterstattung über die Pandemie?**
2. **Welche Rolle spielt Ihres Erachtens die Berichterstattung durch traditionelle Medien wie den *ORF*, die *Kronen-Zeitung* oder *Der Standard* dafür, was die Bevölkerung über die gesundheitlichen Aspekte der Pandemie weiß?**
   - Neben den traditionellen journalistischen Medien (wie ORF, Standard, Kronen-Zeitung etc.) gibt es mittlerweile auch viele alternative Informationsquellen – insbesondere im Internet. Welche sind Ihnen im vergangenen Jahr aufgefallen, von denen sie glauben, dass sie Einfluss auf das haben, was die Bevölkerung über die Pandemie zu wissen glaubt?
   - Für wie gut halten Sie denn allgemein das Wissen der Bevölkerung zu Corona?
3. In Österreich hat sich die Politik während der Pandemie in hohem Maße selbst direkt an die Öffentlichkeit gewandt – beispielsweise durch zahlreiche Pressekonferenzen der Regierung. **Welches Zwischenzeugnis stellen Sie als Bezeichnung ergänzen] dem Umgang der Regierung mit Corona aus? Hat sich die Regierung ausreichend auf relevante wissenschaftliche Expertise bezogen?**

Bedeutung von Expert*innen in der Politik

4. **Inwiefern wurde Ihre persönliche Expertise im Zuge politischer Entscheidungen zur Pandemie berücksichtigt?**
   - ***Wenn sie berücksichtigt wurde:*** Können Sie uns bitte schildern, wie die Kommunikation dort verlieft (Kontaktaufnahme, gegenseitige Ansprüche, Bewertung dessen, was aus Expertise gemacht wurde)?
   - Würden Sie sich wünschen, dass Ihre Expertise stärker von der Politik nachgefragt würde? [Bzw.: Hätten Sie sich gewünscht, dass...]

5. **Wie würden Sie denn generell das Verhältnis zwischen Wissenschaft und Politik in dieser Pandemie beschreiben und bewerten?**
   - Wie sollte die Politik mit dem Wissen und den Einschätzungen der Wissenschaft umgehen?
   - Inwiefern sollte es Ziel der Wissenschaft sein, politische Entscheidungen anzuleiten?
6. **Welche Lehren ziehen Sie persönlich als Wissenschaftler*in aus dem Umgang der Politik mit wissenschaftlicher Expertise während der Pandemie?**
   - Halten Sie es persönlich für klüger, Kontakte zur Politik zu meiden oder sollte man die Kontakte im Gegenteil intensivieren?
7. **In welchem Zusammenhang stehen Ihres Erachtens politische Relevanz und mediale Prominenz von Expert*innen? Inwiefern bevorzugt die Politik medial prominente Experten oder die Medien Expert*innen, die politisch relevant sind?**

Berichterstattung über die Pandemie

8. **Wie gut ist es den Medien Ihres Erachtens gelungen, *wissenschaftliche Erkenntnisse* rund um die Pandemie zu vermitteln?**
   - Haben Sie zwischen unterschiedlichen Medien Qualitätsunterschiede erkannt? Können Sie uns bitte schildern, woran Sie festmachen, dass einige Medien besser berichten als andere?
   - [Können Sie uns dazu konkret ein Positiv- und ein Negativbeispiel nennen?]
   - Haben Sie den Eindruck, dass sich der mediale Umgang mit wissenschaftlichem Wissen im Zeitverlauf verändert hat? (Ist er kenntnisreicher bzw verständnisvoller geworden? Oder sogar eher im Gegenteil?)
9. *Wir haben ja vorhin schon darüber gesprochen, dass es neben den traditionellen Medien im Internet zahlreiche weitere Quellen gibt, die über die Pandemie „informieren“.* **Wie schätzen Sie die Qualität dieser Quellen im Vergleich zum Journalismus ein?**
   - Haben Sie auch hier positive oder negative Beispiele für uns?
10. *Eine wichtige Rolle in der Berichterstattung spielen ja die sogenannten Expert*innen.* **Wie bewerten Sie das Expert*innenspektrum, das österreichischen Medien im Kontext der Pandemie präsentieren? Inwiefern finden Sie, dass dort die richtigen oder die falschen Expert*innen zu Wort kommen?**
   - Sind Ihnen auch hier Unterschiede zwischen unterschiedlichen Medienangeboten aufgefallen?
   - Inwiefern haben Sie Unterschiede bei der Wahl von Expert*innen zwischen traditionellen Medien und alternativen Angeboten im Internet wahrgenommen?

Perspektiven auf Wissenschaftskommunikation in der Pandemie

**11. Zunächst allgemein gefragt: Wie haben Sie generell die Rahmenbedingungen für Wissenschaftskommunikation in der Pandemie erlebt? Nehmen Sie hier besondere Herausforderungen, aber auch Möglichkeiten wahr?**

**12. Welchen Stellenwert hat für Sie denn grundsätzlich die *öffentliche Kommunikation* Ihrer wissenschaftlichen Expertise im Kontext ihrer wissenschaftlichen Arbeit?**

- Warum ist es Ihnen (weniger) wichtig, Ihre wissenschaftliche Expertise öffentlich zu teilen?

Eigene Erfahrungen als Medienexpert*in

**13. Inwiefern haben Sie sich generell auf die Rolle als potenzielle*r Medienexpert*in während der Pandemie vorbereitet gefühlt bzw. inwiefern fühlen sich vorbereitet?**

- Hatten Sie schon vor der Pandemie Medienerfahrung?
- Haben Sie an Medientrainings teilgenommen?
- Gibt es seitens Ihrer Organisation (Uni oder Institut) Unterstützung für den Umgang mit Medien?

**14. Was braucht es denn Ihres Erachtens, damit man die Rolle als Medienexpert*in zufriedenstellend wahrnehmen kann? Was für Kompetenzen muss man mitbringen? Und welche Ressourcen benötigt man?**

**15. Nun möchten wir uns konkret Ihren Erfahrungen als Medienexpert*in widmen. Erst einmal ganz offen gefragt: Können Sie mir bitte schildern, welche Erfahrungen Sie als Ansprechpartner*in für Medien im vergangenen Jahr gemacht haben – wie viele; gute, schlechte (?) – was ziehen Sie für eine persönliche Bilanz?**

- Erinnern Sie sich an eine besonders bemerkenswerte Erfahrung, von der Sie uns berichten können?

16. Können Sie uns bitte berichten, wie sich die Medienanfragen während der Pandemie entwickelt haben?
    - Gab es bestimmte Anlässe, zu denen sich Anfragen geballt haben?
    - Waren die Anfragen auf traditionelle Medien beschränkt oder gab es auch Kontakt zu neuen, alternativen Formaten, über die wir vorhin schon gesprochen haben?
17. Wovon hängt es denn ab, ob Sie Medienanfragen annehmen oder ablehnen?
    - Inwiefern macht es einen Unterschied, von welchem Medium die Anfrage kommt?
    - Und haben Sie während der Pandemie erlebt, dass Journalist*innen unterschiedliche wissenschaftliche Kompetenz haben? Entscheiden Sie auch anhand dieser Kompetenz, ob Sie Anfragen annehmen?
    - Inwiefern ist es Ihnen wichtig, dass Journalist*innen Verständnis für den wissenschaftlichen Prozess haben?

**18.** *In diesem Zusammenhang: Forschung zur Wissenschaftskommunikation beschäftigt sich ja intensiv mit dem Konfliktpotenzial zwischen wissenschaftli-*

*chen und journalistischen Prinzipien.* **Haben Sie in der Pandemie die Erfahrung gemacht, dass Ihre wissenschaftliche Perspektive nicht zu den Bedürfnissen der Journalisten passte und dass es zu Konflikten zwischen journalistischen Ansprüchen und ihren Prinzipien kam?**
   - Wo genau lag da das Problem?
   - Haben Sie den Eindruck, dass Journalist*innen mit der Unsicherheit und Vorläufigkeit wissenschaftlichen Wissens gut umgehen können?
   - Wie haben Sie in Ihrer Kommunikation mit den Journalist*innen denn auf die Unsicherheit wissenschaftlicher Erkenntnisse verwiesen?
   - Kam diese Unsicherheit in den entsprechenden Beiträgen auch ausreichend zum Ausdruck?

**19.** *Nun haben wir schon darüber gesprochen, wie intensiv und unter welchen Bedingungen Sie Medien als Expert*in Rede und Antwort stehen. Wir wissen aber noch kaum etwas zu Ihren Motiven, überhaupt Zeit für solche Tätigkeiten als Expert*in zu investieren.* **Können Sie uns bitte schildern, warum Sie grundsätzlich bereit dazu sind, als Expert*in in den Medien aufzutreten? Welche Ziele verfolgen Sie mit Ihren Medienauftritten?**

**20. Inwiefern haben Sie den Eindruck, dass Sie diese Ziele mit Ihren Auftritten als Expert*in während der Pandemie auch erreichen? Reflektieren Sie das für sich selbst?**

**21. Wenn Sie jetzt auf Ihr mediales Expert*innendasein im letzten Jahr zurückblicken. Wie zufrieden sind Sie mit Ihren Erfahrungen? Was lief gut, was weniger? Und welche Konsequenzen ziehen Sie daraus für zukünftige Medienauftritte (oder haben Sie schon gezogen)?**

Resonanz auf Expert*innenauftritte und Wissenschaftspopulismus

**22.** *Sie haben es vorhin ja selbst angesprochen, dass über Medien ja vor allem die allgemeine Öffentlichkeit erreicht werden soll. Wir hören hier aktuell einerseits von großem Vertrauen der Bevölkerung in Wissenschaft, andererseits von großer Skepsis einiger Bevölkerungsschichten in akademische Eliten.* **Wie nehmen Sie die Meinung der Öffentlichkeit zu Wissenschaft generell wahr?**

**23. Glauben Sie, dass die Pandemie die öffentliche Meinung zu Wissenschaft verändert? Können sie diese Einschätzung begründen?**

**24. Können Sie mir bitte berichten, inwiefern Sie persönlich auch ganz konkret Resonanz auf Ihre öffentlichen Auftritte erhalten haben? Welche Erfahrungen haben Sie da gesammelt?**
   - War die Resonanz überwiegend positiv oder negativ?
   - Können Sie bestimmte Muster erkennen; dass also Äußerungen in diesem oder jenem Medium zu diesem und jenem Thema besonders viel oder wenig Resonanz erzeugen?
   - Über welche Kanäle erreicht Sie dieses Feedback?

**25. Können Sie mir bitte noch etwas detaillierter die negativen Kommentare schildern? Wie wurde denn da Kritik geäußert und worauf bezog sie sich?**
   - Wie sehr hat sie das berührt?

- Inwiefern haben Sie darauf reagiert?
- Würden Sie sich Unterstützung im Umgang mit solchen negativen Kommentaren wünschen?

26. **Was würden Sie Kolleg*innen (insbesondere jungen Kolleg*innen) auf Basis Ihrer Erfahrungen mit dem Feedback der Öffentlichkeit hinsichtlich ihrer Wissenschaftskommunikation raten?**
27. **Und welche Konsequenzen ziehen Sie persönlich aus der Resonanz auf Ihre öffentliche Wissenschaftskommunikation?**

Ausblick

28. *Wir haben in diesem Interview ja viel über die Herausforderungen der Wissenschaftskommunikation während der Pandemie gesprochen:* **Inwiefern sehen Sie da wissenschaftliche Organisationen in der Pflicht, Unterstützung zu leisten? Welche Unterstützungsstrukturen würden Sie sich persönlich, aber auch ganz allgemein für Wissenschaftler*innen wünschen?**
29. **Wenn Sie noch einmal auf das vergangene Jahr zurückblicken: Was haben Sie in diesem Jahr über Wissenschaftskommunikation gelernt?**
30. **Und was hat die Pandemie im Verhältnis zwischen Wissenschaft, Medien, Politik und Öffentlichkeit verändert? Zum Guten und/oder zum Schlechten?**

## **Appendix 2.** Codes

**Table 1. Coding system including the code description, number of codings, examples and coding instructions.**

| Code | Number of codings | Example | Coding instructions |
|---|---|---|---|
| Evaluation of reporting | 84 | "I think it's actually very well done. In what depth I mean the Standard that I read or Die Zeit, for example, which is a German newspaper, but you probably know it. And the depth and detail, the accuracy, the correctness of the research here. And I find that extremely positive, for example" (Transcript 4) | This code is assigned when a personal evaluation of the reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic takes place. |
| Differentiation of media | 23 | "You're probably not happy when I say that there's no clear verdict on this because, firstly, the range of media is very broad. And secondly, even within one medium, my perception has varied greatly over the past year and a half." (Trancript 16) | This code is assigned when the interviewees point out differences between different media (for example, in their reporting, in their public image or in their perceived functioning). This code is also assigned when no differences can be identified. |
| Differentiation of media / Differentiation by journalists | 25 | "I can also name two where I felt very well looked after in the interview. That was the report with (science journalist 1), she was absolutely fine. And (science journalist 2), of course, is also extremely good" (Transcript 4) | This code is assigned when the interviewees recognize differences in relation to individual journalists regardless of their media organization and are emphasized as individuals. |
| Differentiation of media / Differentiation by media | 40 | "ORF, for example, gave a lot of experts a chance to have their say. As did the good newspapers, at least in Austria" (Transcript 15) | This code is assigned when the interviewees recognize differences in relation to whole media organizations. |
| Handling media enquiries | 26 | "Or, conversely, the journalists know which questions they can come to you with and which not. That's actually the biggest change. If I now get a call on my mobile phone where I don't know the number, I don't pick up the phone any more" (Transcript 17) | This code is assigned when responding to media inquiries (e.g., initial contact; how to deal with inquiries in the first step) |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Perception of the functioning of media | 61 | "And of course it is very often perhaps a little abbreviated or a little misinterpreted by the media. And of course that can then take a turn for the worse. So, I do believe that there is a danger here that the media, if they work with these things improperly, can of course have the opposite effect to what was actually the intention" (Transcript 5) | This code is assigned when references are made to an underlying media logic both in its coverage (e.g., how media select, edit news) but also in its fundamental functioning (e.g., commercial logics, democratic logics). |
| Perception of the functioning of media/ Dealing with media | 49 | "It probably takes a certain talent to explain things simply without making them banal. I think those who communicate well can really break it down so far that it is generally understandable and also adapts to the medium and what they want" (Transcript 13) | This code is assigned when indications are given on how to adapt to the perceived media logics in media appearances (e.g., particular behaviors, (offensive or defensive) strategies, routines). |
| Satisfaction with media appearances | 37 | "But everyone is respectful loving and I like these media people I think it's funny what they do and how it works these backgrounds. I've been to different studios and for me it was a kind of vacation in Vienna" (Transcript 2) | This code is assigned when one's own experiences in media appearances or in dealing (before and after the media appearance) with individual media or journalists are shared (both positive and negative). |
| Satisfaction with media appearances/ Consequences of media appearances | 19 | „I don't think I've taken any damage from what I've done, if I can avoid it at all, I won't do anything in the future, I'll stay away from it as much as I can" (Transcript 6) | This code is assigned when the interviewees draw conclusions for their future media appearances based on their experiences with media appearances or in dealing with media/journalists (e.g., withdrawing from media; increased willingness to appear as expert; adapting their approach to the media/journalists). |