

News Publishers' Innovation of Practices Amid Platform Dominance

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Abstract

To news publishers, digital platform companies (or “platforms”) such as Google and Meta present both benefits and risks. Platforms offer publishers certain functionalities and services that may be beneficial, but they have also gained an immense influence over journalism and the business of news, so much so that publishers have become wary of being over-reliant on them. Given this complex dynamic between publishers and platforms, it is critically important to understand how publishers continuously innovate their practices when engaging with platforms. To shed light on this, this dissertation employs a practice-oriented approach and a mix of qualitative methods to longitudinally examine *how* and *why* a Singaporean news publisher innovated its editorially oriented practices in relation to platforms. This dissertation covers a six-year period (2015 to 2021) and includes four studies, each focusing on different aspects of the publisher’s innovation of practices. This dissertation offers four key conclusions: (1) *platform significance*, which highlights the varying importance of platforms to publishers, the shifting platform landscape and the risks of platform dependency, (2) *platform mutability*, which foregrounds platforms as ever-changing technological infrastructures that exert authority over publishers and foster dependency, (3) *publishers’ platform configuration*, which provides a deeper understanding of publishers’ agency to strategically and continually configure a range of platform-related practices while attempting to strike a balance between leveraging platform opportunities and maintaining editorial and financial autonomy, and (4) *publishers’ platform-oriented competencies*, which underline the growing importance of workers with platform-related knowledge, skills and expertise, and the impact they have on newsroom dynamics. Overall, this work offers insights into the evolving publisher-platform relationship and raises important questions regarding the sustainability of journalism in a platform-dominated digital media landscape.

Keywords

Digital journalism, innovation, news publishers, platforms, practice theory

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The dissertation is based on the following studies:

Article 1: Chua, S., & Westlund, O. (2019). Audience-centric engagement, collaboration culture and platform counterbalancing: A longitudinal study of ongoing sensemaking of emerging technologies. *Media and Communication*, 7(1), 153–165.

<https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v7i1.1760>

Article 2: Chua, S., & Duffy, A. (2019). Friend, foe or frenemy? Traditional journalism actors' changing attitudes towards peripheral players and their innovations.

Media and Communication, 7(4), 112–122. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v7i4.2275>

Article 3: Chua, S., & Westlund, O. (2022). Platform configuration: A longitudinal study and conceptualization of a legacy news publisher's platform-related innovation practices.

Online Media and Global Communication, 1(1), 60–89.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/omgc-2022-0003>

Article 4: Chua, S. (forthcoming). Platform configuration and digital materiality: How news publishers innovate their practices amid entanglements with the evolving technological infrastructure of platforms. *Journalism Studies*.

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