

Funding Accurate News Reporting Through Taxation as a Public Good

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

News reporting is an important part of society, making this kind of service a public good that is non-excludable and with joint supply (Kohn, 2020). It provides information for the engagement of citizens, promotes accountability and enhances democratic governance (Offer, 2024). However, the generation of accurate news requires a lot of investment including human resources, equipment and the medium on which the news is published (Tuulonen et al. 2019). Regarding the case of market failure characterized by positive production externalities such as an increase in Societal awareness, taxation appears as the probable source of funds. According to the study, government funding can resolve the free-rider problem and provide society with access to credible information (Murphy, 2019). Swedish and British models demonstrate this through compulsory public broadcasting charges (Ramsey and Herzog, 2018). It supports independent journalism, reduces fake news and helps to counter losses of print media and news agencies affected by declining circulation and digital transformation. However, taxation has its risks for instance, governments might interfere, media might be biased and taxation just generally is not efficient.

This trade-off shows why it is important to also defend and protect media independence to put into practice democracy. Other alternative funding models like crowdfunding are therefore available. In this way, crowdfunding operates not only to shield journalism's essence but also to enhance the message's work of openness. The model illustrates that media liberty can be combined with financial viability without state interference. Therefore, it is valuable to state that funding accurate and reliable news reporting through taxation or other similar methods can only be sourced sustainably.

Fig 1: Taxation in Public Services

The Role of Tax Revenue in Funding Public Services



Source- (The Role of Tax Revenue in Funding Public Services, 2022)

1.2 Research Rationale

The argumentative foundation of this study is rooted in the understanding of independent, credible news as the foundation of a democracy. Since it is an example of a public good, access to it cannot be restricted, which can also not be exhausted or depleted through its use; it provides citizens with free and equal access to valuable information, including accountability and decision-making. However, the free market often does not efficiently provide and distribute accurate news in the best possible manner because of two issues: the free-rider problem and the underfunding due to the high priority given to profit rather than accuracy (Biondo, 2023). Discussions of the prospects of using taxation to fund the creation of reliable information products illustrate how taxation ensures consistency for these market failures (Mpfu, 2022). This approach is helpful though it increases doubts about government involvement and media libertarianism, in the future specifying governmental support for the freedom of media.

Moreover, other models like crowdfunding offer more ways of supporting news agencies without mustering through conflicts of interest. In this research, the author's purpose is to determine the feasibility of taxation and to evaluate its impact concerning the autonomy and openness of accurate journalism.

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

This study aims to assess the viability and effectiveness of supporting accurate news through taxation, measure its market potential as a public good, and discuss approaches to solving the issue of media bias, political interference, potential negative social consequences, and media autonomy. It is also concerned with finding out the other loosely connected models of maintaining accurate journalism in the digital age.

Objectives

- To evaluate the economic rationale for funding accurate news reporting as a public good through taxation.
- To analyze the risks of government interference and bias in taxation-funded news agencies.
- To explore alternative funding models like crowdfunding to support independent journalism.

1.5 Research Questions

1. How can taxation fund accurate news as a public good?
2. What are the risks of government funding for news agencies?
3. How do crowdfunding and subscription models compare to taxation for funding news?

1.6 Research Gap

The void in prior research is the underutilization of taxation as a sustainable source of funding for accurate news reporting, along with handling market failures without compromising media freedom. Although previous research recognizes accurate news as a public good, this paper finds that the government-funded model and the associated risks of bias or intervention receive insufficient scrutiny. Also, as good funding alternatives, crowdfunding, and similar platforms are still not utilized to their full capacity within the digital environment. This gap calls for a detailed analysis of the viability of taxation and possibilities of new forms of support to provide long-lasting and non-Bias journalism.

1.7 Chapter Summary

Society benefits from factual content through informed voices in the democratic arena through media well informed to enable it to make sound decisions. Funding through taxation can solve issues such as the free-rider problem and give people equal rights to get accurate information. Nevertheless, such a strategy has some drawbacks. One can talk about the influence of authorities, the prejudiced position of some media, low specialisation, and possible lack of journalistic freedom. Such other models of working as crowdfunding suggest ways of keeping something like the news agency working while at the same time remaining independent.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Accurate News as a Public Good

According to Kohn, (2020), the role played by accurate news reporting makes it a public good since it is not possible to exclude people from using it while at the same time, it is not possible to use it without using it again by someone else. It bears the essence of the public good premise introduced by Paul Samuelson and many other economists, that there is a problem of free-rider and the consequent market failure in providing these goods. News is vital in free societies because accurate news provides an opportunity for the respective authorities to explain their actions. However, Luo and Kaul, (2019) argued that it is a reality that the private sector tends to undersupply it due to profitability with limited concern for social welfare. They also showed that accurate news reporting brings a secondary benefit of increasing the level of awareness among society and people's engagement in the right processes. However, Gao et al. (2020) argued that given that the free market fails to optimally capture these benefits, there is under allocation of resources thus, calling for government intervention. However, there is still a problem of equalising access to reliable news in the age of decreasing print media revenues and monopolies owned by shareholder-profititeer digital companies.

2.2 Government Funding and Media Independence

Martens et al. (2018) pointed out that a direct option to solve the underproduction of accurate news involves governments providing subsidies to independent news agencies usually affected by tax revenues. This model ensures that there are constant sources of revenues hence avoiding bias in their reporting through the need to source for advertisements. Murschetz et al. (2023) stated that the UK, Sweden, and Norway, amongst other countries, have employed government-funded public broadcasters to deliver non-partisan news and cultural information. However, while through taxation the market imperfection is corrected, numerous appreciable questions concerning media independence appear. Scholars demonstrate that states attempt to exert control over editorial content to retaliate for lack of direct access to sources of funding, and blocking of

such funding. These threats comprise dichotomy in reporting, censorship, and negative social attitudes towards media organizations. Also, Chater and Loewenstein, (2023). Argued that the wastage in public spending coupled with the cost of employing taxpayer's money on media instead of other important segments including health and education have been matters of discussion. It is important to achieve a government funding level where mechanisms that protect editorial freedom do not become unsustainable while, at the same time, preventing excessive subsidies from distorting journalistic independence. Past research has suggested that funding should be declared, there should be supervision bodies in charge of media and lastly, there should be proper legal jurisdictions to protect publicly funded media from politicians.

2.3 Alternative Models for Sustainable Journalism

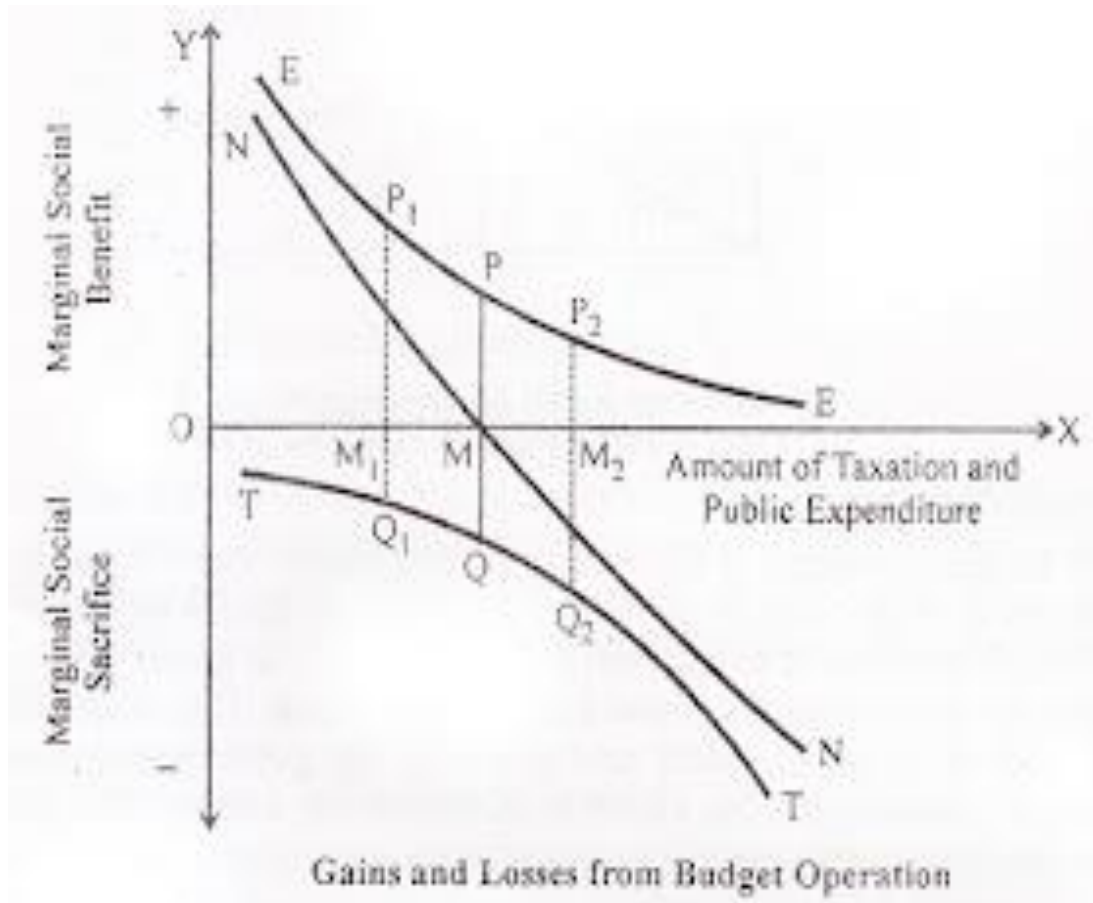
There is a reduced concern with the profitability of traditional media and new threats from state-funded models; supplemented funding sources are thus emerging as viable survival strategies in journalism. Despite the pressures to find WFA sources of revenues, innovative models such as crowdfunding and subscription, as well as philanthropic funding, are being adopted more to strive for both financial and editorial independence. Crowdfunding is particularly effective since most news agencies or individual journalists can get support from the general public avoiding overdependence on advertisers or government subsidies. Academic literature has revealed that, through crowdfunding, journalism can be an independent profession where reporters can choose topics and are not influenced by commercial or political interests. Other traditional business models, including the subscription-based model, also seem to work well in the case of digital platforms such as The Guardian or The New York Times. This way, donations and grants from non-profit organizations also look set to become significant funding sources for investigative journalism and public interest journalism. However, these models are not without their drawbacks. Regular funding for campaigns might not always be achievable, and subscription often excludes information to some communities by economic status. Previous studies have pointed to the need to find ways of integrating these models into a sustainable funding model for journalism.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

The epistemology of this research is anchored on the principles of economics of public goods, media independence, and other funding models. News reporting is viewed as a publicly desirable good based on Paul Samuelson's principles of non-exclusion and non-rivalry which results in market faults like underproduction and free-rider cases (Luo & Kaul, 2019). The framework points to Musgrave's model in Public Finance where taxation stepped in to cater for these market failures in the provision of news. But it also recognises concerns about media bias and media

independence by referring to theories of media pluralism and theories of liberal democracy in which free media with autonomy enables them to check and keep governments in check.

Fig 2: Musgrave’s Model in Public Finance

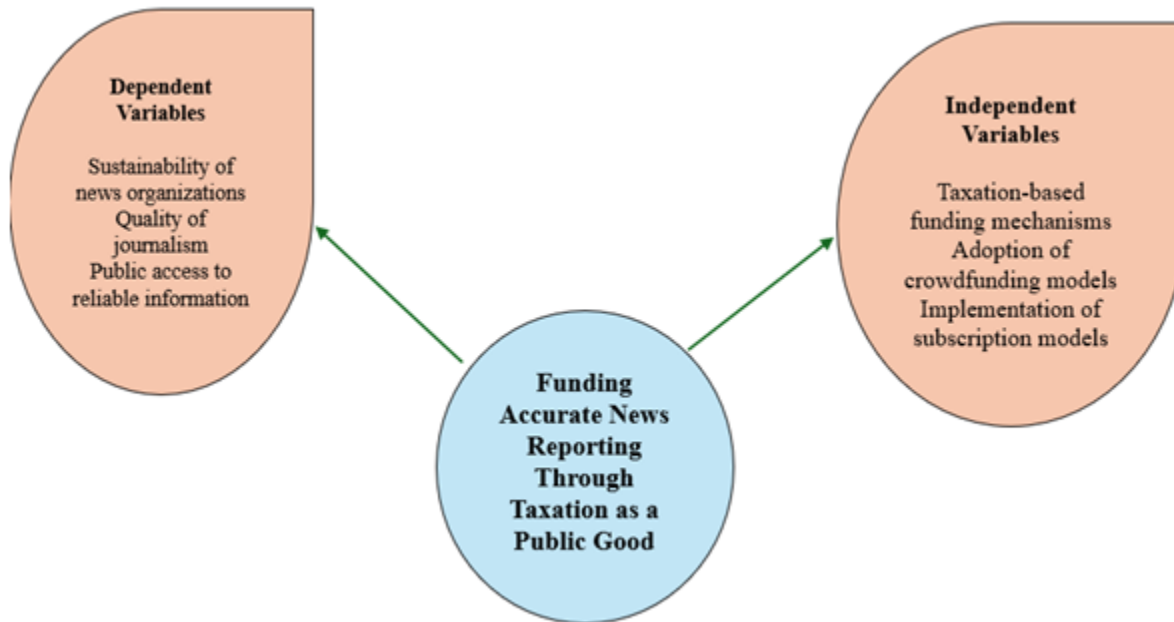


Source- (RichaGoel, 2024)

Finally; the framework also includes different kinds of funding models such as crowdfunding and some subscription-based systems with key opportunities and possibilities of such funding alongside several demonstrations of how it can make journalism sustainable and independent while also being economically profitable and not influenced by the advertisers. This integrated framework directs the assessment of taxation and any other funding mechanism in support of credible news reporting.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

Fig 3: Conceptual Framework



Source: Self Developed

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research work employs a qualitative, secondary research method to assess the viability and impact of taxation to fund the accurate reporting of news. This research therefore looks to identify the economic, social and especially ethical implications and dynamics of news agencies funded through the tools of taxation by finding out from literature, case and comparative studies, as well as reports from various countries across the world (Ramsey & Herzog, 2018). As primary data sources, academic and trade journals, government and association documents, and publications from the media industry will be used to discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the topic. It provides an entrepreneurial view of the existing knowledge and best identifies the future research voids.

3.2 Research Approach

A qualitative approach is adopted for it enables one to investigate key issues emerging from the hypothesis concerning funding of media, independence of the media as well as, role of

government in providing media public goods. The goals of the current literature review will be achieved by using thematic analysis to code and categorize the findings of the study. To examine the nature of the issues arising from the theoretical and practical frameworks of analysing news reporting funded by taxation, this study adopts a qualitative research design to uncover the nuances and experiences, challenges and opportunities about the landscape of news reporting across societies.

3.3 Data Collection

Due to the secondary research data collection method, the collection of available literature, reports, and cases will be done. A few types of sources will be used: journals, books, policy papers, government reports, media industry reports, etc. It will be important to limit the sources reviewed to those that consider interactions between public finance and media autonomy and other sources of funding including crowdfunding. Information will be collected systematically, sorted and categorized to highlight themes such as the strengths and weaknesses of taxation-funded models, media independence, and the ability of other funding models to be sustainable.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

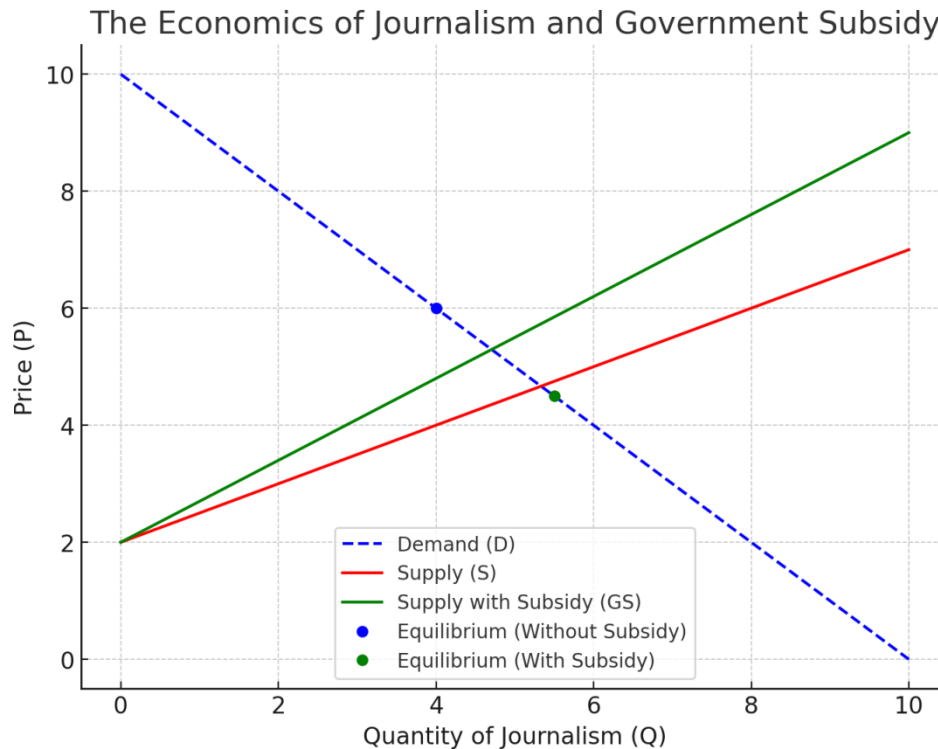
The research will guarantee that all the information gathered is acknowledged to its rightful owners after analyzing it. That is why, with the help of only credible, peer-reviewed sources, the information presented will be accurate and of high quality. Moreover, the study will not allow the fabrication of results or coming up with unmerited conclusions owing to partial or tainted information. Due to the political and highly sensitive nature of media independence, this study will not favour or condemn any side but will analyze the two parties separately and compare their views.

4. Data Analysis

How can taxation fund accurate news as a public good?

It can be funded by accurately charging people in the form of taxes to pay for journalistic services as a public utility similar to the way people pay for other public utilities such as roads, schools or bridges. Journalism as it is today is slowly being defined as a public good in a democratic society. As citizens rely on their taxes to pay for a range of public goods and services – from roads to schools and hospitals they can also rely on their taxes to finance journalism, so citizens have access to trustworthy information (The Role of Tax Revenue in Funding Public Services, 2022). Thus, there is the idea that government-funded journalism can meet the needs of people who are not covered by miniaturized newsrooms and the dominance of fake news. Regarding the current financial situation in the United States, the newspaper industry has been

warned to reduce its revenue sharply over the years unknown with the internet and social media sites. For example, in the newspaper industry, local employment is reduced from 71000 in 2008 to just 31000 by 2020 which leads to a decline in quality journalism. As organizations that provide news wither or shut down, civic engagement suffers as many communities remain without proper news sources.



The graph above shows the breakdown of the economic model of journalism and subsidy. The demand curve, D illustrates the need for good news and information, which diminishes where the cost of journalism is high. The supply line (S) shows the industry's capacity to supply the media news at different prices. The easy availability of government subsidies acts as the shift in the supply curve to the right (GS) as the government support makes it easier for news providers to provide journalism at cheaper rates (Murschetz et al., 2023). This change also reduces the cost of the journalism and output of news that is available to the public.

The economic argument for taxation for the funding of journalism amongst other activities connects its advocacy to the nature of journalism as a public good. According to economists, public good is by its nature, an individual cannot prevent another person from enjoying it and one person does not affect the availability of the good to the other person. Journalism therefore meets these requirements because the knowledge offered by the process is for the well-being of

all society in the event the individual does not pay for it. One way to support journalism with tax money is to prevent market forces from exploiting this issue or even creating a monopoly over it. Government subsidies are useful to support journalism, as they protect it from such negative effects of the market approach: increasing volumes of misinformation. This year, more than in previous years, news sources have chosen to exaggerate or publish fake news to gain profits. The subsidy for the media via taxation means that there is no need for 'click-bait' journalism, or even simplicity, but journalism that is factual, detailed, and noble.

What are the risks of government funding for news agencies?

Public financing of news agencies entails a set of benefits that may result in compromising either independence, product quality, or both. The concept of #BuyingNewsPromise which seeks government support to fund journalism appears to have raised important questions that may have important answers in the quest to try to fill the critical gaps in media companies, such challenges cannot but present difficult considerations.

1. Risk of Political Influence

Apart from competing funding sources, the greatest threat to government-funded news is political influence. K spending powers are often pressured to control opinion content to allow its side of the story to gain ground (Biondo, 2023). This tendency makes him a holder of two roles that are completely opposed to each other because journalism aims to be a check on government power. Examples in some countries have shown that governments can convincingly subtly or directly influence media organizations to advance governmental agendas or disassemblage opposed opinions. This erodes the third arm of the country's democracy, which is the journalism profession.

2. Threat to Editorial Independence

In response to this, audiences may be in doubt as to whether the information given is impartial or affected by bias with the funding agency. This was rooted on the basis that this can harm the public trust which is an important factor in the delivery of their roles as informers by media organizations (Oldekop et al., 2020). For instance, some statistical data point to increasing erosion of the public's faith in the government, which automatically translates to media organizations regarded as working with the government.

3. Credit and Dependence

In particular, transparency comes at the cost of reliance on government money, which means that the agencies become hostage to their ability to secure governmental funding, and often the

money is cut or re-appropriated for other purposes. In case the funding it gets is cut down or removed on grounds of economic hardships or political decisions, the news agencies may face a very hard time. Fluctuation in finance affects strategic development, output quality, and company stability, which are essential for good reporting.

4. Inequitable Distribution of Resources

The state funding may not be evenly spread; sometimes it is developed in a way that a certain newspaper, radio or television station is favoured while other legitimate newspapers, radios or television stations are ignored or marginalized (Chater & Loewenstein, 2023). Localized or less popular agencies and the press might not be adequately funded, thus resulting in substantial gaps in insurance coverage in the target communities. This could only perpetuate the problems that government funding is supposed to solve such as Hiç news deserts and the erosion of local coverage.

5. Risk of Bureaucratic Inefficiencies

The participation of government entities in raising funds and supervising research can lead to the distortion of the administrative process (RichaGoel, 2024). They also may be denied access to money, or they may be presented with a plethora of bureaucratic obstacles to receiving this money, which can ruin the topicality of their news. Further, government procedures might remain loyal to funders at the expense of broadcasters' flexibility negatively impacting how quickly media responds to new topics.

How do crowdfunding and subscription models compare to taxation for funding news?

Crowdfunding is the practice of collecting a public contribution towards creating adequately funded journalism, whereas subscription funding models are about the value of controlling a public Commons through an intermediary, such as a publisher. What they all have in common is that they all look to solve the problem of declining traditional advertising revenues but significantly differ in terms of practicality, openness, and threats to journalistic autonomy.

Crowdfunding is based on funds provided by ordinary people, where people make donations related to certain projects for one time (Bird and Davis-Nozemack, 2018). This model directly links the journalist with the people and gives the letter a view of what the former is doing. Nevertheless, it is intrinsically volatile because it depends upon the benevolence and wealth of donors. Appealing to numerous people could be a problem, and thus the funds gathered might be insufficient, especially for the smaller outlets or the chosen topics are more specific, so it can represent a less reliable option for the long term.

Paywalls by which audiences directly provide money for content are products that have emerged with digital systems. This approach assures constant revenue income and encourages high-quality reporting to retain subscribers. Taxation, on the other hand, recognizes journalism as a public sphere through which citizens are informed and through government resources. This model creates justice in terms of availability of news that people can trust without being confined to the financially well-off. Publicly financed journalism will help to level the industry's fluctuation and mitigate the problem of 'news deserts'. But it also has dangers of political influence and people's distrust of government intervention in editors' decisions.

Different from the market models that complement crowdfunding and subscription models but often lock out the needy. As for taxes, they are fair and involve all kinds of professions and services, but strong protection is necessary for journalists. An optimum possibility is when these models are used hand in hand with transparency and accountability to the public to offer the best sustainable solution to funding journalism in the emergent media environment.

5. Result

Q1. The investigation of this paper also supports the idea that public funding through taxation can indeed support public interest journalism in the manner necessary based on the results obtained here. Public journalism guarantees that all citizens have equal access to reliable information, especially in areas where few residents receive their information. It can help meet the needs of 'news deserts' and stem the tide of fabricated news by helping the latter. But they have the potential only if it is protected from political intervention, and its news stringers maintain their editorial freedom and the people's faith (Oldekop et al., 2020). Transparency in fund distribution and procedures that ensure non-handling of news organizations are other features of this model.

Q2. The risk related to government funding is political interference for instance governments may be involved in influencing editorial policies or priorities. This interferes with journalistic impartiality and reduces people's credibility in the news. Besides, dependence on state support will bring certain risks in situations with reduced budgets or changes of political powers. To minimise these risks, strong legal requirements, professional loss from political control for news organisations, and societal accountability tools are important to maintain the accuracy and impartiality of funded media outlets.

Q3. Crowdfunding and subscription models are innovative strategies driven by markets for their audiences. Direct public support is possible through crowdfunding, although the solution is characterized by instability and diffusiveness. The subscription models come with constant streams of revenues but at the same time augment the phenomenon of the digital divide by

excluding low-income groups through the creation of walled gardens. While taxation will cover all the costs making it inclusive and equitable and viewing journalism as a public good, this is not applicable. Nonetheless, taxation needs effective institutional support to avoid the executive influence of political actors. However, integrating these models while paying attention to Big Tech's role and demanding complete transparency could propose a more feasible approach to supporting genuinely quality journalism.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

6.1 Conclusion

The discussion of taxation, crowdfunding, and subscription as ways to finance journalism points to the need to start treating journalism as a public good. Taxation stands out as a viable solution for redressing the deepening calamity of journalism by providing reasonable utilisation and quite solid revenues for objective coverage. However, it calls for protection measures against political influence to protect journalistic freedoms. Thus, the subscription and crowdfunding models can be considered as the alternative sources for the achievement of the revenues but they are conditioned by such drawbacks as instability and availability. Although these approaches are useful, they cannot fully compensate for the lack of public funding's consequent pervasiveness. In the long term, the potential of a synthesis of taxation and the crowdfunding model along with the benefits of subscription can help establish a reliable model for the support of journalism. It is part of a global fight against the dissemination of information that misleads the public, weakens democracy and creates an informed society where independent, high-quality news agencies are given adequate funding.

6.2 Recommendation

It is suggested that a combination of diverse strategies should be adopted to stabilise the future of journalism as a public good.

- First, governments should develop sustainable public financial support systems for news agencies including taxation with the provision of measures that guarantee editorial freedom. It also means that certain funding can guarantee the access of all individuals to timely, relevant and non-altered data, especially in the districts that lack the resources to achieve the goal on their own and with no interference from political leaders through the introduction of impartial regulatory agencies.
- Second, there is a need for news organizations to adopt various revenue sources by including crowdfunding and/or subscription services. Crowdfunding enables communities to fund particular reporting projects, offering involvement and

responsibility; subscription services provide continuous, predictable readership revenues. However, the funding realised through these models should be complemented by public funding for the identified gaps in accessibility and equity.

- Thirdly, it is necessary to enable the population to understand the necessity of journalism. Media and non-governmental organizations should mobilize citizens for recognition of reliable media in democratic value preservation and combating fake news.
- Finally, the government's role is to facilitate relations between traditional media and new technologies that would help tailor existing changes and interact with a larger number of people. Granting rewards for the delivery of news through grants or tax credits can also enhance the media ecosystem.

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