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The digital transformation of international and national news agencies: Challenges facing AFP, AP, and TASS

The existence and continuity of news agencies or press associations – the oldest electronic media organizations, which date back to the first part of the 19th century – has been taken for granted for a long time. There is still a news agency in almost every country, and they continue to play a significant role as intermediary organizations that provide their services to most media in the country, and also – through their own networks – beyond it. However, digitalization has challenged news agencies to such an extent that some of them have been forced to cease their operations. The Australian News Association (AAP), for example, announced that it will officially shut down its operations after 85 years on June 26th, 2020 but was rescued by a 11th-hour bid by a philanthropic investment consortium that now has been given a government grant (Meade, 2020; Wahlqvist, 2020; McQuirk, 2020). In short, many news agencies are struggling financially in the age of digitalization and even the most profitable ones are no longer among the biggest media companies.

The monopoly of speed was for a very long time the domain of news agencies. As Charles Havas, the founder of one of the oldest agencies in the world, once put it, "*vite et bien* [quickly and well]" (Tungate, 2007, p. 180). News agencies exemplified *institutional journalism* (Picard, 2014, p. 504), providing what Carlson (2007, p. 1015) calls the "presentational authority of journalism". Nechushtai and Lewis (2019, p. 299) write that institutional journalism has the ability to "generate cultural meaning through the purposeful ordering, arranging, and highlighting of some news items relative to others." Its coverage often focused on "selected institutions, such as government agencies, educational institutions and financial institutions" (Picard, 2014, p. 504), which further emphasized the semi-official character of news-agency operations even when the agencies were privately or cooperatively owned. News agencies played the role of major gatekeepers, establishing and maintaining a news agenda. Their past may have been glorious, but what about their future?

This chapter explores how news agencies, across different geographical and organizational contexts, have responded to the challenges of digitalization. We outline how digitalization has challenged news agencies in three key areas: (1) the deprofessionalization and deinstititutionalization of journalism; (2) the emergence and development of digital platforms; and (3) the need for diversification. We examine how various news agencies representing different ownership forms in France (AFP), the United States (AP) and Russia (TASS) have responded to these challenges by diversifying their operations. Whilst we show that news agencies' diverse responses and strategies have met with varying degrees of success, we argue that the struggle for dominance in which news agencies are currently engaged challenges the notion of what constitutes a news agency at the same time as demanding a reappraisal of how diversification should be defined.

From "Big Five" to "Big Seven"

Our three case studies are Agence France-Presse (AFP) in France, The Associated Press (AP) in the United States, and TASS in Russia, all once described as members of the "Big Five" international news agencies along with Reuters (at the time in the UK) and United Press International (UPI) in the USA (Alleyne & Wagner, 1993) that once dominated the world's news flows. The majority of international news originated from these five agencies, especially from the four Western agencies. They were once seen as so powerful that UNESCO instructed developing countries to limit their reliance on these major agencies as a source of international news content (Rafeeq & Jiang, 2018, p. 98). Much has changed since the 1970s and 1980s. Reuters is now in Canadian ownership, and UPI is no longer an international agency. Nowadays, there are also new international agencies such as EFE in Spain, Xinhua in China and Anadolu in Turkey (Surm, 2019).

Since they were founded, AFP, AP, and TASS have had no change of ownership or ownership form. AFP was founded in 1944, defined itself then and still defines itself now as a publicly owned organization (Surm, 2019, p. 7; Juntunen & Nieminen, 2019). The AP was founded in 1846 as a not-for-profit news cooperative and continues to define itself as such. Its owners are US newspapers and broadcasters. TASS was founded in 1925. Although it has undergone a number of changes since 1991 (Ob utverzhdenii ustava Informatsionnogo Telegrafnogo Agentstva Rossii, 2014), it has remained in state ownership. The legal status of TASS as a federal state-unitary enterprise has remained unchanged (Vartanova & Vyrkovsky, 2020, p. 8). Based on the number of offices abroad and the languages in which their news is delivered, AFP, AP and TASS have maintained their positions among what could now be called the "Big Seven" of AFP, Anadolu, AP, EFE, Reuters, TASS, and Xinhua.

Digitalization

Digitalization or digital transformation can be defined as the application of digital technology to all aspects of human society, including business and trade (Yeganeh, 2019, p. 259). In the digital transformation of news, new media and especially social media play a central role. Digitalization has hit news agencies hard and called into question their viability. News agencies have traditionally operated as business-to-business companies, as wholesalers of news, rather than on a business-to-consumers basis (Vartanova & Vyrkovsky, 2020, p. 2). Their clients – the media, and especially newspapers – have been confronted by major changes to their main income stream. These clients have had to contend with rapidly reducing numbers of subscribers who now look for free news from other sources, as well as with a collapse in revenue from advertisers (Rantanen et al., 2019a). The changes have in turn deeply impacted news-agency business models.

The deprofessionalization and deinsititutionalization of news production

The digital collection and distribution of news by consumers has challenged journalists' role as the sole producers of news, contributing to a *deprofessionalization* (Haug, 1975; Blankenship, 2016) and *deinstitutionalization* (Picard, 2014) of news production. The deinstitutionalization of journalism plays a central role in what Picard (2014, p. 504) calls the "shifting ecology of news provision". It likewise features crucially in what Reese (2016) calls the "*new geography of journalism"*, which is characterized by the unpredictable extension of journalism beyond its traditional organizational confines. This new geography challenges institutional journalism by integrating non-institutional producers, such as YouTubers and citizen journalists, who disrupt the traditional boundaries between the production and consumption of news.

The concept of the *digital circulation of news* (Carlson, 2020) is now often used to describe how news production and consumption have become more closely connected. According to Carlson (2020, p. 234), "circulation includes reception while going further to encompass the institutionalized message flows that shape media reception and practices of message recirculation or commentary that result". When news is exchanged and re-used without charge in the new geography of news, it cannot be controlled in the same way as news wires were in the past. When news circulates in all directions, it thus becomes a good that almost instantaneously loses its value (Rantanen, 2009). In this way, whilst digital circulation exponentially multiplies the production and use of news, it simultaneously makes it more difficult to protect its exclusivity and monetary value.

Even as the democratizing potential of so-called participatory news was being widely lauded, Deuze, Bruns, and Neuburger (2007) wrote about attempts by news organizations to integrate forms of citizen journalism and user-generated content production. Indeed, a number of examples of attempts to create agencies based around the distribution of participatory content demonstrate varied degrees of success, with Citizenside in France and Scoopt in the UK being integrated to various degrees into AFP and Getty respectively (Cameron, 2008; Nicey, 2013). The subsumption of these services within the existing structures of dominant media institutions, including news agencies, should serve as a potent reminder of the ongoing imbalance between users and media institutions, even in the context of so-called hybrid media. The fact that Getty shuttered Scoopt within two years of acquiring the service underlines this tension (Cameron, 2008).

The emergence and development of digital platforms

Many digital platforms, especially social media platforms, now serve as important mechanisms via which news is initially generated and disseminated into the broader media ecosystem. Digital news circulation relies on an extensive technical infrastructure in order to make content flows possible. It uses digital platforms that consist of technical components at different levels, such as device, operating system, and applications that are dependent on each other but also serve as control mechanisms for their owners (de Reuver et al., 2017, p. 131). Digital platforms associated with Apple, Google, Facebook, and Twitter now assume an important gatekeeping role previously played by news agencies (Hanusch, 2017). Google News, for example, combines news content from many different news providers and displays it to users on a single digital platform (News Media Alliance, 2019, p. 7).

Van Couvering (2017, p. 5) argues that digital platforms enable the continuing separation of media content from media distribution methods through the use of algorithms for finding and displaying content, based on simple functions like filtering, listing, categorizing, highlighting, sharing, and ranking. Such technologies play a crucial role in the algorithmically-driven digital gatekeeping of digital intermediaries such as Google and Facebook (Hermida, 2020). For example, News Media Alliance (2019, p. 21) reported that news content makes up roughly 39 percent of trending queries and 16 percent of high-volume queries in Google Search, whilst Google and Facebook together have been estimated to drive roughly 60 percent of the traffic to news sites in recent years (Nechushtai & Lewis, 2019, p. 298). On average, in 2016, 69 percent of all recommendations led to five news organizations (Nechushtai & Lewis, 2019, p. 298), with only one news agency – Reuters – among these. Algorithms have thus become the invisible hand of a digital gatekeeper, which is no longer necessarily a traditional news agency.

The emergence of digital platforms has created significant challenges for news agencies with regard to the viability of their business models. Jääskeläinen and Yanatma (2019), for instance, describe the disruption caused by the relation between social media platforms and news customers, which indirectly affects the ability of news agencies to monetize their services. The Board of the European Alliance of News Agencies (EANA) has argued that search engines are exploiters of content which benefit from distribution they have neither created nor paid for (Statement on copyright by the Board of EANA, 2017). When the European Parliament adopted the new EU Copyright Directive in 2019, it was asserted that the Directive would empower creatives and news publishers to “negotiate with internet giants” (European Parliament approves new copyright rules for the internet, 2019). Whilst the Directive was supported by EANA, larger platforms like Google opposed it (Tyner, 2019). This highlights the tensions that exist between new digital platforms and news agencies, particularly where this pertains to the monetization of intellectual property.

It is important to note that, although the circuit of news potentially democratizes news production, it also makes possible new ways of controlling news flows. In a way, Facebook and Google have also become *digital gatekeepers* of news through the ownership and control of their platforms (Bro & Wallberg, 2014). These platforms not only provide most of the audience for online news: their dominance may potentially *capture* (Nechushtai, 2018) the infrastructures that underpin attempts to legally protect the copyright of news.

Relations between digital platforms and news agencies, however, are not characterized solely by tensions. Whilst AFP has been a vocal campaigner against Google's purported abuse of its search-engine dominance in France (EANA considers Google is trying to abuse its search-engine dominance in France, 2019), the AP has been involved in collaborative efforts with Google to build a tool for sharing more local news more quickly (Schmidt, 2019). Thus, although digital platforms are significant sources of potential growth in usership (Nechushtai, 2018), the tensions they engender have been one of the key forces driving the diversification of news agency product offerings.

Diversification and the development of proprietary platforms

News agencies have widely used diversification as their main strategic response to the challenges of digitalization. As Jääskeläinen and Yanatma (2019, p. 3) note, business diversification relates to transformations in news-agency operations as a direct response to digitalization, which has seen many new digital platforms challenge news agencies' role as the near-exclusive provider of news to their clients. This has not been an easy process but it has led to significant institutional transformations, particularly in terms of the possibilities opened up for news agencies to deal directly with audiences (Vartanova & Vyrkovsky, 2020, p. 2). It has challenged news agencies' traditional role as intermediary organizations, potentially bringing them into direct competition with their owners and customers. Most European agencies now see their own clients as their main competitors for the domestic market (Rantanen et al., 2019b).

In 2010, Freedman (2010) described diversification as the response by traditional news organizations to the internet's disruption of their territory. He outlines a number of prominent approaches, including acquisitions and partnerships, but also most significantly the move to provide online in addition to offline news (Freedman, 2010). Since that time, however, the concept of diversification has been greatly expanded. According to Sükösd, (2016, p. 154), for instance, media diversification can potentially create new forms of competitive media spaces including new media institutions, ownership patterns, types and genres, channels and platforms, technologies, and dispersed geographic designs. Revers (2017) describes journalistic responses to digital platforms as a *diversification of professionalism*, highlighting the differences that exist between journalistic cultures in different places. In our view, diversification should also include increasing the diversity of gender, ethnicity and languages in terms of staff members and management, and of news reporting. Forms of media diversification also vary according to local conditions, as demonstrated by Sükösd (2016).

News agencies, at least in Europe, have used some of the forms of diversification described above, but not all. They have not radically changed their own ownership patterns, although some forms of acquisitions and partnerships have taken place, for example in the Baltic countries (Lauk & Einmann, 2019) and in Austria (SDA und Keystone fusionieren, NZZ, 2018). Diversification of content has been widely implemented. This is because a text news service has become largely unprofitable (Rantanen et al., 2019a). Most news agencies in Europe now see picture and video services as among their most important services (Rantanen et al., 2019b). The agencies that do well in Europe now offer not only a news wire, but an edited news service for online publication, a picture and video service, ready-made pages for newspapers, IT services, press releases, and media-monitoring services (Jääskeläinen & Yanatma, 2020).

News-agency diversification

In this section we zoom in on three news agencies in different countries in order to examine how they have used diversification when responding to the challenges of digitalization: AFP in France, the AP in the US, and TASS in Russia. Although the long-established distinctions between ownership forms of news agencies have become increasingly blurred in recent decades (Rantanen et al., 2019a), we here select examples with different ownership structures: co-operative (AP), public (AFP) and state (TASS), in order to show how news agencies in different parts of the world have or have not diversified their operations.

These are by no means average national agencies; rather, they all have a strong presence outside their home countries. Whilst AFP, AP, and TASS all define themselves as national news agencies with respect to their own domestic markets, they present themselves as international agencies for global markets (Surm, 2019; Vartanova & Vyrkovsky, 2020). AFP, indeed, is legally required to function as a worldwide service (Loi n° 57–32, 2015). In 2018, AFP had a global presence in 151 countries or territories, with services offered in six languages: French, English, German, Portuguese, Spanish, and Arabic. The AP news report is distributed to its members and customers in English, Spanish and Arabic, and it has over 100 offices abroad. TASS's reports are in Russian and English, and it has 68 offices outside Russia. Its obligation is, by law, to cover "state policy and public life of the Russian Federation, as well as the most important events taking place abroad" (Ob utverzhdenii ustava Informatsionnogo Telegrafnogo Agentstva Rossii, 2014).

Ownership & Governance

One of the ways in which media organizations could potentially diversify themselves, when trying to develop new products or expanding into new markets, is through acquisitions and mergers. News agencies are often constrained in their attempts to bring in changes, either because of their relationship to their national governments, or because of their ownership. For example, even if AFP and TASS have not changed their ownership forms, there have been some changes to their statutes. AFP is legally defined as "an autonomous organization with a civil personality and whose functioning is ensured in accordance with the commercial rules" (Loi n° 57–32, 2015). Although there were a number of key reforms to the agency's statutes in 2015, the 1957 law already encoded an important consultative role for two representatives of the French government (AFP, personal communication, May 25, 2020). Between 1991 and 2014, ten legislative changes concerning TASS were introduced by the Russian government, but there have been none since (Ob utverzhdenii Ustava Informatsionnogo telegrafnogo agentstva Rossii, 2014).

Changes in governance can be seen as part of a diversification process, even if this is often only seen in relation to new products. A more frequently discussed issue is how company governance reflects changes in gender and ethnicity in society at large. For Carter, Simkins and Simpson (2003, p. 34), the gender, racial, and cultural composition of the board of directors is now one of the most significant issues of governance within a modern corporation. However, as representatives of institutional journalism both national and internationally, news agencies have been rather slow in reacting to these broader social changes.

All three agencies have either a President (AP), a CEO (AFP) or a Director (TASS) as their chief executive. AFP is administered by a Board of Governors that appoints the CEO for a renewable five-year term (Loi n° 57–32, 2015). Over the last 40 years, ten presidents have been appointed (Surm, 2019, p. 8), all of whom have been men. The Board consists of 19 members (including the CEO, who is elected by the 18 others), eight of whom are women.

AP's by-laws are corporate documents and are not open for research. It is governed by an elected Board of Directors, currently consisting of 16 members, four of whom are women . They are elected by members, or appointed to the Board by the other Directors. AP has had five General Managers/Presidents since the 1960s (AP, personal communication, May 28, 2020), and they have all been men. Its Press Management Committee, which oversees AP's essential operations, consists of four women and four men.

The Russian government appoints the Director of TASS, who appoints the Editor-in-Chief. The collegial governing body of TASS is the Collegium, which consists of 14 members (the Director's deputies (ex officio) and the heads of the Agency's major divisions) – two of these are currently women. TASS has had nine Directors since 1960. The present Director was appointed in 2012, and they have all been men.

New platforms and automation

The three agencies have approached the development of new platforms and the integration of technologies of automation in a variety of ways. All three offer news, both on their platforms and on mobile phones, directly to their users. AFP has been active since 2000 in offering web- and mobile-based news (Rampal, 2019, p. 161). The AP News app on iPhone was launched in 2018 and had 653k downloads and 2.2 million users in 2019. TASS's website was relaunched on a new platform in 2018, boosting site traffic to 19 million unique monthly visitors in that same year and increasing the number again to 23 million by early in 2019 and to 30 million in 2020 but still well behind the other state-owned agency RIA (LiveInternet, n.d.; Vartanova & Vyrkovsky, 2020, p. 11). The TASS mobile news App on iPhone *TACC Seychas* (TASS Now) has offered news in Russian and in English without charge since 2015.

In the earlier years of the past decade, efforts at AFP targeted towards digitalization focused on the development of a new platform for the distribution of the agency's intellectual property. The digital system 4XML was presented as a mechanism that would permit "agents to produce multimedia 'content' intended for customers" (Laville, 2010). A new system is due to be launched in June 2020 (AFP, personal communication, May 25, 2020). Today, alongside developments in image and fact-checking, AFP's Medialab continues this push towards digitalization, with its group of engineers and journalists moving beyond the earlier focus on multimedia to examine new ways of creating interactive content. Amongst other projects, Medialab has been participating since 2016 in the development of the web video verification tool InVID (Teyssou et al., 2017).

The AP's deployment of automation began in 2014, with a focus on reporting the financial results of US-listed companies, followed by a movement in 2015 towards sports reporting. They estimate that automation has freed up 20 percent of journalists' time, allowing reporters to engage in more complex and qualitative work (Marconi, Siegman, & Machine Journalist, 2017, p. 4). Their approach relies on the datafication of event-driven narratives to produce content using Natural Language Generation. The AP aimed to have produced 40,000 automated stories by the end of 2019, mainly in the domain of business news and sports, with a further goal of deploying image-recognition tools in order to facilitate image labelling in the newsroom. However, the use of NLG also raises ethical issues around the production of errors. The AP, for example, no longer monitors all automatically generated outputs because this is too time-consuming (Turi2, 2015).

Vartanova and Vyrkovsky (2020, p. 12) write that TASS management views artificial intelligence and virtual and augmented reality as the most important technologies to be implemented by media companies. However, viewing AI as a strategic step in developing the news sector, the agency is also working on ways of robotizing the collection of routine data, e.g., stock exchange quotations, and automating the production of financial news coverage (Vartanova & Vyrkovsky, 2020, p. 12). TASS and Chinese news agency Xinhua jointly launched the world's first Russian-speaking AI news anchor in June 2019.

Use of social media

Although some news agencies have been frequent critics of social-media platforms, all three of our case-study agencies now use these, including Twitter and Facebook, as a means of reaching their news consumers directly. This represents a shift in the traditional role of news agencies as B2B rather than B2C organizations. The AP was one of the first to use social-media platforms, with one AP executive interviewed by Griessner (2012, p. 17) arguing that to do so had important implications in terms of credibility, brand presence, and developing relations with news consumers, demonstrating the strategic importance of social media for gaining visibility and brand-building (Lauk & Einmann, 2019, p. 9).

Levels of consumer engagement vary across our cases. AFP has a multilingual presence on Twitter, with 3.4 million followers in French and 1.8 million followers in English. AFP has more than 510,000 Facebook followers in English. The AP's Twitter following is more substantial, with 14 million followers in English. The AP also has more than 766,000 Facebook followers and 1.2 million YouTube subscribers. TASS also has a multilingual presence on Twitter: the agency's Twitter account in Russian has 480,000 followers and it has 60,400 followers in English. TASS Facebook in Russian has 615,809 followers. TASS also uses other social platforms such as VKontakte, with 688,988 followers, Instagram with 230,000 followers, TikTok with 17,300, and YouTube with 72,500 subscribers, all in Russian. All figures are accurate as of May 2020.

TASS thus delivers news on all the major mobile platforms. However, as Vartanova and Vyrkovsky (2020, p. 11) write, "the agency's shift towards a B2C market has been seen as a difficult and slow process". This is also shown in its domestic market position. Today, TASS narrowly maintains its leading position as the most cited agency, with the other state-owned agency RIA-Novosti ranked second, and also competing with the privately-owned Interfax agency, which is ranked third (Top-3 samykh tsitiruyemykh informatsionnykh agentstv - mart, 2020).

Financing and new sources of revenue

Digitalization has challenged the business models of many news agencies. If the agencies make losses, where do they find new sources of revenue? Given their distinct ownership structures, the forms and scales of revenue for our case-study agencies are all different. The most recent year for which detailed financial information on the AP's operations is publicly available is 2017 (AP, personal communication, May 28, 2020). Annual revenue at the AP peaked in 2008 at US$748 million (Rampal, 2019, p. 155) and since then has mostly fallen. In 2017 AP's revenue fell by 8 percent to US$510.1 million from US$556.3 million in 2016.

While AP receives no subsidies from the state, both AFP and TASS do. AFP had an annual turnover of US$325 million (300 million euros) in 2018. However, AFP receives subsidies accounting for 42 percent of its revenue (AFP, personal communication, May 25, 2020). AFP received US$123 million (113.3 million euros) in state subsidies in 2018 as a contribution to the funding of its general interest missions. This figure increased in 2019, with a subsidy totalling US$ 135 million (124.4 million euros). In 2018, AFP saw growth for the first time in four years, with profits in 2019 totalling US$5.6 (5.2 million euros), an increase of 19.4% on the previous year.

The Russian draft federal budget in 2019 for the next three years provided TASS with 2.9 billion roubles annually (US$44.8 million, 40,1 million Euros) (Finansirovaniye SMI iz byudzheta predlozheno uvelichit' na tret', 2019), compared with 1,8 billion in 2016 (Minfin rekomendoval sokratit' finansirovaniye gosudarstvennykh SMI, 2016). It has been estimated that the turnover of TASS is about US$60-70 million annually. In 2018, the total share of state financing in the agency's balance sheet was about 65 percent (Vartanova & Vyrkovsky, 2020, p. 10). This has allowed it to obtain direct budget financing without any obligation to make a net profit, enabling the agency to function without economic or commercial pressures (Vartanova & Vyrkovsky, 2020, p. 8).

The focus on the diversification of products and offerings has arguably been borne out by AFP's revenue streams. In 2018, for example, fully 41 percent of AFP's turnover was generated by sales of images, i.e., photo and video (AFP, 2019). As noted by Surm (2019, p. 12), AFP currently generates about 80 percent of its video turnover outside France. Indeed, AFP's Sales Director for Europe has asserted that video is AFP's most internationalized product (Surm, 2019, p. 12). Indeed, AFP's video services grew by 30 percent in 2017.

Insofar as TASS operates without commercial pressure (Vartanova & Vyrkovsky, 2020, p. 8), the agency possesses creative and economic independence to develop its plans around the diversification of its products and production mechanisms (Ob utverzhdenii ustava Informatsionnogo Telegrafnogo Agentstva Rossii, 2014). Speaking in 2019, TASS Director General Sergei Mikhailov argued state support will "gradually decrease", prompting the agency to generate its own income at a rate that increased "sevenfold in the past seven years".

Since 2017, the AP has no longer published its financial information, making it exceedingly difficult to assess how revenues are being diversified. We only know that in 2017 customer revenues by segment were 48 percent from TV, 23 percent from newspapers, and 9 percent from the Internet. Content licencing was 81 percent by business line in 2019. The AP says that it has worked to make up the shortfall in the newspaper business by investing more in video products and by cutting expenses. In sum, responses to digitalization demonstrate how the very notion of what constitutes a news agency is currently being transformed at the same time as news agencies are redefining the work that they do.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have explored how digitalization has challenged three news agencies, AFP, the AP and TASS, once seen as members of the Big Five, in a new era where their core role as intermediary news organizations has been challenged. We have provided concepts for and empirical evidence of the challenges they face, but also given examples of the ways in which they have diversified their operations. We have defined diversification as an all-inclusive process that includes organizational change, technology and product development.

The evidence we have is that none of these organizations has radically changed their ownership or governance – they have largely remained as they were originally founded and mainly defined by their ownership forms. Although these ownership forms are different and they operate in different types of environment, the challenges they face are very similar and show how universal the concept of a news agency once was. It is surprising to see the similarities between TASS and the AP, traditionally seen as antithetical agencies (Alleyne & Wagner, 1993), but now facing the very same problems of decreasing customer loyalty and the increasing uncertainty of their new role in the digital world.

The diversification of products shows similarities across the three agencies. Each emphasizes the important role that images play in terms of their income and visibility. In contrast to text, the copyright on images is easier to protect and thus they maintain their exclusivity. All three agencies have also increased their visibility on social media, although their success is overshadowed by digital gatekeepers such as Google. The era that started after World War II, when news agencies were the main and often only gatekeepers for news flows, has been over for some time. So international and national news agencies have had to adapt and continue to transform as they move towards a B2C market. It is of crucial importance that these agencies maintain and further develop their presence and brand on social media. At the same time, this puts them in direct competition with their media clients, who are trying to do the very same thing.

Our overview of diversification strategies within the three news agencies demonstrates diversification in some areas but not in others. At the same time, some agencies are diversifying their operations and offerings at a faster rate. All may need to draw on their status and reputation as powerful intermediary news organizations, yet they are also burdened by the traditions on which that status rests and resistant to change. This is the dilemma they face as representatives of institutional journalism: change is slow and does not necessarily reflect the changes in the profession of journalism and in societies.

Questions:

1. To what extent, if any, are news agencies still needed in the digital age?
2. How successful have the agencies been in their attempts to respond to the challenges of digitalization?
3. Should the concept of a news agency be redefined in the digital era? If so, how?

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