

Trusting the media? TV news as a source of knowledge

Nicola Mößner

Abstract

Why do we trust TV news? What reasons might support a recipient's assessment of the trustworthiness of this kind of information? This paper presents a veritistic analysis of the epistemic practice of news production and communication. The topic is approached by discussing a detailed case study, namely the characteristics of the most popular German news programme, called the "Tagesschau". It will be shown that a veritistic analysis can indeed provide a recipient with relevant reasons to consider when pondering on the trustworthiness of sources of information. Moreover, it will turn out that these reasons are part of what recipients might gather from media literacy.

1 Introduction

Philosophers usually agree that testimony, as a source of knowledge, is not restricted to face-to-face communication, but includes all kinds of media – such as the reading of books and journals, listening to the radio, surfing the Internet, and watching television (see e.g. Coady 1992, 49ff.; Fricker 2004, 112; Kusch 2004, 19; Scholz 2001, 357). In this context, social epistemologists have to a certain extent examined social media (see e.g. Goldman 2010b; Lievrouw 2010; Munn 2012) and the Internet in general (see e.g. Fallis 2011; Goldman 1999, ch. 6; Pfister 2011), but only a few have discussed mass media (see e.g. Cox and Goldman 1994; Gelfert 2014, 138f.; Goldman 1999, 182ff.; Mößner 2010, ch. 5). The aim of this paper is to contribute to the latter endeavour by presenting a case study on TV news as an epistemic source. TV news programmes are as diverse as their target audiences.ⁱ No general

statements about their reliability can therefore be made, but particular cases can be analysed as means for comparison. Approaching the topic this way will help to point out conditions that are relevant to consider in all the different settings to assess the reliability and trustworthiness of this source of information. Why is it that people rely on TV news? And, more importantly, are they justified in trusting the journalists? What reasons are relevant to consider in this context?

This analysis is guided by Alvin I. Goldman's suggestion that social epistemologists should not only retain classical philosophical topics and simply widen the focus of their research in respect to social aspects if necessary, but should also critically analyse social epistemic practices in respect to their veritistic outcome and make suggestions for their improvement. "Under veritism we are asked to select the social practice that would best advance the cause of knowledge" (Goldman 1999, 79). The task, set out for philosophers here, comprises two parts. On the one hand, they are asked to evaluate given social practices aiming at the genesis and distribution of knowledge – such as science, education, and the media. On the other hand, philosophers are expected to look for better alternatives if those under investigation are found to be defective. Goldman calls this the "meliorative project" of social epistemology (Goldman 2010a, 18). Analysing TV news as an epistemic source can be regarded as such a kind of project.

In this paper, I will approach the topic of analysis as follows. Firstly (sect. 2), a case study will be presented of the "Tagesschau", which is the most influential news programme in Germany (see Gscheidle and Geese 2017, 314). The next part of this article (sect. 3) deals with the question of how exactly the particularities of the news production may affect the trustworthiness of the reports of the "Tagesschau". In the first part of this analysis (sect. 3.1)

two aspects concerning the characteristics of the “Tagesschau” will be explored in more detail: on the one hand, it will be asked what kind of epistemic problems might influence the recipients' trust in media reports in a negative way. On the other, it will be shown that some of the features of the news programme can also be used in a positive sense to support beliefs in the trustworthiness of the media reports. Both parts will bring it to the fore that it is *media literacy* which is required when recipients are seeking an epistemically justified basis for deciding whether to trust or distrust certain media (sect. 3.2).

2 Characteristics of news production

As there are many different kinds of TV news on the market, some of the main characteristics of the “Tagesschau” have to be outlined at the beginning. Many of them bear directly upon the information output of this news programme. Therefore a short description of the “Tagesschau” as an *institution* of the German public service broadcasters will be presented. Beyond describing how media reports are produced and distributed, a closer look will also be taken at some crucial difficulties related to the different types of reports in this news programme. Those difficulties are relevant to consider when questioning why recipients might or might not rely on media reports as epistemic sources. This is then the first part of Goldman's meliorative project, namely a (synoptic) veritistic analysis of the news production and communication on television.ⁱⁱ

The “Tagesschau” is regarded as *the* typical German news programme both amongst media scholars and the German audience. It was the first news programme to be broadcast on TV in West Germany after the Second World War. Its first edition was shown on TV at Christmas 1952 (<http://intern.tagesschau.de/about-us/>, accessed August 15, 2017)ⁱⁱⁱ and its first competitor (called “Heute”) did not appear on the scene until 1963 (see Jaedicke 2002,

161f.). Not until 1984, when the market was opened for private broadcasters in Germany, were further competing news programmes established in this country.

Many of the “Tagesschau’s” features exhibit a long tradition. The main edition at eight pm.^{iv} lasts fifteen minutes, since 1960 ending with the weather forecast (see <http://intern.tagesschau.de/about-us/>, accessed August 15, 2017). From the beginning, the “Tagesschau” is mentioned as the German news programme that pays particular attention to political topics. In comparison to other German TV news it still has got the highest percentage of political topics among its reports (in 2016, for example, 54 percent of its broadcast time was devoted to political topics, see Krüger and Zapf-Schramm 2017, 65). There are three main types of reports used to distribute the news: (1) announcements by the anchorman (“Wortbeitrag”), (2) news in a film (“Nachricht im Film”), and (3) documentaries (“Filmbeitrag”, see Schäfer 2007, ch. 6).

The first type of news reports is a traditional feature of the main edition of the “Tagesschau”; an anchorman or anchorwoman reads the news.^v He or she is not a journalist, but a newscaster (called “Sprecher” in German) reading at sight (see Jaedicke 2002, 104ff.; Paschmanns 2009). Moreover, *only one* anchorman is present in the studio during a broadcast, i.e. there is not a team of journalists discussing the different topics.^{vi} The anchorman sits at a desk and seemingly explains what is happening in the world to his audience, as Knut Hickethier and Joan K. Bleicher point out (see Hickethier and Bleicher 1998, 373). They make clear that this staging of the news is meant to create a competent appearance of the anchorman so that the recipients are tempted to take the newscaster as an expert regarding the information distributed. This impression, however, is misleading because the anchorman is not a journalist and not in any way involved in the investigation

resulting in the news he reads. His reports are broadly – though not exclusively – produced from information distributed by news agencies (see Schäfer 2007, 162f.) such as “Reuters” (see <http://www.reuters.com/>, accessed August 15, 2017) and written by news editors. Given that these agencies update their messages regularly during the day, the text to be read by the anchorman is normally finished just in time (see Schäfer 2007, 109). As many media producers use those agencies, there is a non-trivial information overlap between the different broadcasts concerning their reports.

The second type, namely *news in a film*, is a documentary commented off-stage by the anchorman. Normally, the pictures for the report are purchased from third parties, e.g. freelance camera crews, or transferred by the EVN (*Eurovision News Exchange*, <https://www.eurovision.net/about/profile.php>, accessed August 15, 2017). The text is written by the editors of the “Tagesschau” using information distributed by news agencies (see Schäfer 2007, 111f.). A corollary of this production procedure is that no “Tagesschau” journalists were present at the scene of the event that the report is about. Furthermore, as the text and the pictures are the products of different contributors, the problem may arise that they might not fit very well. Due to the requirement of up-to-dateness, the documentary is often transmitted to the editors just in time. Hence, the explanatory text has to be produced beforehand without knowing what exactly the pictures will show (see *ibid.*, 113). So visual and verbal information may fall apart.

Finally, there are *documentaries* produced by “Tagesschau” journalists at the scene of the event. This type is chosen by the editors if the event to be reported about, for example an election or a catastrophe caused by severe weather, is considered to be of sufficient importance – i.e. of interest to enough people – to devote such effort to the production of

the report (see *ibid.*, 115). Here it becomes clear that the process of selecting topics does not only include decisions about whether a certain issue will be broadcast at all, but also involves considerations about what type of report would best suit a certain news (see *ibid.*, 116). The format in which a topic is finally presented in the news programme can therefore also tell the audience something about its place in the hierarchy of importance that the editors apply. The more important they think a topic might be, the longer the report and the more pictures will be included (see *ibid.*). Producing a documentary means that the editorial staff will delegate a “Tagesschau” correspondent to the scene of the event. The latter will in turn hire an external camera crew or make use of his own, and will personally write the relevant report.^{vii} When the documentary is finally broadcast, the name of the correspondent will be mentioned as the responsible journalist. Here, the correspondent can become a *real eyewitness*. The audience’s impression about the correspondent’s apparent expertise is further strengthened by the responsible journalist’s being on camera to summarise the report and to critically assess the situation at the end of a documentary (see *ibid.*, 117f.). This feature contributes a great deal to the authenticity of the news and, as a corollary, also to its credibility (see Röhl 1992, 91).

Now, it is time to turn to some of the epistemic problems related to the process of news production described above. What might hinder a recipient to trust the anchorman and to believe his words? What might or should arouse suspicion regarding the credibility of media reports in this context?

A major difficulty that is related to the practice of using documentaries the way described is that recipients are tempted to make unwarranted generalisations. News reports are normally produced by using information distributed by third parties. In such instances, it

would be plainly wrong to take the report as a genuine product of the “Tagesschau” and to regard its employees as eyewitnesses of the reported events. Therefore, recipients would be mistaken to apply the claim of authenticity related to documentaries also in these instances (see Mößner 2010, 265).

Another problem is correlated with the distinction between *news*, i.e. reports about facts, and *comments*, i.e. the journalist’s opinion about a certain event etc. In Germany, the distinction between news and comments is one of the news producers’ leading principles. Moreover, this distinction is also an official requirement for public service broadcasters and legally fixed in the *Interstate Broadcasting Treaty* (see <https://www.die-medienanstalten.de/en/about-the-media-authorities/>, accessed August 16, 2017), as expressed in article number ten, first sentence of the treaty: “Comments must be clearly separate from the reports and must be identified as such giving the name of the author.” However, if the media producers are obliged to make such a clear-cut distinction between reports about facts and comments, their practice of presenting evaluative remarks at the end of documentaries to enhance the authenticity of the latter becomes questionable. Obviously, a tension arises between this procedure and the requirement not to provide unmarked subjective statements about the event presented (see Schäfer 2007, 118).

Another critical aspect concerning the trustworthiness of media reports is related to the particular sources of the news broadcast. Especially regarding documentaries, the relevance of *correspondents* was highlighted. The ARD^{viii} has journalists at its disposal in 31 external offices (thirteen in Europe, four in North America, two in South America, four in Africa, eight in Asia and Australia: <http://korrespondenten.tagesschau.de/>, accessed August 16, 2017). Even though this is one of the largest networks of correspondents available to a

German news programme (see Röhl 1992, 55f.), there are obviously gaps in the landscape, so to speak. In order to produce reports from countries outside Europe, the correspondents have to cover a broad range of topics and geographical areas, although those might not belong to their area of expertise. Despite the fact that it is the impression of expertise which correspondents are supposed to convey when making their statements on camera, it rather might be a mistake to regard them as experts on the event reported. Neither might they be eyewitnesses, nor do they necessarily possess the relevant background knowledge to assess what is going on correctly.

In addition to its own correspondents, many *co-operators* help to produce the “Tagesschau” reports. An important role is played by news and picture agencies such as EBU (*European Broadcasting Union*, see <http://www3.ebu.ch/>, accessed August 16, 2017). By making use of their news services, the “Tagesschau” editors fill the visual gaps in their own broadcasts. Concerning the question about the trustworthiness of news reports it has to be born in mind that what is reported has already been filtered by these agencies. As Sabine Schäfer claims, the “Tagesschau” journalists’ and editors’ perspective of the world and their decision about what might be relevant to report about is already preconfigured by those news agencies (see Schäfer 2007, 127).

A last point of concern regarding media reports as a trustworthy source of knowledge is related to the design of the broadcast that bears upon the understandability of the content transmitted. As was noted above, a single edition of the “Tagesschau” lasts 15 minutes, so the number of possible reports is restricted right from the start. In 2016, the average edition included 13 reports lasting around one minute each (see Krüger and Zapf-Schramm 2017, 63). Watching the “Tagesschau” is therefore somehow comparable to watching a *daily soap*,

that is, to understand the presented messages correctly the recipient has to watch the news every day as many stories are carried on for several days or weeks (see Hicketier 1998, 193).

These are just some of the features of the “Tagesschau” that influence its epistemic contents. What should have become clear is that both the way the reports are produced and how they are presented affect what kind of information – regarding quality and quantity – is broadcast. In the next section, the second part of the veritistic analysis of TV news will be approached. The focus of inquiry will then be on how exactly the characteristics of the “Tagesschau” sorted out so far are related to its epistemic output.

3 Media literacy

The difficulties related to the production and communication processes of the “Tagesschau” discussed in the previous section can influence what people might learn from the media reports. They affect both the *quantity*, regarding what kind of and how much information is distributed, and the *quality*, regarding the details and the truth value of the reports as well as the likelihood of errors, of the recipient's potential learning process. The question is whether there are any suggestions for improving the recipient's epistemic situation. This is then the second part of Goldman's meliorative project concerning the epistemic practice of using TV news as an epistemic source. Is it possible to enhance this practice in a way that the likelihood of adopting misleading or faulty propositions that are potentially distributed by the media can be reduced? An answer to this is closely related to what the reasons are that a recipient can make use of to decide whether a source of information is trustworthy or not.

To improve the recipients' epistemic situation it is important that the audience becomes aware of the difficulties mentioned above. This knowledge will help them to assess the reliability of their informants, it might offer them clues when it is appropriate to mistrust

a particular report, and it may indicate instances when it would be wise to consult further sources of information to verify what has been broadcast. The idea of pointing to such a kind of background knowledge is not a new one. On the contrary, it is what media scholars are promoting for quite a while now by emphasising media literacy as a crucial ingredient of the epistemic lives of citizens in current knowledge societies.

Then what does media literacy mean? There are several definitions of this term available. Most of them put forward a mixture of propositional knowledge and skills related to the two functional roles of being a producer and a recipient of media services. The UNESCO, for example, published a declaration stressing the importance of media literacy and making suggestions of how to promote it in contemporary societies. They define media (and information) literacy “as a combination of knowledge, attitudes, skills, and practices required to access, analyse, evaluate, use, produce, and communicate information and knowledge in creative, legal and ethical ways that respect human rights” (The Moscow Declaration on Media and Information Literacy, 28 June 2012, http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/In_Focus/Moscow_Declaration_on_MIL_eng.pdf, accessed August 17, 2017).

In the following, the claim will be fleshed out that it is indeed *media literacy* which offers reasons to trust or distrust media reports. It is this kind of background knowledge that the recipient can make use of to justify her epistemic dependence on the news distributed by the “Tagesschau”.

3.1 TV news as an epistemic source? The evaluation of reasons

Statistics tell us that German people take the “Tagesschau” to be a very reliable source of information (see Gscheidle and Geese 2017, 318ff.). However, the question arises whether

this reliability judgement is epistemically justified. What are the *reasons* that people can cite to support their assumption that the “Tagesschau” is a reliable source of information? And can these reasons indeed be regarded as a bedrock to build on the recipients' trust in media reports? Coming back to the initial observation that social epistemologists usually regard media reports as an instance of testimony, some helpful insights from the debate about knowledge by testimony can be brought to the fore to find an answer to these questions.

The appropriateness of knowledge claims derived from testimony depends on the epistemic character of the speaker (his *sincerity and competence*) and the process of information transmission (its reliability). These are also the aspects that have to be analysed to find out whether the “Tagesschau” is a reliable source of information or not. Highlighting the relevance of testimony in the context, however, makes it necessary to point out who the testifier in question is.

It is the anchorman who is facing the recipient while reading the news that others have produced in the course of their investigations. He can thus be regarded as the last part of a chain of testifiers. Yet relying on an *anti-reductionistic strategy*,^{ix} that is, appealing to a presumptive right to trust the speaker (the anchorman) unless there are reasons not to do so, i.e. *defeating reasons* (see Lackey 2008, 156f.; Scholz 2009), does not seem to be a valid option in this context. Due to the professional role of the anchorman and the staging of the news, as discussed by Hickethier and Bleicher (see Hickethier and Bleicher 1998), the recipient cannot hope for clues that might tell her whether the anchorman is trustworthy or not. It is part of the professional setting of the “Tagesschau” that the anchorman behaves and is dressed in a respectable manner; it is due to his training that he appears as a credible testifier. In the same way, the studio is designed to convey the impression of a professional

workspace accommodating a trustworthy testifier (see Hicketier and Bleicher 1998, 373). Possible indicators which might arouse the audience's suspicion, i.e. defeating reasons, are neutralised in advance by the professional setting so that the anti-reductionistic strategy does not work properly in this context.

Admitting that it is not helpful to focus the attention on the anchorman to find out whether the reports of the "Tagesschau" are trustworthy or not, it has to be called back to mind that the newscaster is only one part of the testimonial chain. Taking things this way reveals an alternative way to assess the reliability of the source. If it can be shown that the reports which the anchorman eventually reads are reliably produced, people will be justified to trust the speaker despite the staging of the news. Therefore the focus of investigation has to be shifted towards the journalists who are producing the news.

As was pointed out above, documentaries play a crucial role as types of reports on the "Tagesschau". Due to their design, including correspondents shown commenting on the events, recipients might feel tempted to regard journalists as experts then. Elizabeth Fricker's definition of this concept makes plain why people might argue this way to support their trust in the journalists as apparently credible testifiers. "S is an expert about P relative to H at t just if at t, S is epistemically well enough placed with respect to P so that were she to have, or make a judgement to form a conscious belief regarding whether P, her belief would almost certainly be knowledge; and she is better epistemically placed than H to determine whether P" (Fricker 2006, 233). The expression "epistemically well enough placed" can, for example, be understood in the sense of being an *eyewitness* of the reported event, and this is exactly the impression that documentaries are designed to commit to the audience. Without doubt, an eyewitness would usually be a competent testifier about what she has observed.

However, the above discussion made clear that it would be wrong to regard journalists and correspondents as experts in general. Although some of them appear on camera at the end of a documentary, there is neither a guarantee that their reports are produced first-hand, nor can such an assumption be extended to the “Tagesschau” reports more broadly as many of them are produced by information gathered from news agencies and other third party informants. Referring to the journalists as experts in the sense above is therefore not a recommendable epistemic strategy in this context. These considerations make plain that credibility assumptions regarding the news programme cannot be easily pinned down to the trustworthiness of individual testifiers. However, by taking the wider context of the news production into account it becomes clear that all comes down to trusting an institution rather than individual people.

So far, particular facts about the process of news production were used in a negative sense to point out that certain lines of reasoning are not valid to support a recipient's trust in media reports. Knowledge about these facts clearly belongs to the category of media literacy regarding TV news. Beyond that, media literacy can also provide positive reasons for trusting the institution. In the following, two examples of such positive reasons, which might, for instance, be used in a *reductionist* theory of testimony (see Lackey 2008, 145),^x will be discussed. Those reasons help to explain why, despite the difficulties mentioned so far, recipients can rely on the “Tagesschau” as a news broadcaster.

A first point to consider can be called *institutional credibility*. The thesis then is that the ARD as the institution producing the “Tagesschau” could simply not afford to broadcast a news programme known to be unreliable. Allowing the “Tagesschau” to constantly broadcast false reports not only would threaten its long-standing and wide-ranging record of being a

reliable source of information (see Schäfer 2007, 12f., 205), but also seriously damage the reputation of the ARD as the institution responsible for its production. *Institutional credibility* is indeed a factor worth considering in the epistemological quest. It has to be kept in mind that this news programme competes with several other broadcasts to win and retain the viewers' favour. Annoying its audience by transmitting continuously false reports would most probably encourage a lot of its current viewers to switch to other news suppliers instead.^{xi} Of course, this is not a desirable outcome to the ARD, and it can thus be assumed that the producers of the "Tagesschau" will avoid whatever might provoke such a development.

The second reason to mention in support of trusting the institution is related to the the *legal context* in which the "Tagesschau", as a product of public service broadcasters, is embedded. The editors and producers of this news programme have to fulfil certain obligations stated in the *Interstate Broadcasting Treaty*. In particular, the requirements expressed in its article number ten are relevant to mention in this context. "(1) Reporting and information programmes must conform to accepted journalistic standards, also where virtual components are employed. They must be independent and objective. Prior to transmission, news must be verified regarding their truthfulness and origin in accordance with the attention to accuracy and source required by the circumstances. Comments must be clearly separate from the reports and must be identified as such giving the name of the author" (*Interstate Broadcasting Treaty* in the version of the 19th Amendment to the Interstate Broadcasting Treaties, entry into force: 01 October 2016, <http://www.die-medienanstalten.de/en/legal-basis.html>, accessed August 18, 2017). In this paragraph, the requirement of conforming to certain *standards* in the news production becomes evident. *Independence* and *objectivity* are explicitly mentioned as requirements for the news

disseminated by the “Tagesschau”. Moreover, journalists are asked *to check the information thoroughly* before reporting it. Acknowledging the fact that these issues are legally fixed, they seem to provide good epistemic reasons for assuming the reliability of the “Tagesschau’s” reports.

However, only normative standards are expressed by the *Interstate Broadcasting Treaty*. This is by no means a guarantee that these standards are also met. What might then motivate the news producers to fulfil these requirements? Again it is the aspect of institutional credibility that offers the relevant explanation. News producers are not only required to maintain certain standards while generating and distributing their news, they are also obliged to make public how they meet these standards.^{xii} The ARD is committed to publish a respective report every other year, the so-called “ARD-Bericht” and “ARD-Leitlinien” (see <http://www.ard.de/home/intern/fakten/abc-der-ard/Programmgrundsaeetze/554870/index.html>;
http://www.ard.de/home/intern/fakten/abc-der-ard/ARD_Bericht/563652/index.html, accessed August 18, 2017). Here, the ARD has to describe, whether and, if so, how they fulfilled their legal requirements and what their plans for the immediate future are to meet their aims. Such a report offers an official point of reference for potential critiques if the ARD (or the “Tagesschau” as one of its products) does not fulfil the obligations. A public critique in turn would threaten the reputation of both – the ARD as a public service broadcaster and the “Tagesschau” as its news programme. Furthermore, a damaged reputation implies losing viewers to competitors. Hence, pointing to the legal context constitutes another reason for considering the “Tagesschau” to be a reliable source of information.

Epistemologically assessing the reasons why recipients might or might not trust the

reports of the “Tagesschau” draws heavily on background knowledge about the epistemic virtues and vices of the news production. This background knowledge is the result of an analysis similar to the one presented in the first part of this paper. The important insight then is that the output of the veritistic analysis of TV news as an epistemic source coincides with what media literacy can teach recipients in this context. Generally speaking, the background information about the epistemic virtues and vices of media sources is what media literacy, amongst others, provides recipients with. The next section will provide a systematised overview regarding reasons derived from media literacy that recipients can make use of to check their trustworthiness assumptions concerning TV news.

3.2 Media literacy as background knowledge

Media literacy is the kind of background knowledge that can provide positive epistemic reasons relevant to consider when pondering the trustworthiness of the reports of the “Tagesschau”. It means knowing certain propositions that are relevant when epistemically evaluating the reliability of this source of information.

These propositions might be used as positive reasons in a reductionist framework when pondering on the epistemology of the testimony in question. The analysis above has made plain that such reasons are available to the recipient of TV news who has to decide whether the source in question is trustworthy or not. However, the aim of this paper is not to suggest a particular epistemological theory about testimony in this respect. Either theory that draws on positive reasons, that is, a classic reductionist framework as well as a hybrid theory of testimony, for example discussed and defended by Axel Gelfert (see Gelfert 2014, ch. 6) or by Jennifer Lackey (see Lackey 2008), or a theory that is in need of empirical support to refine defeating reasons in an anti-reductionist framework (see Scholz 2009) can benefit

from the analysis above.

Moving on in the attempt to systematise the results obtained, it can be noted that the propositions mentioned can be categorised along the lines of three different sets of background information in the context of TV news.^{xiii}

(1) *Conditions of production*: here, the *time factor* for producing the different editions of the news programme has to be mentioned. This means, on the one hand, that due to the fact that the eight pm edition (i.e. the main edition of the “Tagesschau”) takes 15 minutes in sum a selection of topics has to be made. On the other, the producers – journalists, editors, and technicians – are hard-pressed to get all the contents in time – pictures and other information – they need for the message which they want to transmit. Furthermore, both aspects of *cooperation* and *competition* and their corollaries for the news production have to be listed here. A first point refers, for example, to the editors’ cooperation with picture and news agencies. This teamwork, amongst others, explains why certain topics are widely distributed in the media system. A second aspect is closely connected to the topic of institutional credibility. Being aware of the fact that there are several competitors on the market, the news producers have to be mindful of what to broadcast and how to transmit their information to retain the favour of their viewers. Finally, the *legal context*, that is, the requirements expressed by the *Interstate Broadcasting Treaty*, has to be mentioned here. As shown above, knowledge about the commitments derived from this legal setting can provide crucial hints regarding the “Tagesschau’s” reliability assessment.

(2) *Conditions of communication*: the *unidirectional path of communication* is relevant to consider in this context. The “Tagesschau” does not involve any interaction between audience and anchormen or journalists. Audience and information provider are disjunct sets

of people. A corollary of this is that the media producers have only a rough idea about their audience. They have to assume what might be relevant and of interest to their viewers, so they take the demand of a *mainstream audience* to guide the design of their product. This also implies that the editors have to produce news for people with divergent background knowledge regarding the topics presented as well as with huge differences regarding their general education. Furthermore, the professional role of the *anchorman* has to be taken into account here. He is not a journalist and is not involved in the production of the news he reads. It is an important fact to know that, due to the professional role and the staging of the news programme, the anchorman's appearance, behaviour, and surrounding are not relevant criteria for assessing the reliability of the news programme.

(3) *Criteria of design*: one aspect concerns the *long-term reports*. Quite often, to fully comprehend what is broadcast by the "Tagesschau" the recipient has to watch the news programme regularly or seek other sources of information in addition. Without this further information it might be difficult to interpret the particular news correctly. Moreover, the *significance of the visual* to the news programme was pointed out above. Being broadcast on television also implies a particular need of suitable pictures. A report is ranked higher in its importance (that is, in the assessment of how relevant it is to transmit this news) by the editors when good pictures are available, and the likelihood of its being integrated into the programme increases. It is therefore necessary to critically assess the editors' practices to abandon some news in favour of reports for which pictures are available. Moreover, there might be cases where no topical pictures are at the editors' disposal and, hence, pictures from the archive are used as illustrations although they do not show what the report is about. Another difficulty concerns the *adequate combination of linguistic report and*

pictures. If both elements do not match very well, the audience might have difficulties in understanding the message correctly.

In a nutshell, all aspects in these three categories are part of what is transmitted when people are taught media literacy. And this background knowledge helps the recipients to critically assess the epistemic dimension of media reports (see Mößner 2010, ch. 5.4). By this means, they can find out what influences the news production and, thus, the truth values of the reports. For sure, the suggestion that media literacy as background knowledge is epistemically relevant when media reports are considered as an epistemic source is not new. Goldman, for example, emphasises this point and demands the teaching of media literacy in schools. “A truth seeker in the information age must negotiate all sorts of treacherous communicational terrain, full of hazards of every kind. Whose words should be trusted over the Internet? Which political messages deserve relatively great credence or trust? To what sources can a citizen turn to help appraise the intentions behind this or that political message? Guidance in “media literacy” properly belongs in the information-age classroom, as many schools have already decided” (Goldman 1999, 367).

As a concluding remark, one last aspect concerning the meliorative project of analysing TV news has to be added. Media literacy has hitherto been defined as a certain kind of background knowledge which enables the recipient to critically assess the media system and its reports. However, media literacy not only consists of knowledge about media production and about using media reports, it also involves the suggestion of a *special attitude* towards them. Using media reports in an epistemically responsible way also implies understanding that to get informed about a certain topic – about what is going on in the world – is *not a passive matter, but an activity*. Just turning on the television and waiting for information

titbits ready for consumption is not the right attitude because the world is so overloaded by information. This information has to be evaluated before people can rely on some of those reports. Epistemically responsible recipients have to consult different media to compare their news and critically think them through before deciding whom to trust and what to believe. As Ignacio Ramonet, editor-in-chief of “Le monde diplomatique” between 1991 and 2008, makes clear: *getting informed is demanding* because it means that people have to actively search for relevant information.^{xiv}

4 Conclusion

The above analysis focused on the question why a recipient might trust or distrust media reports. The topic was approached by presenting a case study on the most popular and widespread German news programme, called the “Tagesschau”. German people regard this news programme as particularly trustworthy. Following Goldman's strategy of a veritistic analysis of social practices, the epistemic practice of news production was critically investigated in this paper. The above inquiry made clear that reasons to trust the reports of the “Tagesschau” are based on institutional considerations, such as the legal setting of the news production in Germany, rather than on reasons applicable to an individual testifier. Furthermore, it was pointed out that the characteristics of the news programme which are relevant to consider when evaluating its epistemic reliability are part of what recipients can learn from media literacy.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Philip Kitcher and Boris Lanin for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

5 References

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- ⁱ That there are important differences between media systems of different countries can, for example, be noted in the critical remarks that Philip Kitcher points out concerning the news market in the US (see Kitcher 2011, 183ff.).
- ⁱⁱ A more detailed analysis is offered in Mößner 2010, ch. 5.
- ⁱⁱⁱ For more information about the history of the “Tagesschau” see Jaedicke 2002; Matzen and Radler 2009.
- ^{iv} Several editions are broadcast during a single day (see <http://www.tagesschau.de/multimedia/livestreams/>, accessed August 15, 2017).
- ^v The first anchorwoman was Dagmar Berghoff who started her job in 1976 (see Kufeld 2009).
- ^{vi} This formal setting is often cited as a critical point in surveys amongst “Tagesschau” viewers. Especially young people consider the “Tagesschau” to be stiff and prosaic in comparison to other news programmes (see Blumers, Gerstner, and Tebert 2010, 135f.; Zubayr and Geese 2009, 169).
- ^{vii} This is also the main distinction to the second type, where the editors write the text by using information from news agencies.
- ^{viii} ARD stands for *Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, i.e. association of public service broadcasters in Germany.
- ^{ix} For a critical discussion of this approach in the debate on knowledge by testimony see Faulkner 2011, ch. 4; Gelfert 2014, ch. 5
- ^x For a critical discussion of such approaches in the debate about knowledge by testimony see Faulkner 2011, ch. 2; Gelfert 2014, ch. 5
- ^{xi} Of course, this presupposes that the recipients are able to find out that they were seriously misled by the news programme.
- ^{xii} This is also formulated in the Interstate Broadcasting Treaty, article 11e, second sentence (see Interstate Broadcasting Treaty in the version of the 19th Amendment to the Interstate Broadcasting Treaties, entry into force: 01 October 2016, <https://www.die-medienanstalten.de/en/about-the-media-authorities/>, accessed August 21, 2017).
- ^{xiii} Admittedly, there might be overlaps between the categories. A more detailed analysis is offered in Mößner 2010, ch. 5.2.
- ^{xiv} “Sich informieren bedeutet, die verschiedenen Medien abwechselnd zu konsultieren, eine wenig zuverlässige Quelle auszuschneiden usw. Auch die Bürger haben also eine Verpflichtung: Sie müssen aktiv nach Information suchen” (Ramonet 1999, 72).