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Funding intermediaries: Google and Facebook's strategy to capture journalism

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Abstract
With more and more governments around the world considering or having already passed laws aiming to regulate the relationship between news publishers and online platforms, primarily, by ensuring a form of remuneration of the former from the latter, we ought to understand the current situation. This paper seeks to inquire whom platforms fund, how and why. We created a dataset of organizations that have participated in Google News Initiative or Facebook Journalism Project by gathering data from communicative and informative material found on the websites of platforms and beneficiaries. Through our analysis, we identified stakeholders that play a crucial role in the realization of platforms' funding programs, whom we call funding intermediaries. Therefore, this paper contends that the platforms' strategic decision has not only been to distribute money through a complicated governance structure, but also to target parts of the industry that have been hurt by an ongoing crisis, aggravated by the platforms' dominance of the advertising industry. However, funding journalism ensures neither media capture, i.e., positive or lack of critical coverage, nor regulatory capture, i.e., avoiding or adjusting regulation. As a result, we ultimately propose to approach capture as a political-economic concept to study platform power.

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Keywords
Google News Initiative, Facebook Journalism Project, platform funding, journalism, media capture, infrastructural capture, platform governance, platform power

Introduction
Academics, civil society organizations and investigative journalists have been trying, in recent years, to track the ways in which large online platforms have been funding news media organizations, a phenomenon often discussed as part of the increasing capture of the industry by a handful of online platforms (Schiffrin 2014; Schiffrin 2021; Bell and Owen 2017;

Nechushtai 2018). This paper offers comprehensive insights into Facebook and Google's funding for journalism to understand where platforms' money goes, how and to what ends. Specifically, we created a dataset of 7,467 (6,875 unique) beneficiaries by gathering data that cover the period between 2017 and early 2022 from communicative and informative material found on websites of platforms and organizations that have participated in a funding program (Table 2). Through our analysis we identified the existence of stakeholders that play a key role in the development and realization of platforms' funding activities, whom we name "funding intermediaries."

We define funding intermediaries as essential actors of the news ecosystem that offer privileged access to platforms through partnerships formed as part of their funding projects. We find that our twofold contribution with the concept of funding intermediaries and the data regarding platforms' funding for journalism projects allows for a deeper understanding of platforms' strategy to capture as many levels of the news industry as possible. The recurring crises of the news industry have both exacerbated the need for more funding and have legitimated platforms' intervention in lack of an appropriate publicly accountable response. As a result, we argue that platforms' funding for journalism may also have significant and unexpected consequences for the news ecosystem's governance. We wish this paper to serve as a point of departure for future research that will zoom in on specific projects or countries and conduct more qualitative analysis that will allow us to better understand the impact that these activities have had on journalistic praxis.

Media and Infrastructural Capture

The concept of capture derives from the economic theory of "regulatory capture" which was designed to account for the ways in which regulators often end up working in the interests of the industries they are supposed to be overseeing on behalf of the public (Stigler 1971). The concept of capture was later reframed to study similar situations in the media ecosystem, primarily concerning journalists not holding state power to account especially in times of crises. Media capture has been redefined in recent years with the domination of online platforms, with scholars proposing the concept of "infrastructural capture" (Nechushtai 2018) to analyze the risk of (in)dependence of news media on platform infrastructure and tools. As we will show in this paper, we believe that we are now passed the point of infrastructural dependency in the socio-technical sense with platforms increasingly capturing networks; thus, with this paper we would also like to suggest expanding our understanding of capture, not just as a normative concept that speaks to influence and dependency, but also as a lens to inquire platform power.

Nechushtai's main focal point was to examine the relationship between news organizations and digital platforms, arguing that it has evolved from "parasitic" (Siapera 2013, 13) to "symbiotic" (Nechushtai 2018, 1052). Additionally, some even argue that this relationship has now evolved from "symbiotic" to "dependent" (Sebbah, Sire, and Smyrnaios 2020) as a way of highlighting the asymmetrical power that platforms exert on news organizations (Smyrnaios and Rebillard 2019). These platforms' oligopolistic tendencies for centralization and maximization of profits and control over flows of information have accelerated and exacerbated the various crises felt by the news industry (Smyrnaios 2018; van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018). In particular, Nechushtai was interested in studying the "platformization of news" (Nieborg and Poell 2018), i.e., how the production and distribution of news has become increasingly "dependent on the tools, advertising revenue, and data and *governance standards* of GAFAM platforms" (Nieborg and Poell 2018, 4278); emphasis added).

The "governance standards" part is of crucial importance to this article, as we argue that news organizations have not only become more dependent on platforms' "material

benefits" (Nechushtai 2018, 1049), like access to audiences or funding, but also on their networks; a situation of networked capture. Nechushtai employed the notion of infrastructural capture to describe "situations in which an organization tasked with scrutinizing another organization, institution, business, or industry is incapable of operating sustainably without the resources or services they provide" (Nechushtai 2018, 1046). To better understand this concept, we also ought to unpack the notion of infrastructure, particularly in relation to media and platforms. For instance, Plantin and Punathambekar have proposed studying digital platforms through an "infrastructural optic" based on "media infrastructure studies," inviting us to consider "the social, material, cultural, and political dimensions of the infrastructures that undergird and sustain communication networks and media cultures across the world" (Plantin and Punathambekar 2019, 166). Subsequently, we extrapolate that infrastructure does not necessarily need to be tied to materiality. As Brian Larkin have theorized, infrastructures are "built networks that facilitate the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over space" (Larkin 2013, 328) and they have critical cultural and political value (ibid, 330).

In other words, we should think of infrastructures as multifaceted assemblages that consist of many dimensions: material, political, cultural, analytical, and others. As a result, infrastructures are built, but they are also defined. Put simply, something can be built to function as an infrastructure, but it can also transform into one. That is what Plantin et al. imply when posing the rhetorical question of "What is Google, then: a platform? An infrastructure? Is it sequentially or simultaneously both?" (Plantin et al. 2018, 294). Earlier attempts to define what a platform is revolved around the notion of intermediation, i.e., bridging two – or more – parties; others have also specifically talked about "infomediation" so as to emphasize "the mediation between information and consumption" (Siapera 2013, 11). In addition, other scholars have spoken to platforms' unique technology: "an online 'platform' is a programmable digital architecture designed to organize interactions between users-not just end users but also corporate entities and public bodies" (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018, 4).

Digital platforms are, thus, digital infrastructures, upon which applications can be built and run (Gillespie 2010; Plantin et al. 2018) but that also afford socioeconomic exchanges and, thus, hold high symbolic, sociopolitical and economic value. Consequently, online private platforms function as infrastructures for our communicational or commercial exchanges, but they have also obtained an infrastructural status in our modern societies that has allowed them to expand to every possible direction, making alternatives almost unimaginable. The phenomenon of "platformization" (Van Dijck 2020) is, primarily, the result of the unfettered capitalist dogma for growth of Silicon Valley conglomerates and it has had sweeping effects on our digital public sphere, from the way we have been consuming and exchanging information to the way we have been producing it (Helmond 2015; Nieborg and Poell 2018; Owen 2019). Indeed, as Plantin et al. note: "the rise of digital technologies, in a neoliberal, political, and economic climate, has simultaneously facilitated a 'platformization' of infrastructures and an 'infrastructuralization' of platforms" (Plantin et al. 2018, 298). Journalism and news making was not an exception to this.

In summary, this paper contends that we are now in a situation of co-dependency between news organizations and platforms, with the latter preserving asymmetrical influence over the former and, at the same time, needing the former to fend off strict regulation and/or remedy their image. Subsequently, media capture does and should not exclusively refer to ensuring positive publicity or less scrutiny from journalists, but also to a deeper kind of capture with existential stakes for journalism. We ought, though, not to overlook the fact that many news media organizations have resorted to platform funding due to increased state

capture, especially in countries with limited media plurality and freedom, drop in revenues, as well as lack of more transparent and controllable sources of funding.

From DNI to GNI: Google's decade-long funding for journalism

In the previous decade, Google emerged as the dominant funder of journalism. A recent study of the German media landscape went as far as naming the company "[a] media patron" (Fanta and Dachwitz 2020) because of its several funding programs. The same study also demonstrated how Google started experimenting with its programs in France in 2013 before expanding them to the European Union in 2015 and, finally, to a global level in 2019. This was due to political pressure by the French government, to which Google responded by setting up a 60-million-euro fund "to support press publishers' innovation projects in 2013, which was the blueprint for the [Digital News Initiative][1] & the [Google News Initiative]" (Fanta and Dachwitz 2020, 89).

It is important to note that the type of political pressure and lobbying at the time differed greatly from today, as it was much more explicit. A case in point is when former Google's CEO, Eric Schmidt, was welcomed by former French President, François Hollande, at the Elysée; a journalist association representing publishers was also part of these negotiations (Smyrnaios and Rebillard 2019, 46). The initial plan of the French government was to impose a new tax on Google that would compensate media whose content was indexed in the search engine. However, the result of their meeting and the subsequent negotiations was an agreement to create the fund for digital innovation in the press (FINP[2]). As Smyrnaios and Rebillard have argued, Google's political pursuits with this agreement can and should be examined in relation to "litigations between the Californian firm and French fiscal authorities as well as mounting anti-Google criticism after the Edward Snowden revelations" (ibid, 46).

This was the first and decisive step that Google took to overtake the control of funding that is directed to news media organizations in Europe and, later, beyond. This too came after a barrage of threats by Google that it would stop indexing news content if forced to pay for licensing rights (Smyrnaios and Rebillard 2019, 46). What is more, just a couple of months prior to that agreement, Google settled a six years-long dispute with a group of major French publishers, who had filed a lawsuit against the tech company for listing their articles on Google News without permission, by agreeing to "[place] Google advertising in publishers' media"[3]. . So, under the risk of a possible regulation, Google agreed to pay French news publishers, albeit on its own terms; a pattern that would dictate all similar future deals and negotiations. Interestingly, the same story would play out once more in 2019, when the leading association of French news publishers, APIG, signed a framework agreement with Google on the basis of the new neighboring right introduced by the new Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market; the negotiating parties went to court after a united front of French publishers and major media filed a complaint with the French Competition Authority arguing that Google had negotiated in bad faith, something with which the Authority agreed and fined Google with €500 million (approximately $540 million; Kayali 2021).

Facebook Journalism Project

Contrary to Google, Facebook has received much less scrutiny from academia in relation to its funding for journalism. Instead, a significant body of literature has focused on the ways in

[1] DNI stands for Google's Digital News Initiative fund, which later became Google News Initiative.
[2] Fonds pour l'innovation numérique dans la presse
[3] https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/feb/01/google-52m-fund-help-french-publishers.

which the platform has impacted the distribution and production of news content, from the format of news content to editorial strategizing to maximize reach (Meese and Hurcombe 2021). Scholars have also discussed the risks of the increasing dependency and contingency of journalistic praxis on social media platforms, namely Facebook (Nieborg and Poell 2018). For instance, the infamous algorithmic shift to prioritizing video content in users' feeds in 2018, that also reportedly caused many newsrooms to pivot and lay off staff that was able to handle video content has been tackled time and again as an instance of a risk spurring from platform dependency and asymmetrical power that platforms hold over content producers (Caplan and boyd 2018).

Jurno and D'Andréa are among the few academics that have specifically tackled Facebook's funding initiatives and, in particular, as part of the company's "process of platformization of journalism" (Jurno and D'Andréa 2020, 503). The authors identify two periods of this process: the first spans from 2014 to 2016, where the "platform offer[ed] itself as an infrastructure for news publishers, particularly around Instant Articles", and the second spans from 2017 to 2019, where the platform "began to offer its services as a coordinator of activities related to the journalistic craft" mainly through "funding of training and education initiatives for and about journalism" (ibid). They also provide us with a brief history of how the FJP came to be, with Campbell Brown, head of global news partnerships at Facebook, taking the lead and meeting with dozens of publishers prior to its launch to first, pitch the project and, second, recruit them (ibid, 516). As Lucia Moses reported at the time, some of these meetings were even held at Brown's apartment, with publishers feeling "impressed" merely by the fact that Facebook was talking to them (Moses 2018).

Furthermore, they connect the FJP's launch to the techlash and recurring crises that the company was suffering from at the time, hence the two periods. However, they conclude that Facebook improved its approach in the second period (2017-2019) as regards the way it treated journalism. Subsequently, they paint a rather positive image of the platform because of its decision to assume a more coordinating role (i.e., managing the governance of the funding process) instead of being simply a benefactor, like Google did previously (Jurno and D'Andréa 2020, 518). Indeed, from the very beginning, Facebook pursued a different strategy compared to Google by tapping into an existing network of industry stakeholders to distribute its funds. Facebook Journalism Project was announced on 11 January 2017 as a means of "[establishing] stronger ties between Facebook and the news industry"[4]. This was part of Facebook's strategy to "reconcile its desires with the aspirations of journalistic institutions" and "consolidate the platform as an 'obligatory point of passage' for journalism" (ibid, 520).

Therefore, these two companies have emerged as the leading investor for the news industry, having developed multi-million-dollar funding initiatives, most notably, the Google News Initiative and the Facebook Journalism Project. These companies have been funding journalism through other ways too, either in a self-regulated manner through their own licensing programs (i.e., Facebook News or Google News Showcase) or in a more (co-) regulated fashion through competition (e.g., Australia's News Media Bargaining Code; hereinafter NMDC) or copyright (e.g., EU's Copyright Directive) policy. The news industry's argument, also put forth by governments, is that online platforms have usurped online advertising revenues[5], especially through anti-competitive behavior (McCabe and Wakabayashi 2020). Indeed, according to Reuters, the two companies generated $607 billion in advertising revenues between 2018-2021, approximately the same period that they started or dramatically augmented their funding programs (Coster 2021).

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[4] https://www.Facebook.com/journalismproject/introducing-Facebook-journalism-project.

[5] https://www.accc.gov.au/focus-areas/inquiries-finalised/digital-platforms-inquiry-0/final-report-executive-summary.

However, it would be short-sighted to blame them as the sole reason for journalism's crisis; as Victor Pickard has written: the "systemic market failure has created a wide range of problems, from the loss of local journalism to a lack of affordable and accessible internet services" (Pickard 2020b, 68). What is more, this would also further fuel a platform deterministic approach, whereby platforms are depicted as extremely powerful entities, which thus hinders our way of inquiring their power and thinking of alternatives. We would also be remiss not to acknowledge the fact that, in many cases, struggling news organizations would have had to either let people off or shut down entirely if not for platforms' financial aid, especially during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, this is a reminder that we ought to start considering "[removing] news media from the market as much as possible" (Pickard 2020a, 716) and rethink our public service media.

Methodology

We built our database by collecting data from the companies' websites and, when necessary, from beneficiaries' websites; the data cover the period from 2017 to early 2022; the latest data were gathered on 10 January 2022 for FJP and 6 December 2021 for GNI. Provided that neither platform provides an interactive or explorable database of their funding initiatives, we had to develop our own data-gathering method. We ought to acknowledge that Google, at the very least, provided a downloadable file – in PDF format – with all its news partners; however, it only included the partners' names and the file's format was not easy to interact with (i.e., to extract data from). We did not wish to include Google's Digital News Initiative (hereinafter DNI) because it was primarily a program developed to serve the European Union and had little if any intermediaries involved, especially in comparison to the global reach of GNI. However, in the future it would be interesting to compare GNI and DNI. We also need to underline here that the scope of this paper excludes platforms' distinct licensing projects that include deals with news publishers all over the world, like Google News Showcase and Facebook News.

The data cover a period of approximately four years, from Facebook Journalism Project's launch in 2017 to early January 2022. While we have tried to minimize errors, due to the minimal data provided by platforms and the difficulty to acquire them, it is possible that some discrepancies exist. For this reason, we wish to publicly release our data and invite other researchers to collaborate and continue ameliorating our database. By taking inspiration from relevant research projects, namely Alexander Fanta and Ingo Dachwitz's work and the Tech Transparency Project[6], we proceeded with the following steps:

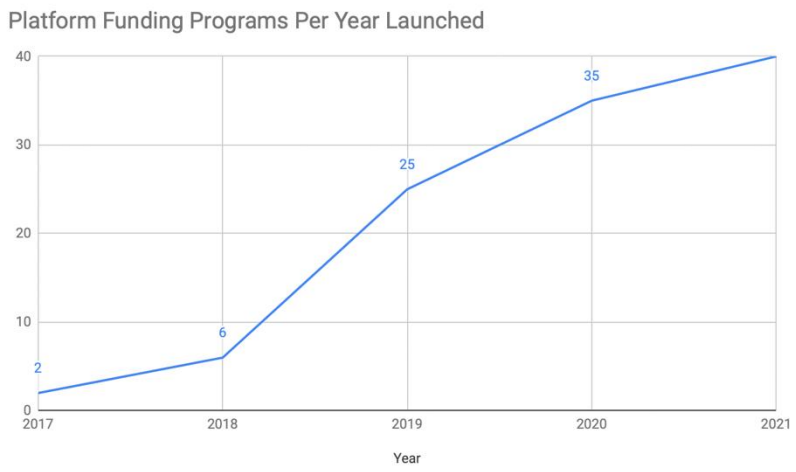
- For FJP:
    - We loaded all articles' links and headlines found on FJP's blog concerning the aforementioned period (including announcement of partnerships, press releases, etc.)
    - We 'scraped' all articles by downloading the page's Source Code (using Mozilla's *Firefox*) as an HTML file and opening it with a text editor, which allowed us to get all articles' titles, their category and their corresponding hyperlink; the total number of articles was approximately 500.
    - We classified them based on their categories and opened every article containing partnership announcements and relevant information and manually collected relevant data, like beneficiaries' names, location, grant amount, etc., as well as information related to MJP's projects, like duration and partners involved.

[6] https://www.techtransparencyproject.org/articles/find-out-which-groups-get-big-tech-funding.

- For GNI:
    - We downloaded the GNI's 2021 "impact report"[7], which was available as a PDF; we converted it to a CSV file that made it easier to edit. Unfortunately, Google did not include details for each beneficiary, so we did not have access to beneficiaries' country of origin, amount awarded, etc.
    - We, then, downloaded the list of beneficiaries that received finance from GNI's Journalism Emergency Relief Fund[8] (hereinafter JERF) which distributed $39.5 million to approximately 5,600 organizations. In this list, the country of origin of each beneficiary was provided, but the allocated money was not included.
    - We compared the two datasets and found 5,437 matches (i.e., organizations that received money both from a GNI program and JERF). That way we managed to attribute location data to most beneficiaries from the GNI impact report. However, for around 1,200 organizations that were included in the GNI dataset and were not in the JERF list, location and project participation could not be identified.
    - Last, through our own research, we identified and added around 540 beneficiaries that were not included in the GNI's 2021 impact report.

It is worth highlighting that Facebook was more transparent in terms of providing the amounts of money involved in its funding projects by sharing either the total amount pledged to a program or the exact money allocated to each recipient. However, it did not keep a list of its programs nor of the beneficiaries, which makes research extremely difficult. On the other hand, Google rarely provided financial specificities around its projects and, instead, shared total amounts of money invested in a year. What is more, we requested access to more detailed data from both platforms, but to no avail.

Due to the lack of exact funding figures concerning many organizations, we decided to focus on the frequency with which organizations participated in a funding program, as well as the number of funding projects per year as an indicator of platforms' spending intensity (Fig. 1); It is important to note that the frequency of participation in a program does not necessarily correlate to the amount of money a beneficiary has received. It could imply a privileged relationship or simply a good understanding of grant-awarding procedures. Furthermore, in most cases, the amounts allocated were not divulged. If the exact amount of a grant was included, we listed that amount in the dataset.



[7] https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/impact2021.
[8] https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/info/journalism-emergency-relief-fund.

Figure 1 - Platform Funding Programs Per Year Launched

Findings

Dataset

Before addressing the data related to our proposed concept of funding intermediaries, we reckon that this paper would benefit from presenting an overview of the whole dataset we created as part of this research project. Specifically, we identified a total of 7,467 (6,875 unique) beneficiaries (Fig. 3) who have participated in 114 programs (38 of Google and 76 of Facebook) across 131 countries (Fig. 2). The period covered spans from 2017 to early January 2022, when we last updated our dataset; 5,914 organizations have benefitted from a GNI program and 1,553 from an FJP. This discrepancy can be explained by Google's JERF project that was launched in 2020 to "support local news" in light of the pandemic outbreak (Blecher 2020; Gingras 2020).

We also noticed a pattern of over-representation of US-based organizations: 2,657 out of 7,467 operate or are based in the US (approximately 36%): specifically, for the GNI, that percentage is approximately 29% (1,700 of 5,911), whereas for the FJP, that percentage is 62% (957 of 1,543). The second largest country in terms of total beneficiaries is Brazil with 448 organizations and the third largest is Canada with 418. Most funding projects were specifically tailored around two themes: Covid-19 and local news. Specifically, concerning Google, the JERF project that was mentioned earlier was undeniably the largest project.

Intriguingly, Google also framed it in a twofold way: "the Fund aimed to support the production of original journalism for local communities in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic"[9]. It should also be noted that JERF was so large in scope that recipients must have not received large sums of money individually. As regards Facebook, we identified 13 projects with Covid or coronavirus in their title, with the largest being the "Community Network to Support Coronavirus Reporting" with 407 US-only beneficiaries and $2 million distributed; additionally, 12 other projects that were identified had local in their title, with the largest being "COVID-19 Local News Relief Fund Grant Program" with 203 US-only beneficiaries and $16 million distributed.

Funding Intermediaries

This research project's initial question was to understand where platforms' money goes in relation to their funding for journalism, how and for what. As we were advancing in the research process, we noticed a pattern in our data, which first became evident in the FJP data and which allowed us to then identify it in the GNI data too. We discerned that many programs involved the collaboration of industry stakeholders; we decided to name these funding intermediaries. Similarly, we noted that Facebook was the first to incorporate them in its strategy, with Google abolishing its previous centralized approach and following suit shortly after. This, effectively, answered our research question's regarding platforms' funding strategy. Therefore, we understand these intermediaries as key stakeholders of the news ecosystem that offer privileged access to platforms through partnerships formed as part of platforms' funding projects.

We define funding intermediaries as essential actors of the news ecosystem that offer privileged access and expertise to platforms through partnerships formed as part of their funding projects. We identified 91 stakeholders, which were labelled as follows[10]: (i) 30

[9] https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/info/journalism-emergency-relief-fund/recipients.

[10] The list might not be extensive, but we believe that it serves as sufficient evidence of the proposed argument in this paper.

journalist associations, (ii) 18 educational institutions, (iii) 16 news media organizations[11], (iv) 8 philanthropic institutions, and (v) 19 non-profit organizations. More specifically:

1) We define journalist associations as interest groups promoting and lobbying for journalists' interests. These are often groups that bring together numerous news outlets and, thus, are important stakeholders in governance deliberations thanks to their network and expertise. For instance, in 2019, Facebook partnered with Abraji (Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism) to launch a free online training program for 3,000 journalists in Brazil[12].
2) In our dataset, educational institutions are, principally, universities with journalism-focused programs and research centers focusing on studying journalism. In most cases, these intermediaries were either funded by platforms to organize training programs or conduct relevant research. For instance, in 2019 Kadir Has University and Habitat Association launched a training program in Turkey with the support of Facebook, to train more than 1,000 journalists and journalism students in how to use Facebook and Instagram in their reporting[13].
3) We define news media organizations that operate as funding intermediaries as organizations that have benefited from a funding program with the purpose of using their experience and expertise to disseminate grants, review grant applications or train other journalists. For instance, in 2020, Google extended a previous partnership with Internews with a $1 million grant, to help the organization promote news and media literacy in India through workshops and training activities[14].
4) Philanthropic institutions have long played an important role in providing grants to news organizations. In this paper, we mainly define them as non-profit institutions with social and financial capital, as well as with grant-awarding programs, and which serve as networking and sustainability hubs for, mainly, local newsrooms. As a result, these are important stakeholders that already have strong ties with journalists. By partnering with them, Google and Facebook gain access to crucial networks. For instance, both have partnered with Fundación Gabo to launch training programs for journalists in Latin America[15].
5) Finally, non-profit organizations are defined in this context as public interest groups promoting important topics, from health-related issues to media literacy. Some of them are also dedicated to helping journalism's sustainability, which makes them crucial access points for platforms. For instance, the European Centre for Journalism partnered with Facebook in 2020 to distribute $3 million in relief grants related to the Covid-19 pandemic[16] and, more than once, with Google to organize fellowships and training programs[17].

Moreover, 45 intermediaries are either based or operate in North America, 3 in Africa, 8 in Asia, 13 in Europe, 10 in South America, 3 in Oceania, while 9 have global reach. As a result, in line with the broader findings mentioned earlier, funding intermediaries were found to be predominantly based or active in North America and, specifically, the US. Last, out of the 91 intermediaries, we found that 17 had been asked by either Facebook or Google to

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[11] In this instance, we define news media organizations as organizations producing journalistic content, including fact-checkers

[12] https://www.Facebook.com/journalismproject/Facebook-abraji-brazil-training-program.

[13] https://www.Facebook.com/journalismproject/Facebook-journalist-training-program-turkey.

[14] https://tech.hindustantimes.com/tech/news/google-grants-1-million-for-promoting-news-literacy-in-india-story-hOOdZTDmjeFKDsDX4d3uxO.html.

[15] https://www.Facebook.com/journalismproject/fundacion-gabo-and-Facebook and https://latam.googleblog.com/2021/04/la-fundacion-gabo-y-google-news.html.

[16] https://europeanjournalism.fund and

[17] https://grant.ejc.net/s/gni-student-fellowship.

review grant applications for their funding programs. Additionally, we classified the ways in which Google and Facebook have been funding the news industry to direct, i.e., by awarding grants to news organizations, and indirect, i.e., by providing training, fellowships, etc. (Table 1).

Similarly, we detected that funding intermediaries are involved in the grant-awarding process: directly (i.e., by allocating platforms' funds; Table 3) or indirectly (i.e., by reviewing grant applications or providing training, etc.; Table 4). A third way of involvement is a tad more complex: platforms funding directly intermediaries to support their own funding programs and, thus, funding indirectly news media organizations (Table 5). The vast majority of intermediaries were involved in training (47) and grant-awarding (37) projects, with scholarships (3) and fellowships (5) having the lowest participation.

Table 1 - Types of Funding and Intermediation

Stakeholders	**Direct Funding/Mediation**	**Indirect Funding/Mediation**	**(In)direct Funding/Mediation**
Platforms	Grants, advertising credits	Training, fellowships, etc.	Donations to support intermediaries (direct platform funding)
Funding Intermediaries	Handling grant distribution for platforms	Reviewing grant applications for platforms, providing training, etc.	Using platforms' donations to develop their own funding initiatives (indirect platform funding/direct intermediary funding)

Discussion

Both platforms' endeavors to fund journalism, news organizations and other relevant stakeholders are part and parcel of their strategy to become the de-facto infrastructural backbone of the news industry. This is not limited only to "platformizing" the vertical and horizontal axes of journalism (i.e., production and distribution) but also attempting to extend their political power to the larger news ecosystem (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018, 50). Facebook, in particular, has been dealing with a severe reputational crisis since 2016, principally due to its own shortcomings and repeated failures that led to a proliferation of disinformation, hate speech and other deleterious content, as well as to a massive privacy scandal with implications for the US Presidential Election of 2016. This was a turning point for Facebook on many levels that sought to change various policies to enforce trust and safety, albeit with questionable results, as the findings of the 'Facebook Papers' leak demonstrated. It might be that Facebook saw this opportunity to remedy a part of its deteriorating image through the launch of FJP: both from the perspective of emerging as a benefactor of a struggling news industry – especially by assuming the role of a coordinator with funding intermediaries – and from the perspective of capturing media in a bid to soften their criticism or reduce scrutiny.

We do not claim that any of the above two perspectives were indeed Facebook's objectives as we lack supporting qualitative data. However, both platforms have consistently asserted that news content returns insignificant revenue. Therefore, we find it difficult not to

argue that the primary goal has been to reap reputational and political gains[18]. Expanding Jurno and D'Andréa's framing of Facebook's strategic decision to assume a coordinating role and acting as a central node in the news industry's ecosystem, we contend that Facebook employed intermediaries to consolidate itself not only as an "'obligatory point of passage' for journalism" (Jurno and D'Andréa 2020, 520), but as an indispensable infrastructure for journalistic praxis and the broader governance of journalism. In that sense, FJP has indeed established "stronger ties" with the news industry (Fidji 2017): not only has it become of existential importance for news media organizations, especially with the Covid-19 crisis, it is also now vital for other industry stakeholders, from journalist associations to educational institutions.

The same applies to Google and the GNI, as it has fully embraced the concept of funding intermediaries, following Facebook's strategy; in some cases, it even used the same actors as Facebook. This demonstrates a divergence in Google's core strategy, according to which, in most cases, the company handled the procedures internally, as it did for instance with its DNI in Europe. Both platforms are now so entangled with and embedded in the news media ecosystem that it is increasingly difficult to revert the level of dependency of stakeholders on them. We believe that this epitomizes the notion of infrastructural capture and, actually, hints at a deeper level of capture, one that expands beyond the socio-technical stack to networks and governance structures. Provided that online platforms rely on network effects to operate and maximize socioeconomic value, it makes sense for them to capture cultural producers, like news media, and their networks. Furthermore, the state of current policy-making, from Australia to Canada, fails to provide much-needed alternative remedies and, instead, risks entrenching platforms' asymmetrical power even more (Sebbah, Sire, and Smyrnaios 2020).

In our research, most intermediaries were journalist associations, which suggests that platforms have been using third parties to not only fund news media organizations, but also to capture stakeholders whose primary role is to protect and promote their trade associates' interests. In recent years, trade associations have been competing with one another in terms of lobbying policy-makers, especially in the EU which has been leading the regulatory race in relation to rules for competition and content (Alves et al. 2021). Journalist associations have the necessary expertise to distribute funds to peers, review grant applications and whatever else may be requested by platforms but, perhaps even more importantly, they have crucial networking capacities. As a result, platforms' funding for journalism may also have significant and unexpected consequences for the news industry's governance.

Furthermore, most funding projects benefited North American organizations, namely US-based. Even though the pandemic offered both platforms the chance to extend and increase their funding programs, both in quantity and in geographical reach, there is a priority for US-based organizations. While this could partly be due to the large news media market of the United States[19], it could also be due to "news deserts" (Stites 2011; Pickard 2019) that have been appearing throughout the country with negative consequences for local communities. At any rate, we believe that both crises have served as a means of legitimating platforms' intervention to the industry and capturing both media organizations and key governance stakeholders, hence the reason why the largest programs were launched during the Covid-19 pandemic and, mostly, aimed at supporting local US newsrooms.

Beyond North America, we also noticed a high number of recipients from Brazil, which had the most beneficiaries in South America, and Italy, which had the most

[18] https://blog.google/intl/en-au/company-news/outreach-initiatives/responding-to-revised-publisher-code/ and https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/jun/15/facebook-says-it-doesnt-need-news-stories-for-its-business-and-wont-pay-to-share-them-in-australia.

[19] https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/futureofmedia/us-media-index.

beneficiaries in Europe. What is more, Brazil and Italy provide for a compelling argument to think of these funding initiatives as part of the platforms' strategy to resist or influence regulation. In 2020, Brazil's Senate ahead of the presidential election in 2022, approved the bill 2630/20[20], aimed at combating disinformation; more recently, an amendment was added to the bill by the House of Representatives seeking to create a right to remuneration for news publishers for the use of their content by online platform. Interestingly, the bill's sponsor, congressman Orlando Silva, framed the legislative initiative as a way of regulating social media and restraining the spread of disinformation because, he argues, "the valorization of professional journalism allows for the production of reliable information, which creates a framework to address disinformation." Platforms have quite vocally opposed this bill, with the support of various journalist associations, including Abraji, that was mentioned in our findings section. However, the bill has received substantial criticism from civil society organizations due to risks of further entrenching market consolidation and power concentration both of large online platforms and traditional media (Alimonti and Doctorow 2022). Last, in 2021, another bill was introduced[21], drawing direct inspiration from Australia's NMDC, "[stipulating] that platforms with 'significant market power' pay 50% of the revenue obtained from the news published on the platforms to journalistic organizations."

In 2021, Italy as an EU member, transposed the Commission's Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market[22] which, inter alia, introduced a so-called "neighboring right", i.e., the right for news publishers to be remunerated by platforms for the (re)use of their content (Reuters 2021). It should be noted that while the Directive was announced in 2019 and the transposition expiration date was due in July 2021, only 11 EU Member-states have implemented the Directive so far (Matas 2022). Increasing funding spending in European countries could be seen as a way for platforms to proactively shield themselves from being forced by (trans)national policies to pay more. Having said that, we are unable at this time to draw further conclusions regarding the possible reasons why Italian news organizations have had such high participation in funding programs. Another important factor to consider is that Italy is home to the International Journalism Festival[23], which has received funding from both platforms[24]. This could mean that Italian journalists are better informed about funding opportunities, as well as that it is easier for them to connect to these platforms, and vice versa.

Concluding Remarks

At a time when more and more governments around the world consider or have already passed laws aiming to help journalism's sustainability by regulating the relationship between journalists, publishers and online platforms, we ought to have as better an understanding of the current state of affairs as possible. This paper set out to do exactly that. Therefore, we believe that our research project contributes, on the one hand, to an expansion of the analytical framework used to study media and infrastructural capture and, on the other hand, to the conceptual framework used to study platform governance, especially in relation to the news industry. Furthermore, through a distant reading of our data, we identified an interesting pattern that could aid in delineating these platforms' strategies and further illuminate them.

Specifically, we were able to discern: (i) the main focal points of the platforms' funding programs were local and regional news – including organizations that cover issues related to vulnerable or marginalized groups, as well as "relief funds" related to dealing with

[20] https://www.camara.leg.br/proposicoesWeb/fichadetramitacao?idProposicao=2256735.
[21] https://www.camara.leg.br/proposicoesWeb/fichadetramitacao?idProposicao=2277800.
[22] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2019/790/oj.
[23] https://www.journalismfestival.com.
[24] https://www.journalismfestival.com/supporters/.

the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, (ii) there was a significant increase in platform funding activities in 2019 that continued in 2020 and 2021 – perhaps related to the mushrooming of regulatory frameworks related to online platforms, (iii) most beneficiaries were based or operated in the US – albeit the number of beneficiaries does not necessarily equate to the level of funding, (iv) largest and established publishers participated the most in funding programs, and that (v) both platforms have incorporated "funding intermediaries" in their funding strategies.

Moreover, we believe that the strategic decision of Facebook and then Google to integrate funding intermediaries in their strategy to dispense funds and award grants, has allowed them to capture more news industry stakeholders, legitimize the selections of grantees and transform into a sort of de-facto infrastructure for journalism. Through our analysis, we identified 91 of said intermediaries belonging to various governance categories. As a result, we also contend that this development affects the whole system of governance that these platforms partake in, as stakeholders have been increasingly assuming more roles within that same system and are often conflicting with other stakeholders' interests. Consequently, this incites more friction, competition or co-opetition (Daidj and Jung 2011).

As a result, we assert that the platforms' strategic decision has not only been to distribute money through a complicated governance structure, but also to target parts of the industry that have been hurt by an ongoing crisis that the platforms themselves have severely aggravated, namely due to the large capture of the advertising industry. In that sense, it would not be an exaggeration to describe this as a kind of "reputation-washing" from the part of the platforms. However, funding journalism ensures neither media capture, i.e., positive or lack of critical coverage, nor regulatory capture, i.e., avoiding or adjusting regulation. Therefore, we frame capture here more as a political-economic concept to study platform power. As Google themselves have said, these initiatives are "somewhere between philanthropy and self-interest" (Fanta and Dachwitz 2020, 38). In that sense, they should be seen as a subtle diversification and expansion of their lobbying activities, as is the case with corporate social responsibility programs.

Despite the fact that these platforms are not the sole reason for the crisis endured by the news industry, they have exacerbated it (Nechushtai 2018, 1051; Schiffrin 2021, 7). As Marius Dragomir has written, "media outlets doing solely independent journalism, especially those serving audiences outside the Western world, have either succumbed to financial crises or are hardly surviving" (Dragomir 2018, 1132). While Dragomir speaks to state capture of media and how governments, particularly in Eastern Europe, have been trying to control news media through funding initiatives, we can draw a parallel between state and platform funding for journalism insofar as the latter attempts to exert influence on three levels: how they are treated publicly by news media, influence regulatory interventions by making themselves indispensable especially in a sensitive industry that policymakers are deeply engaged in, and redeem their damaged public relations image.

The limitations of our research mainly derive from the difficulty of gathering data regarding platforms' funding beneficiaries and, specifically, the exact money that was allocated to each one of them. More often than not, platforms did not divulge financial specificities of their projects or they simply revealed a range of possible grants that beneficiaries would get. As a result, transparency obligations envisioned by EU's Digital Services Act or Canada's Online News Act are welcome and should be further expanded. Moreover, due to the lack of an easily explorable database of platforms' funding projects, we had to manually gather, record, clean and analyze that data. In some cases, organizations were listed differently from one project to another, which resulted in having unnecessary duplicates. As a result, our data are not complete and may contain errors. For this reason, we will share our data and invite other researchers to collaborate on improving them.

Finally, qualitative research that includes interviews with beneficiaries and/or intermediaries will greatly benefit our understanding of the advantages and risks of platform funding. This should also be conducted in places where state capture is still very prevalent, especially in countries of the Global South, to understand the motivations of news media organizations to participate in platforms' funding initiatives and the subsequent implications. Moreover, future research should also tackle the implications of having educational institutions play the part of funding intermediaries and how this may affect the future of journalism. We aspire that this paper and our research will serve as a useful resource and as a departure point for other researchers to engage with this timely topic.

Disclosure Statement

The author report there are no competing interests to declare.

Data Availability Statement

Data openly available in a public repository that issues datasets with DOIs (Open Science Foundation).

Data Reposition

Data can be found here: https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/6C7VQ.

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Appendix I – Tables

Table 2 - Total beneficiaries of Facebook and Google's funding programs per continent

Continent	**Google**	**Facebook (Meta)**	**Grand Total**
Africa	113	13	126
Asia	789	105	894
Europe	1705	130	1835
North America	1979	1121	3100
South America	1141	140	1281
Oceania	182	38	220
Global	5	6	11
Grand Total	5911	1543	7467

Table 3 - Funding intermediaries who distributed grants on behalf of Facebook and/or Google (indirect funding/direct mediation)

Beneficiaries	**Country**	**Funding Project Title**	**Amount Dispensed on Behalf of Platforms**	**Type of Organization**	**Project Year**
The Walkley Foundation	Australia	FJP COVID-19 Australian News Relief Fund Program	$2,000,000	Philanthropy	2021
International Fact-Checking Network (Poynter)	Global	FJP Fact-Checking Innovation Initiative	$800,000	Non-Profit Organization	2020
Canadian Journalism Foundation (CFJ)	Canada	FJP Local News Accelerator	$2,500,000	Philanthropy	2019
NewsMatch	US	FJP Grant	$1,000,000	Non-Profit Organization	2018
School of Journalism, Ryerson University / DMZ	Canada	The Digital News Innovation Challenge (DNIC)	$50,000	Education	2018
Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at CUNY	Global	Video Business Accelerator	$180,000	Education	2021
Native American Journalists Association	US	FJP Scholarships	$250,000	Journalist Association	2018-2022
Asian American Journalists Association	Asia	FJP Scholarships	$250,000	Journalist Association	2018-2022
Local Independent Online News Publishers (LION Publishers)	US	FJP LION News Revenue Fellowship	$1,000,000	Journalist Association	2021
Masyarakat Anti Fintah Indonesia	Indonesia	GNI Media Literacy	$189,000	Non-Profit Organization	2019
Media Diversity Australia	Australia	GNI Fellowships	$45,000	Non-Profit Organization	2022

Table 4 - Funding intermediaries who reviewed applications on behalf of or in collaboration with Facebook and/or Google (indirect funding/indirect mediation)

Beneficiaries	**Country**	**Funding Project Title**	**Type of Organization**	**Project Year**
The Walkley Foundation	Australia	FJP COVID-19 Australian News Relief Fund Program	Philanthropy	2021
Lenfest Institute for Journalism	US	FJP Community Network Grants	Philanthropy	2020
The Discourse	Canada	FJP Community Network Grants	News Media Organization	2020
News Media Canada	Canada	FJP Community Network Grants	Journalist Association	2020
International Fact-Checking Network (Poynter)	Global	FJP Fact-Checking Innovation Initiative	Non-Profit Organization	2020
Local Media Association (LMA)	US	Local civic news organizations	Non-Profit Organization	2019
Institute for Nonprofit News (INN)	US	FJP Training	Journalist Association	2020
National Association of Broadcasters (NAB)	US	FJP COVID-19 Local News Relief Fund Grant Program	Journalist Association	2020
University of Lagos	Nigeria	GNI COVID-19 Vaccine Counter-Misinformation Open Fund	Education	2021
Stanford Internet Observer	US	GNI COVID-19 Vaccine Counter-Misinformation Open Fund	Education	2021
Australian Science Media Centre	Australia	GNI COVID-19 Vaccine Counter-Misinformation Open Fund	Non-Profit Organization	2021
Christian Medical College	India	GNI COVID-19 Vaccine Counter-Misinformation Open Fund	Education	2021
Data Leads	India	GNI COVID-19 Vaccine Counter-Misinformation Open Fund	News Media Organization	2021
Earthseed	US	GNI COVID-19 Vaccine Counter-Misinformation Open Fund	News Media Organization	2021
World Health Organization	Global	GNI COVID-19 Vaccine Counter-Misinformation Open Fund	Non-Profit Organization	2021
Projor	Brazil	GNI COVID-19 Vaccine Counter-Misinformation Open Fund	News Media Organization	2021
Vaccinate Your Family	US	GNI COVID-19 Vaccine Counter-Misinformation Open Fund	Non-Profit Organization	2021

Table 5 - Funding intermediaries who received funding from platforms to either support them or support other organizations through them (both direct and indirect funding/direct mediation)

Beneficiaries	**Country**	**Funding Project Title**	**Amount Granted by Platforms**	**Type of Organization**	**Project Year**
American Journalism Project	US	FJP Local civic news organizations	$1,000,000	Non-Profit Organization	2019
European Journalism Centre	Europe	FJP European Journalism COVID-19 Support Fund	$3,000,000	Non-Profit Organization	2021
The Knight Foundation	US	FJP Knight-Lenfest Local News Transformation Fund	$1,000,000	Journalist Association	2019
Local Media Association (LMA)	US	FJP Local civic news organizations	$1,000,000*	Non-Profit Organization	2019
Local Media Consortium (LMC)	US	FJP Local civic news organizations	$1,000,000*	Journalist Association	2019
National Council for the Training of Journalists	UK	FJP Community News Project	$9,000,000	Non-Profit Organization	2018-2020
The Pulitzer Center	US	FJP Local civic news organizations	$5,000,000	Philanthropy	2019
Report for America	US	FJP Local civic news organizations	$2,000,000	News Media Organization	2019
The Texas Tribune	US	FJP Grant	$2,500,000	News Media Organization	2019
The Rory Peck Trust	Global	FJP & RPT Resilience Programme for freelance journalists	$135,500	Non-Profit Organization	2018
News Catalyst	US	FJP Local News Transformation Fund	$1,000,000	News Media Organization	2020
Institute For Strategic Dialogue	UK	GNI Google UK Anti-Terror Fund	$1,355,000	Non-Profit Organization	2019
Internews Network	Global	GNI India Training Network	$1,000,000	News Media Organization	2020
Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications at Northwestern University	North America	GNI The Data-Driven Reporting Project	$2,000,000	Education	2021

Appendix II – Figures

Figure 2 - Geographical Distribution of Platform Funding Projects

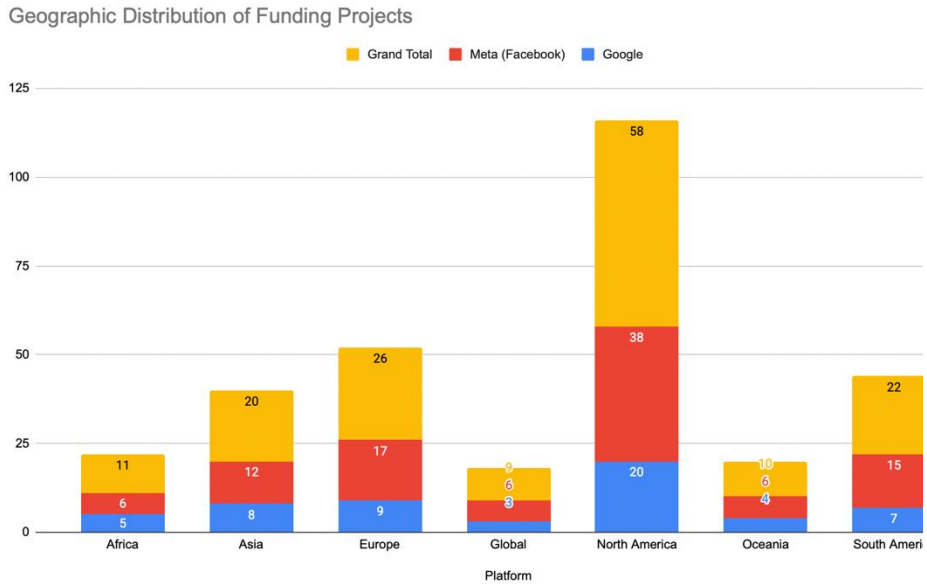
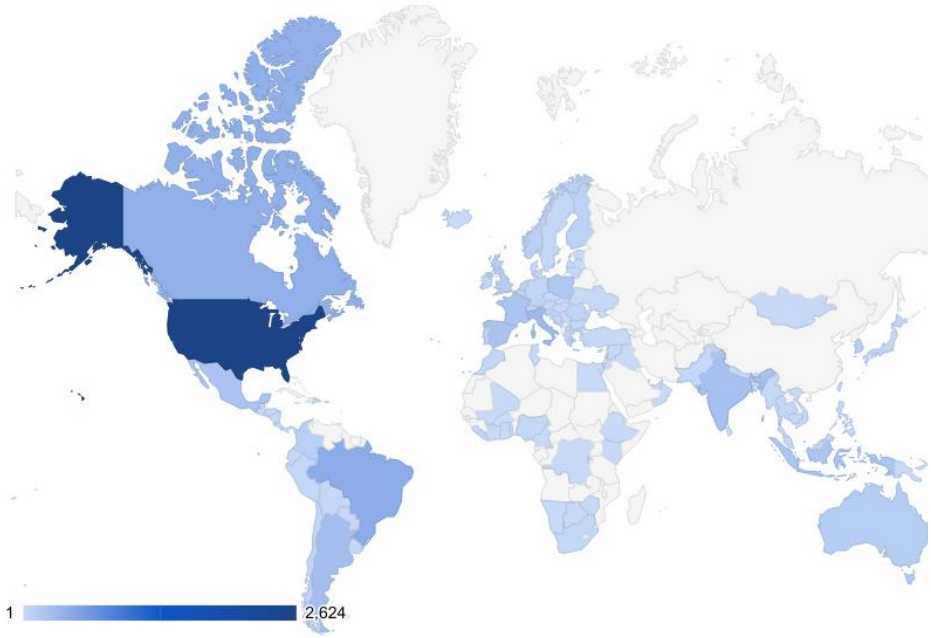


Figure 3 - Geographical Distribution of Funding Beneficiaries (Unique)[25]



[25] An interactive map can be found here.