The transnational media-political system of the *fin de siècle*

Kaiser Wilhelm II as a locus of the converging logics of expanding communications

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'A paper must always be in development. Standing still is falling behind', warned a German handbook for journalists and editors in 1901. It noted that 'what is going on out in the world, in high politics, the reader has long been used to finding out at the greatest speed over the wire—by telegraph or telephone—in his newspaper.'[1] Innovation, speed, and entangled means of communication thus defined the media at the dawn of the twentieth century. Yet how did the media actually portray such international high politics? And what did that portrayal in turn show about how the media-political system operated around the turn of the century?

While most media studies focus on national contexts, several scholars have called for transnational (public sphere) research perspectives.[2] Marie Cronqvist and Christoph Hilgert have argued for an understanding of the transnational and transmedial dimensions of history using the concept of 'entanglement'.[3] This transnational lens has recently been applied to the media around 1900 and the

mediatization of politics at the time.[4] However, these studies generally still focus on a particular medium, and do not capture the amalgam of entangled media technologies and infrastructure that constituted the underlying structure of any transnational media-political space. Such systemic analyses are offered for modern society by social scientists. While the classic *Four Theories of the Press*—which outlined authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, and Soviet communist systems—dominated post-war scholarship, scholars became increasingly critical of its normativity and American Cold War ideological bias.[5] Consequently, Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini suggest a new typology, dividing media systems into the Mediterranean polarized-pluralist, north/central European democratic-corporatist, and North Atlantic liberal models.[6] Critiques notwithstanding, this basic division remains widely applied, and Hallin and Mancini have extended their comparisons to non-Western and transnational contexts.[7] More recently, Andrew Chadwick has introduced the notion of the hybrid media system, recognizing that media innovations never fully replace older media, but create a new hybrid system, with one system integrated into or parasitic on the other—and the resulting system is not defined by the new media per se but by their social meaning. Importantly, he argues that rather than media and politics affecting one another, media, politics, and the public constantly co-create multiple new and interacting media logics.[8]

Henrik Bastiansen calls for the historicizing of this social-scientific media system perspective, but limits his plea to the study of such systems in national contexts.[9] Several historians have gone beyond this nation-state lens to understand how media infrastructures operated internationally, though often still departing from the broader 'nationalist' context of empire. They have focused on the British Empire—particularly British India and South African politics—German Empire, and Portuguese Empire.[10] However, Jean-Michel Johnston notes that in the nineteenth century there was already a 'telegraphic elite' of businessmen who interacted across

borders.[11] Dwayne Winseck and Robert Pike add that, while the global expansion of capital and capitalist imperialism went hand in hand with communication expansions—communications required investment, transnational investment required communications—the interests of business and imperial governments often conflicted rather than coincided in reality. Business preferred free trade and multinational operations across empires. This globalization of capital and communication peaked by 1913, after which it was devastated by the First World War and the 1929 stock market crash, and would only re-emerge in the 1980s–1990s.[12] The historical high point in transnational media communications at the start of the twentieth century constitutes the theme of this chapter, and to explore its nature and relationship with politics I focus on a particularly visible figure: the German Emperor Wilhelm II. A vanguard of 'publicity politicians' emerged in this period, of whom Wilhelm II was the most mediated monarch.[13]

Wilhelm II of the House of Hohenzollern was born in 1859 in the kingdom of Prussia, which became part of the newly founded German Empire in 1871. In 1888 he assumed the throne of this emerging 'Great Power', and reigned until his flight into exile in the Netherlands at the end of the First World War. In contrast to his grandfather Wilhelm I and his father Frederick III—who only reigned for 99 days—Wilhelm II adopted an activist style of rule, exemplified by his dismissal in 1890 of Otto von Bismarck, the 'Iron Chancellor' who had forged and stabilized the young Empire. Wilhelm II threw himself into strengthening Germany's economic, military, naval, and imperial position, against the background of the late nineteenth century's social Darwinian and nationalistic rivalry between modernizing nation-states. This effort made him internationally well known as 'the Kaiser', though his erratic behaviour provoked suspicion among friends and foes alike.

The literature on Wilhelm II is vast.[14] In recent decades it has extended to his interactions with the media, placing him in a broader

historiographical narrative of monarchs, their power increasingly (constitutionally) restricted, employing the new media to 'reinvent' their role as national figureheads of modernity.[15] Thomas Kohut observes how Wilhelm II sought to respond to and shape 'public opinion' as expressed in the press, and Christopher Clark and Martin Kohlrausch argue that these continual interactions with this press made him into a new type of 'media emperor'.[16] However, Kohlrausch notes that, while the media initially boosted the Kaiser's public role, a series of media scandals cramped his room for political manoeuvre.[17] In the wake of the scandals, criticism in the press often took the form of caricatures, which also featured as the postcards that were wildly popular among the German public.[18] Even films, which made him 'the first German film star', were eventually used in the First World War to mock him.[19] While some historians are already looking beyond Germany, with Jost Rebentisch comparing German and British caricatures and Nathan Orgill charting the international coverage of one political scandal, the scholarship on Wilhelm II and the media has generally focused on his role in Germany or in a particular medium.[20] Yet neither national politics nor particular media operated in a vacuum at the turn of the twentieth century, so what can a study of Wilhelm II tell us about the transnational system of interacting media?

Rather than elaborate further on how the media changed the monarchy, this chapter employs Wilhelm II as a case study to show the emergence of a new media system around 1900. I argue that politics in this period became highly transnational, because of the now converging logics of multiple interacting media technologies that had developed in the late nineteenth century. While this transnationality constituted a widening of the political space, it was sustained by an in-depth focus on a key media object such as the Kaiser who appealed to a large public, regardless of borders and media. The Kaiser was a central node in a transnational network of media technologies and political players. The chapter makes this

argument by exploring the different means of communication in the expanding *fin de siècle* media system, how the Kaiser met that system's requirements, and its path dependency in self-reinforcing the Kaiser as node.

A transnational media system

Why did Wilhelm II become so well known internationally? On a technical level, his visibility required means of communication to 'show and tell' the public about him, which fell into two categories: the 'front office' media that primarily 'distributed' information and which audiences consumed directly; and 'back office' communications that mostly 'gathered' news material and which the public only engaged with indirectly. While media consumption was also affected by important social and political factors such as greater literacy and purchasing power, the liberalization of the press, and the extension of suffrage, the focus here will be the media and communications.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, that media front office saw a sequence of important innovations. The printing press industrialized thanks to the invention of the linotype machine, cylinder press, and rotary press, as well as the mass production of ink and wood pulp paper.[21] Globally, there were more than 3,000 newspaper titles in 1828, almost half of them in the English-speaking world, and this number increased tenfold to over 30,000 by 1900.[22] Large commercial press markets emerged in North America, East Asia, and Northern Europe (mass newspapers never really developed in Southern Europe).[23] This growth was reinforced by transnational learning curves: commercial French newspapers partly imitated the style and methods of the American penny press, and by the beginning of the First World War the *Petit Parisien* was the largest paper in the world with a circulation of over 2 million.[24] Major newspapers even began to publish abroad themselves, such as the popular British *Daily Mail*, established in 1896, which had a Paris edition and an

eye on Berlin.[25] However, by the start of the War, Germany—where newspapers also copied Anglo-American stylistic innovations—had surpassed both France and the early industrialized Britain in terms of newspaper numbers to become the largest producer of the printed word in the world.[26] By 1910, almost 4,000 newspapers were published in the young Empire, compared to 1,350 in France and 2,000 in the similarly young Italian state, and the total circulation of those German publications reached around 20 million.[27] While the German press remained comparatively decentralized, a number of popular *Generalanzeiger* newspapers emerged in Berlin that appealed to a national audience (though important regional papers such as the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* were also read across the country).[28] The German Emperor was thus surrounded by a rapidly growing national press—increasingly published from the imperial metropole of Berlin where he himself resided—which in turn constituted part of a greatly expanding transnational press landscape.

Crucially in this period, the Kaiser's visibility was greatly enhanced by the proliferation of visual media. The invention of lithography, the daguerreotype, and photography enabled printers to capture—and distribute on a mass scale—both private images of Wilhelm II and many of his public appearances. In the late nineteenth century, photography in particular advanced qualitatively and quantitatively, fostering a booming international illustrated press managed by image agents.[29] In Germany, moreover, photojournalists enjoyed a higher status than, say, in the Netherlands.[30] Illustrated magazines played a major role in the distribution of images, with the French *Petit Journal* and *Petit Parisien* supplements leading the way in terms of novelty and circulation.[31] Important German illustrateds were *Die Woche* and *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung*; the latter's circulation growing from 23,000 a week in 1894 to 1 million in 1915.[32] The public also consumed the Kaiser's photographic image through the more intimate media of *cartes de visite* and photo albums.[33] And then

Figure 3.1. The Kaiser's travels made for interesting media coverage. 'Ferientage des Kaisers: Der Kaiser an Bord der "Hamburg" auf der Nordlandsfahrt', *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* (22 July 1906).

there were the caricatures in the proliferating number of satirical magazines.[34] The German *Kladderadatsch* and *Simplicissimus*—whose circulation increased from 15,000 in 1898 to 86,000 in 1908—featured among internationally well-known publications such as the British *Punch* and *Tid-Bits* and French *Journal Amusant* and *Le Rire*. The socialist *Wahre Jacob* even reached a circulation of 230,000 by 1908.[35] Caricatures of the Kaiser also appeared regularly as postcards, which now constituted part of the visual mass media—at the turn of the century, 500 million postcards were sent in Germany alone.[36]

All these still images were increasingly supplemented with moving images thanks to the invention of the kinetoscope and cinematograph. Around 1900, both American and European film was flourishing; the French companies Pathé and Gaumont were in the lead and had offices in the US, but there were also large British, German, and Italian film industries that distributed internationally.[37] By the outbreak of the First World War, there were 568 registered cinemas in London and 350 in Berlin.[38] By 1918, Wilhelm II had featured in more than 300 film clips, which cinemas generally showed at the end of each screening.[39] His image was even woven into the fabric of people's daily lives. There were posters for men's clothing and Kaiser-branded consumer goods such as cigarettes.[40] Neither was the consumption of images restricted to a domestic audience. Stories and images of foreign royals and politicians were popular among Dutch audiences, for example.[41] Journalists internationally reflected on how the introduction of pictures had brought the most important transformation in their field, culminating in a new type of visual culture.[42] Finally, the Kaiser's growing (international) visual presence was 'given a voice' through the new sound medium of the phonograph—though Dutch caricaturists subsequently used the phonograph to ridicule the Kaiser's erratic speeches about international affairs.[43]

Much like the front office that 'distributed' the Kaiser's persona, the media system's back office that 'gathered' information saw a series of interconnected changes in the late nineteenth century.
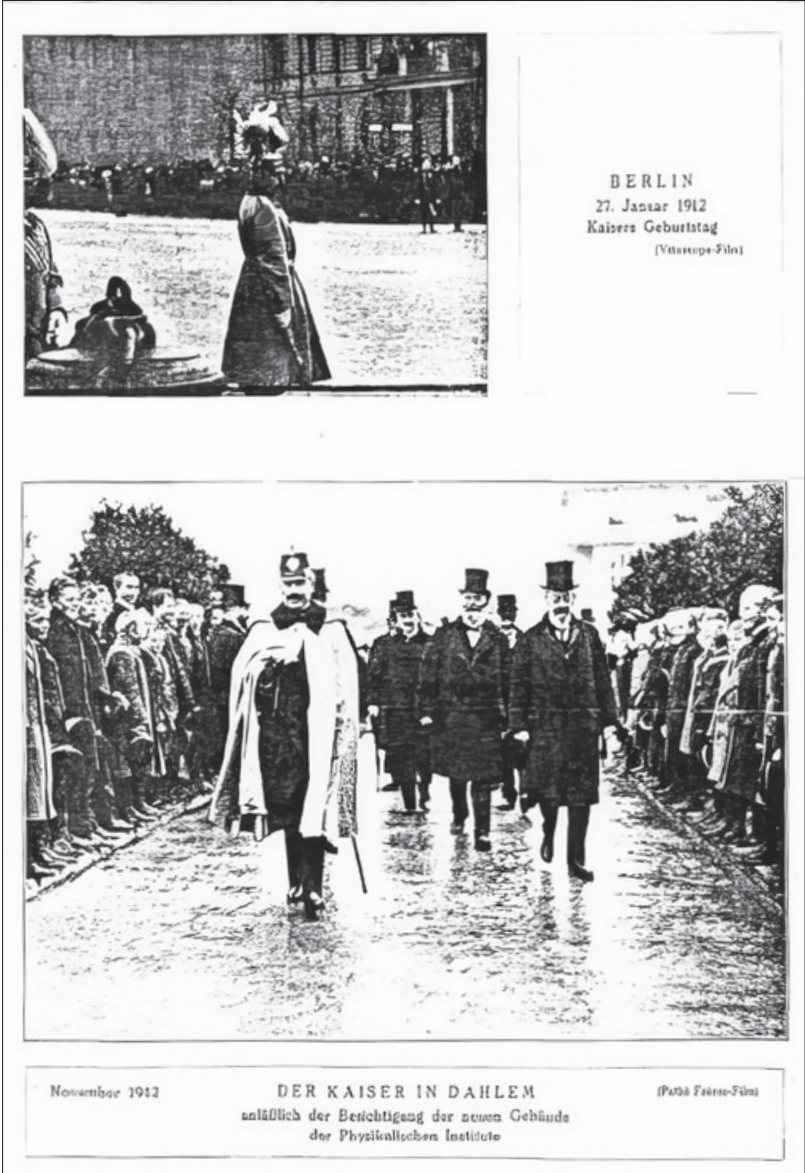
Figure 3.2. The media coverage extended to its mediatization of the Kaiser, as here, where a book included film stills (Klebinder 1912, 87).

Figure 3.3. Media mediating the mediation of the Kaiser in a caricature that depicted him being photographed. 'Après l'entrevue', *Le Rire* (28 Nov. 1908).

Newspapers increasingly found readerships in other countries, and many not only summarized news stories that had appeared in the press elsewhere, but also dispatched correspondents to gather news abroad. While the 1895 opening of the Kiel Canal by Wilhelm II was still only attended by a limited number of British journalists who exclusively represented the major London newspapers, subsequent news events in Germany attracted increasingly large crowds of correspondents, including from British regional newspapers.[44] Foreign correspondents relied on expanding telegraph networks to cable their reports to their newspapers. London, the initial news hub of the world, was connected to North America in 1866, Asia

THE TWO SOVEREIGNS AT FRIEDRICHSHOF.

In the *Empire Review* Mr. Edward Dicey makes the most of his opportunity for promoting Anglo-German good-fellowship afforded him by the recent meeting of King Edward and the Kaiser. King Edward's opinions, when expressed, are the opinions of the English, indeed of the Britons all over the Empire. Mr. Dicey wishes that the Kaiser's opinions were as much influenced by his private sentiments as is generally believed in England. The Kaiser is certainly apt to form decided opinions rapidly, to express them forcibly, and sometimes to modify them unexpectedly. That is to say, he is "a German after

Nebelspalter.]   [Zurich.

Uncle and Nephew.
It does not follow that those who embrace will never fight.

the German heart." Germans, the writer thinks, are nationally prone to come to definite conclusions on insufficient grounds, but at the same time they are nationally ready to listen to objections and acknowledge the force of their opponent's arguments. Notwithstanding official denials, he thinks the recent meeting in Friedrichshof may indirectly, if not directly, influence the course of European politics, though he admits that he has no grounds, other than those of observation and information in the press, open to everyone.

AN INNOVATION IN THE CONSTITUTION.

It was undeniably an innovation on the spirit, if not the letter, of our Constitution that the preliminaries, in

a sense, of the Anglo-French Agreement should have been conducted by the King in person, not by the British Ambassador in Paris, instructed by the Foreign Office. It will be a greater innovation still if the preliminaries to an Anglo-German Agreement should have just been concluded by King Edward for England and the Kaiser for Germany—so great an innovation indeed that it has not taken place. No such agreement has been drawn up. Mr. Dicey, however, imagines the contrary, and justifies the non-existent as follows :—

> Happily for ourselves the good sense of Englishmen is ready to approve of any innovation which, in their judgment, is useful and beneficial, even if it is not in accordance with strict precedent or State etiquette. The innovation, however, would not have been passed without grave protests if the Throne of England had not been occupied by a sovereign who has so thoroughly identified himself with his people, and who commands their absolute confidence in respect to his high ability, his genuine patriotism, his loyalty to the Constitution, his deep sympathy with our British ideas and his extreme regard for the interest of our British Empire.

The fact that the Kaiser personifies his people in much the same way as King Edward personifies his, will, Mr. Dicey thinks, do much to win the approval of the German nation for anything endorsed by their Sovereign.

THE GROWTH OF THE ONE MAN SYSTEM.

Anent this probably weightily important meeting of Sovereigns, the writer notes the growth of the One Man system of administration in both the New and the Old World. In America, with neither an unemployed nor a pauper class, he considers it most remarkable, and part of a general tendency all over the world to increase the authority of personal rulers, whether Presidents, Dictators, Kings, or Emperors (and, he might have added, Premiers), and consequently to impair the authority of Constitutional Parliaments. Of this tendency the recent meeting at Friedrichshof is the strongest proof.

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THE *Windsor Magazine* is a light holiday number, its two chief features being a fully illustrated article on "The Art of Louise Jopling" and the "Chronicles in Cartoon," this time devoted to Colonial and Anglo-Colonial statesmen, from the late Mr. Seddon and Sir Edmund Barton to Lord Milner and Dr. Jameson.

THE *Burlington Magazine* for several· months past has been publishing a series of articles, by Mr. C. J. Holmes, on the development of Rembrandt as an etcher. In concluding the series in the September number, Mr. Holmes says :—

> The labour of the greater part of his life was concerned with real things and real people, and much of his work errs, if at all, from being too gross and solid. Yet when he shakes himself free, as most great artists have done, from the shackles of earthly things, and approaches the unseen world of the imagination, the training of his early life continues to assert itself ; the invisible is made substantial ; and where others deal with the imagery of the Christian faith like children, like anatomists, or like costumiers, Rembrandt as an interpreter of its Founder's spirit has a place with Fra Angelico.

Figure 3.4. The media used politicians to represent their empires and communicate international relations to readers. 'The Two Sovereigns at Friedrichshof', *Review of Reviews* (Sept. 1906), 267.

and Africa in the 1860s and 1870s, and finally Australasia in 1876, the last increasing the speed of communication between Australia and Britain from three months in the mid nineteenth century to six hours in 1900.[45] As both France and Germany sought independence from British cables, German policy focused on installing its own telegraph lines both to guarantee its supply of news and to spread propaganda internationally—including about the Kaiser and his assertive foreign policies.[46] The global distribution of telegraphic news was monopolized in the second half of the nineteenth century by an international cartel of agencies consisting of Britain's Reuters, France's Havas, and Germany's Wolff (and later America's Associated Press).[47] As Wolff had ties with Wilhelm II's government, it served to keep the monarch in public view internationally. The interest in telegraphic communication meant that the volume of global news traffic increased by 300 per cent in the first decade of the twentieth century, and so the global telegraph network played a key role in shaping a truly transnational media system.[48] Finally, in the late nineteenth century another innovation came into use: the telephone. This medium was not only used for gathering news, but also for transmitting live events.[49] By the early 1880s, Berlin already had 525 telephone connections and Hamburg 483.[50] And by 1900, the Kaiser had his own special telegraph, post, and telephone connections at his Berlin palace, thus positioning him squarely in the era's expanded media system.[51]

Wilhelm II could be so well known internationally because of the new back office communications that gathered news about his persona and the front office communications that distributed that news rapidly and widely. Yet together, entangled, they formed a truly transnational media 'system', which was greater than the sum of its parts. The all-pervasiveness of the Kaiser in this system was reinforced by the rising media density in urban areas and concomitant collective media spaces. Contemporaries thought urbanization was one of the main changes of their era, a process that produced a new city culture.[52]

While it was uneven and accelerated around the turn of the century, urbanization was an international phenomenon—Japan, for example, was one of the first to see high levels of urbanization.[53] The media interacted with cityscapes, as when audiences in New York in the 1890s consumed early forms of mass broadcasting together in public, having read about the broadcasts in the newspapers beforehand.[54] Germany experienced a particularly fast urbanization at the end of the nineteenth century, which amplified such developments—mid century, the German bourgeoisie was already an 'urban elite whose defining characteristic was its connectedness, a quality which tied it to its counterparts in cities across Europe and eventually the globe'.[55] Following the likes of London and Paris, by 1900 the population of Berlin had risen to almost 2 million, and with the democratization of communications the Kaiser's imperial capital now constituted a large community of media consumers who were even more inter-connected with the rest of the world.[56]

The logics of the media system

Wilhelm II occupied an enviable position in the transnational media system, but what does that reveal about the logics of the various interacting media of his age? Four connected logics of the new commercial mass media emerge, which will be addressed in detail here: attractive language, visuals, action, and proxies.

The ubiquity of the Kaiser's published speeches reflected how the end product of most contemporary media—and especially print media—was still text. Journalists needed words to fill their columns, and the more interesting their written content, the better. They reported extensively on Wilhelm II because of the sensational nature of his speeches.[57] He was good at memorizing his speeches and delivering them as if they were spontaneous, and he spoke on a wide range of issues including social, political, military, cultural, and scientific policies.[58] The striking style and content of Wilhelm's

speeches also appealed to the media abroad. British newspapers liked their emotion and substance, which compared favourably with the formulaic pronouncements of other monarchs, and was occasionally used to criticize their own royalty.[59] The Belgian *Journal de Bruxelles* even noted that 'when his majesty speaks, writes or telegraphs, we expect a surprise, to see a shock', indicating the Kaiser's chosen means of communication as well as his inherent newsworthiness.[60] However, Wilhelm's verbal eccentricity also met with calls for restraint both in the German Parliament and the (international) press.[61] Caricatures mocked his speeches, notably illustrating their point by invoking another new medium: they often depicted the emperor with a gramophone record to symbolize his repetitive, monotonous tone.[62] Such humour was not confined to the German media space. He was a focal point for satire internationally, with barbed remarks in the Austrian *Neues Wiener Witzblatt*, American *Los Angeles Examiner*, and Japanese *Tokyo Puck*.[63] His international press appeal was evident in several British papers, which hoped his wild speeches would long continue because they made such useful copy.[64] This media logic, demanding sensational content, ultimately led to the (re)publication of collections of his speeches, which went on to be published in translation—introducing one collection, the *Daily Chronicle* even noted in 1904 that his entire biography could be written using only his speeches.[65] Across the Atlantic, the *New York Times* later also published the Kaiser's collected speeches and telegrams, again illustrating the different channels of communication he employed and the transnational appeal of those communications.[66]

Given the late nineteenth-century improvements in capturing and printing images, journalists and editors operating in a competitive market eagerly could enhance their stories with distinctive visual content—the Kaiser being the definition of striking, for better or worse, with his eagle helmet, jackboots, and upward-pointing 'W' moustache.[67] His ever-changing uniforms also featured prominently in illustrated magazines such as the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung*.[68]

Young men even tried to copy the famous moustache.[69] These features were also eagerly exploited, and further accentuated and popularized, in the many caricatures of the emperor—and eventually the moustache became a powerful symbol for his weakness.[70] Positive or negative, the media's use of Wilhelm's image acknowledged his international 'visual value'. For his silver jubilee, the film industries of France, Britain, Italy, and the US collectively published a book on his role in film. It noted that he was a 'screen gentleman of all cultures'—a man always in the spotlight and a protector of the nascent film industry—and its pages displayed the Kaiser's film 'images, that have already been shown to millions of spectators in all cultured countries of the world'.[71] One more self-aware caricature had representatives of the well-known German satirical magazines *Simplicissimus*, *Jugend*, and *Kladderadatsch* bowing to their monarch and thanking him for all the useful material he had provided them with.[72] The insistent media logic of visual appeal, supplied in abundance by the eccentric Kaiser, cut across all the different media formats and national media landscapes.

The international reporting also demonstrated how competition and frequent press deadlines meant the demand for interesting content was sustained and continual. The Kaiser was a media object of choice not just because of his speeches and looks, but also because he provided journalists with a steady stream of newsworthy events. Photographers and film crews had a range of scenarios to pick from: the modern sportsman attending regattas or car races; the traditional aristocrat enjoying hunting parties; the modern family man.[73] His family offered additional opportunities—his son, Crown Prince Wilhelm, featured in the *Illustrated London News*, now at home with a stuffed toy, now playing football or riding a pony.[74] Royal celebrations spoke to the public imagination, as did visits to other royals.[75] The Kaiser's travels were not limited to such monarchical encounters, however, as he was always on the move. The cover photos of *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* showed him in Vienna, visiting his Chancellor

LA CÈNE A FAIRE

« Prenez et buvez, ceci est mon sang, le sang de la nouvelle alliance. »

Le roi Édouard. — Buvez-en tous... C'est le vin de la nouvelle alliance et vous m'en direz des nouvelles!

Caricature de Charles Pourriol (*L'Indiscret,* 15 novembre 1905).

* *La nouvelle alliance* c'est la paix universelle.

Figure 3.5. The personalization of politics saw the media use a cast of political characters to report on politics (Grand-Carteret 1908, 244).

Bernhard von Bülow at the latter's holiday home on the German island of Norderney, and aboard his imperial yacht for his annual *Nordlandfahrt* to Norway.[76] Even in the press of the rival empire, the Kaiser was popular in the early years of his reign in the 1890s, in part because of his frequent visits to Britain and the many events he attended there, and British journalists contrasted his energetic behaviour with the comparatively staid lives of other monarchs.[77] The Kaiser also travelled further afield, notably to the Holy Lands in the Levant in 1898 when he symbolically dedicated holy sites to Protestant and Catholic Germans.[78] The mystical orientalism of the trip was newspaper fodder, and even at the time the French *Petit Journal* reflected on the plethora of journalists and photographers who ensured the Kaiser figure was at the centre of media attention.[79] Part of the reason was that his events were carefully choreographed and thus easy to capture on film.[80] Looking back on Wilhelm's reign after the First World War, the German entrepreneur Walter Rathenau observed that he had created an endless spectacle of mediated events.[81] While the noted journalist Maximilian Harden had once derisively dubbed Wilhelm *Filmhelm* and *Reisekaiser* (travel Kaiser) for this reason, the popularity of his behaviour reflected the media's need both in Germany and abroad for a continual supply of newsworthy material.[82]

An analysis of the Kaiser thus shows how media competitiveness to a hitherto unseen degree combined with ever faster communication technologies in the frantic pursuit of attractive textual and visual content. Even in Germany itself, where newspapers still adhered more closely to literary logics and political party affiliations than in Britain or the US, journalists eagerly reported the flow of news about their emperor's exploits. Yet beyond these practical logics, a final meta logic emerges: the complex 'modernity' of the turn of the twentieth century increased demand for simplifying symbols. People need heuristic shorthands or concrete 'pictures in their heads' to cope with the complexities of reality, and the media similarly

Figure 3.6. The media mocked the hyperactive speechmaking of their media monarch Wilhelm II. 'Wilhelm der Schweigsame', *Simplicissimus* 3/28 (1898), 217.

needed 'representatives' of broader sociopolitical entities to help their consumers.[83] As traditionally well-known, authoritative figures, monarchs were natural representatives who added a personal dimension to (international) politics. After Bismarck, Wilhelm II became the German national symbol, and as a monarch he generally transcended partisan divides—with the exception of social-democratic criticism—which meant newspapers with increasingly honed commercial instincts could use him to appeal to a broad readership.[84] Importantly, this symbolic shorthand extended beyond Germany's borders. 'The Kaiser personifies his people in much the same way as King Edward personifies his', summarized the *Review of Reviews*, which as its title suggests was a digest of broader press opinion.[85] The *Berliner Börsen-Courier* noted that a contemporary Frenchman had described Wilhelm in similar terms.[86] However, this personification was not necessarily positive. The symbol of the Kaiser was frequently used in the media, especially by caricaturists, to criticize German politics and its supposed 'theatricality'.[87]

The media system's path dependency

I have set out how the figure of the Kaiser fulfilled the needs of a transnational media system, but why did it maintain and even increase its central position in the media? The answer lies in path dependency. Once the media had committed to a particular media object like the Kaiser, it was natural and advantageous to maintain this attention, leading to a snowball effect in which he attracted ever more attention. While his government's publicity strategy helped, his continued media presence resulted above all from his position as public protagonist, the ever-growing 'pack' of journalists who surrounded him, the scandals that engulfed him, and the redistribution of media content.

Given the rise of the mass press in the late nineteenth century and the Kaiser's natural advantages in the media landscape due to his

'traditional authority' combined with his eccentricity, several media-savvy staffers in his government saw the potential of exploiting his media persona for political purposes. Bismarck said as soon as he became emperor, Wilhelm II had feared negative press and wanted to deflect it.[88] However, rather than Wilhelm II himself, it was his subordinates who devised his press strategy. Bismarck had attempted to influence the press proactively, and his later successor Bülow—who had worked in Bismarck's press bureau—continued in the same vein.[89] As neither the court nor the Chancellery had its own press department, the official promotion of Wilhelm II was engineered through the press offices of the Foreign Office and Naval Office.[90] While the government-affiliated newspapers *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Kölnische Zeitung* openly supported Wilhelm II, other newspapers and journalists were subsidized secretly.[91] The Wolff press agency was also used to spread the official message, and increasingly the government also sought to control the telegraph infrastructure to shape international communication.[92] Even though this publicity work helped keep Wilhelm II in the public eye, it could only work if the wider (non-government) media and its audience were receptive to it.

The wider media was indeed receptive, in part because of a self-reinforcing dependence on the Kaiser, its key protagonist. As soon as journalists covered particular activities or journeys, narrative logic dictated that they continue to report on them, and on their eventual outcomes. And once readers were familiar with this striking protagonist, it was easier to catch their attention with another Kaiser story. People read about figures they know, not unknown names. Stories of Wilhelm II meeting other monarchs meant multiple well-known protagonists were involved, which made them even more attractive from a reporting perspective. Such encounters had added value for the media, as the monarchs symbolized their nations and their interactions could thus be used to illustrate the state of international relations. As Wilhelm II and Edward VII had the most annual encounters with other monarchs, they were exceptionally valuable

protagonists.[93] They enabled the media to reduce the complexities of international politics to an ongoing saga with a limited cast of characters: Wilhelm II, Bülow, the Belgian King Leopold II, the British Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain, the Prime Minister of the Cape Colony Cecil Rhodes, and the American President Theodore Roosevelt.[94] Snowballing media interest in the Kaiser and those he interacted with added to his draw as a media object, as was also manifested in the caricatures. Satirists across the world depicted him and his fellow protagonists to criticize their handling of international affairs.[95] Last but not least, the self-reinforcing reliance on the Kaiser's persona extended to advertising and the new consumer society. Advertisers benefited from using the image of a well-known figure like the Kaiser on their products—and in the advertisements for their products in the newspapers.[96]

Path dependency also manifested itself on a practical level. The better known the Kaiser was, the more journalists followed him. This dynamic was encouraged by the Kaiser himself, as he surrounded himself with journalists and photographers who could capture his image.[97] He insisted on this even when it conflicted with etiquette.[98] At the opening of the Kiel Canal in 1895, he was personally involved in accrediting journalists from 170 countries, again highlighting the transnational nature of the media system in which he operated.[99] In fact, according to the German *Fränkischer Kurier* in 1906, Wilhelm was particularly hospitable to foreign journalists, as he believed them to be more favourable towards him than the German press. He even invited them to private events such as his son's wedding.[100] A royal press corps, including photographers, travelled with him on his many extended journeys at home and abroad, and had considerable freedom to report on him, his entourage, and the impression he made on audiences abroad.[101] Wilhelm II played a key role in orchestrating this 'travelling pack', and their reporting further enhanced his media personality and by extension his value as a media protagonist. It all

contributed to the Kaiser's increasingly prominent and unavoidable role in international reporting.

Path dependency was reinforced not only by positive news; negative reporting did as much if not more to cement Wilhelm II's position in the transnational media. The many scandals that marked his reign were ready fuel. His dismissal of Bismarck in an attempt to exercise more power himself arguably constituted the first scandal. Then six years into his reign, the historian Ludwig Quidde published a study of the Roman Emperor Caligula and his disastrous rule, during which he had rid himself of his mentor—clear criticism of the Kaiser and his abandonment of his first chancellor. Once the article was reprinted as a pamphlet it attracted a great deal of attention and caused a media scandal, paving the way for the harsher criticism of later scandals. In 1906, such criticisms reached a new level when the Kaiser's closest friend, Prince Philipp zu Eulenburg, was accused of homosexuality. The political influence of the Kaiser's close circle of advisors was openly questioned, as was their obstruction of the relationship between monarch and people. The scandal suggested the emperor either surrounded himself with advisors who were to that society's way of thinking morally dubious, calling into question his own moral compass, or was unaware of their true character, which called into question his competence as a ruler. Two years later, the British *Daily Telegraph* published an interview with the Kaiser based on several conversations in which he attempted to improve Germany's relationship with Britain, but inadvertently offended not only the British, but also the French, Russians, Japanese, South African Boers, and his own people. German newspapers from across the ideological spectrum castigated him for his remarks, and used the scandal as a pretext to openly criticize him for the first time. Each scandal was amplified because journalists felt they could not ignore the press coverage and thus added to it; each led to an increase in sensational stories about the Kaiser and supposed interviews with him. Neither he nor his staff could respond, as prosecuting

journalists in court would only create more attention.[102] These media storms were not limited to Germany. The *Daily Telegraph* affair shows that journalists and politicians in countries like France and Russia responded in their own newspapers to the stories about the Kaiser, prompting a response from the German newspapers and policymakers, and so on, shaping events as they unfolded.[103] The scandals demonstrated another aspect of the transnational media system's path dependency which surrounded Wilhelm II, in which attention—in this case negative—accumulated and turned him into a central node in the media space.

The Kaiser thus remained a focal point in the media because of the workings of path dependency, which saw attention beget more attention. He and his government facilitated this process through their engagement with the press, but it mainly resulted from his role as a narrative protagonist—interacting with other political protagonists, the increasing number of journalists who accompanied him, and the sensational media scandals in which he starred. Finally, once media content about the Kaiser had been produced, it could be reproduced in other formats. Film stills were printed in books. His image was pirated for postcards, added to bourgeois family montages and Berlin city scenes.[104] Caricatures in Germany and abroad played up the constant photographs and films, reinforcing his reputation as a personality around whom the media revolved.[105] The Kaiser thus constituted a type of political snowball that attracted and secured an ever increasing volume of media reporting, reinforcing his role as a focus of attention in an increasingly dense media system.

Conclusion

'There is no escaping the Kaiser's features, whether in hotel, restaurant, church, or any public buildings. In photographs, paintings, busts, coloured prints, medals, bas-reliefs, the Emperor's face is omnipresent,' observed the *Review of Reviews* in 1901. While the

comment primarily applied to the German capital, it contained a broader truth.[106] The Kaiser's visibility resulted from innovative, interconnected media and communication technologies. He fitted the media logics; the path dependence of his persona in their communications meant that his visibility was self-reinforcing. As a case study, the Kaiser thus confirms the emergence of a transnational media-political system. Rather than a 'sphere', the term 'system' is used to show the interconnectedness of a vastly expanded communications infrastructure and cultural-political space. This transnational media system was initially expensive and uneven, and not only included but excluded social groups.[107] It did not necessarily promote international political cooperation, but rather produced tensions between nationalism and internationalism, and the transnational infrastructure reinforced national distinctions and borders. The system promoted intra-imperial connections, but also drove economic globalization.[108] However, all the media needed a figure like the Kaiser around whom they could structure their reflections on the centrifugal and centripetal forces of the media-political world in which people lived. The Kaiser's persona resonated with audiences across borders, and could thus serve as a central node in an enlarged media-political space—and the network connecting such nodes then came to define the media system. While never omnipotent, Wilhelm II still liked to believe he was invested with divine power. By the turn of the twentieth century, however, the media had made him omnipresent. According to several contemporary journalists this omnipresence vested in him a new kind of informal power. The media enabled him to exercise political influence through a direct relationship with the people.[109] It was a relationship that Adolf Hitler and democratic leaders internationally would emulate.

Notes

1 Frizenschaf 1901, 126, 10.
2 Brüggemann et al. 2009; Conrad 2002; Fraser 2016.
3 Cronqvist & Hilgert 2017.
4 Rikitianskaia et al. 2018; van Waarden 2019.
5 Siebert et al. 1956.
6 Hallin & Mancini 2004.
7 Brüggemann et al. 2014; Hallin & Mancini 2012a; Hallin & Mancini 2012b.
8 Chadwick 2013, 1–48.
9 Bastiansen 2008.
10 Potter 2003, 2012; Kaul 2003, 2006, 2014; Kuitenbrouwer 2012; Tworek 2019; Garcia et al. 2017.
11 Johnston 2021, 11.
12 Winseck & Pike 2007.
13 Van Waarden forthcoming.
14 For important overviews of Wilhelm II's life and reign see Cecil 1989, 1996; Röhl 1993, 2001, 2008.
15 Plunkett 2003; van Ypersele 2006; Deploige & Deneckere 2006; Marklund 2016; Owens 2019; for a comparison with how earlier media constructed the public image of an absolute monarch, see Burke 1992.
16 Kohut 1991, 127–40; Clark 2000, 160–85; Kohlrausch 2010.
17 Kohlrausch 2005.
18 Steakley & Hermand 2004; May 2013.
19 Loiperdinger 1997; Tholas 2018.
20 Rebentisch 2000; Orgill 2016.
21 Luykx 1978, 249–56.
22 Bayly 2004, 19.
23 Hallin & Mancini 2004, 91.
24 Ibid. 92.
25 Geppert 2010.
26 Birmele 1991, 2–3; Cawley et al. 2019.
27 Hall 1977, 30; Bösch 2009, 36.
28 Luykx 1978, 295–8.
29 Bomhoff 2017; Vowinckel 2017.
30 Kester 2012.
31 Sèbe 2013, 96–136.
32 Luykx 1978, 298; Holzer 2017.
33 Giloi 2022.
34 Allen 1984, 48–102; Steakley & Hermand 2004; Rebentisch 2000; Wendel 1928; van Waarden 2022b.
35 Feaver & Gould 1981, 28; Allen 1984, 3–4.
36 May 2013; Axster 2012, 12; Giloi, 2011, 274–7.
37 Flynn 2019.
38 Rüger 2007, 52.

39 Giloi 2011, 270–1.

40 Ibid. 2022.

41 Kester 2012, 65.

42 Blumenfeld 1933, 141; Frederick Greenwood, 'Forty Years of Journalism', *English Illustrated Magazine* (July 1897), 498; Schwartz & Przyblyski 2004, 3.

43 'Een keizerlijk fonogram voor de conferentie te Algeciras', *Amsterdammer* (Feb. 1906), supplement; Wendel 1928.

44 Geppert 2010.

45 Read 1992, 45, 90–110; Potter 2003, vii, 27; Nickles 2003, 81.

46 Tworek 2019.

47 Read 1992; Basse 1991.

48 Bayly 2004, 461–2.

49 Chadwick 2013, 33–4.

50 Johnston 2021, 245.

51 'Der Post- und Telegraphen-Verkehr des Kaisers', *Berliner Neueste Nachrichten* (27 July 1907).

52 Bayly 2004, 170–98.

53 Bösch 2015, 62–102.

54 Chadwick 2013, 34.

55 Chapman 2005, 72; quote in Johnston 2021, 248.

56 Fritzsche 1998.

57 Clark 2000, 160–85.

58 Obst 2011, vii–xiv.

59 Kohlrausch 2002, 460.

60 'Lettre de Londres', *Journal de Bruxelles* (31 Oct. 1908), 1.

61 See, for example, 'Prince Bülow and the Emperor. Speech in the Reichstag', *The Times* (11 Nov. 1908), 9.

62 Rebentisch 2000, 92–9.

63 'Danzig', *Neues Wiener Witzblatt* 38 (1901); T. E. Powers, 'Never Again!', *Los Angeles Examiner* (Dec. 1908); *Tokyo Puck* 4/33 (1908).

64 Reinermann 2001, 325–53.

65 For example, Krieger & Penzler 1897–1913; 'Imperial Eloquence', *Morning Post* (13 Jan. 1904); 'The Kaiser by Himself', *Daily Chronicle* (13 Jan. 1904).

66 'Speeches by Kaiser Wilhelm II', *New York Times Current History of the War* (26 Dec. 1914), 209–17.

67 Kohlrausch 2009, 70.

68 For example, 'Neueste Aufnahme des Kaisers in der Uniform seines russischen 85. Inf. Rgts. Wiborg', *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* (20 Sept. 1908), 38, cover.

69 'Lord Burnham's Kaiser', *The Academy* (7 Nov. 1908), 437–9.

70 May 2013, 20–30; Allen 1984, 55.

71 Klebinder 1912, 16–17.

72 Depicted in Rebentisch 2000, 307.

73 Loiperdinger 1997, 41–53.

74 'Royalty's Happy Hours', *Illustrated London News* (31 Oct. 1908), 603.

75 Röhl 2008, 692; Urbach 2003, 991.
76 'Der Kaiser in Wien', *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* (17 June 1906), cover; 'Der Kaiser zu Besuch beim Reichskanzler in Norderney', *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* (30 June 1906), 455–6; 'Ferientage des Kaisers: Der Kaiser an Bord der "Hamburg" auf der Nordlandsfahrt', *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* (22 July 1906), cover; see also Marschall 1991.
77 Reinermann 2001, 106–36.
78 Fitzpatrick 2018.
79 'L'Empereur d'Allemagne en voyage', *Petit Journal* (6 Nov. 1898), illustrated supplement, 416.
80 Loiperdinger 1997, 47.
81 Rathenau 1921, 18.
82 Allen 1984, 54.
83 Lippmann 2017, 3–14; van Krieken 2012, 98–118.
84 Sieg 2013.
85 'The Two Sovereigns at Friedrichshof', *Review of Reviews* (Sept. 1906), 267.
86 'Ein Franzose über Kaiser Wilhelm II.', *Berliner Börsen-Courier* (23 May 1890).
87 Rebentisch 2000, 248–52; Allen 1984, 48–102.
88 Weber 1968, 226–40; Bismarck 2006, 77.
89 Piereth 1994, 34–6; Stöber 1996; Keyserlingk 1977; Bülow 1931, 512; Lerman 2002, 116–26.
90 Stöber 2000, 35–6; Mommsen 1991, 381–401; Kohut 1991, 138–9; Jungblut 1994.
91 Stöber 2000, 77–83; Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office), Berlin (PA AA), Geheime Ausgaben für Pressezwecke und Maßregeln zur Beeinflussung der Auslandspresse, Deutschland 126a secr.
92 Stöber 2000, 58; PA AA, Geheime Ausgaben für Pressezwecke und Maßregeln zur Beeinflussung der Auslandspresse, Deutschland 126a secr., R 1486; PA AA, Reichskanzler Graf von Bülow, Deutschland 122 Nr. 13, R 1323; Tworek 2019.
93 Paulmann 2002.
94 Van Waarden 2021; van Waarden 2022a; van Waarden & Kohlrausch 2022.
95 For example, 'Prosit Neujahr!', *Kladderadatsch* (31 Dec. 1905), supplement, 53; 'Eine Familiengeschichte', *Simplicissimus* 13/34 (1908), 562; 'Current History in Caricature', *Review of Reviews* (Apr. 1908), 351–5; Grand-Carteret 1908.
96 Paulmann 2002.
97 Sieg 2013, 256–7.
98 Stein 2006.
99 Irenäus, 'Von Kaiser und von der Presse II', *Frankfurter Zeitung* (3 Aug. 1906).
100 'Wie Kaiser Wilhelm II. von der Presse denkt', *Fränkischer Kurier* (14 July 1906).
101 Giloi 2011, 270–1; 'Sparsamkeit und Luxus', *BZ am Mittag* (20 Nov. 1908, 1 p.m.), 1.

102 Kohlrausch 2005, 84–301 *et passim*; Bösch 2009, 365–420; Domeier 2010; Steakley & Hermand 2004; Winzen 2002; 'Germany's "Revolver Press"', *The Bystander* (15 July 1914), 162; PA AA, Englische Journalisten, England 81 Nr. 3, R 5962, 114 ff.

103 Orgill 2016.

104 Klebinder 1912, 58–9; Giloi 2012; Giloi 2011, 267–77.

105 'Von der Kieler Woche', *Kladderadatsch* (11 July 1909), 28; 'Après l'entrevue', *Le Rire* (28 Nov. 1908); Rebentisch 2000, 92–9, 305.

106 'The German Emperor and his Hobbies', *Review of Reviews* (June 1901), 572.

107 Thompson 1995, 149–78; Johnston 2021, 1–19.

108 Bösch 2015, 62–102; Geppert 2010, 203–28.

109 'The secret of the Kaiser's power', *Review of Reviews* (Aug. 1902), 177; Obst 2011, vii–xiv; Kohlrausch 2010.

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