Towards a Knowledge-Based Media Governance

The Mediadelcom Method

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Every participant country of Mediadelcom has published this e-book in their national language, adding particular country-specific information.

AT BG HR CZ EE DE GR HU IT LV PL RO SK SE

Contents

Dear Reader!

Welcome to the "Towards a knowledge-based media governance. The Mediadelcom method" e-book. The aim of this book is to introduce you to the topic of media monitoring, its relevance and potential for allowing policy makers at national and European level to make informed media governance decisions.

This book is largely about monitoring and meta-analysis of news media research, the aim of which is to find out, what and how much we know and don't know about the impact of media transformations on deliberative communication in society. Awareness of the emerging dangers to free expression, access to information and other critical factors for democracy is extremely important in today's reality with wars, pandemic, and information pollution.
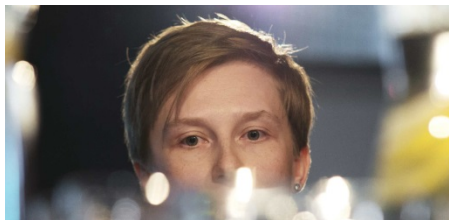
Hanna Azemsha, a Belarusian/Polish journalist at the public event in Warsaw, May 2023.

A Belarusian journalist who is working in Poland for Belsat TV, Hanna Azemsha, points out that the warning signs of dangerous developments should be noticed and taken seriously by the public, or freedoms will be lost like in Belarus. The authoritarian regime was not established overnight, the signs were there long before, but remained ignored.[1] Therefore, it is important to advance deliberative communication in

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[1] Said at the public event "Breaking down the walls?", linked to the Mediadelcom meeting in Warsaw, on May 11, 2023. Cf. https://www.mediadelcom.eu/breaking-down-the-walls-artists-and-journalists-send-a-strong-warning-of-the-dangers-of-complacency/

European societies, and for that, monitoring of the knowledge about news media transformations is vital.

The publication has a methodological focus and is addressed primarily towards university students in the fields of journalism and media studies. However, the first part of the book may also be of interest to a wider audience, providing an insight into some hugely important areas of an EU-funded Horizon 2020 research project called Mediadelcom. The main aim of the project is to produce a diagnostic tool that enables policy makers, media experts, journalists etc., to identify risks and opportunities that media transformation brings about for deliberative communication. This e-book introduces the first results of the project: a meta-analytic method for collecting data and monitoring research across domains of news media thus enabling the synthesis of knowledge, the assessment of the risks and opportunities for deliberative communication, and the identification of knowledge gaps in this area. Through the monitoring and meta-analysis, it becomes evident how the 14 countries involved in Mediadelcom have been able to analyse their media development. The level and quality of the relevant knowledge largely differs among the countries. The book offers the reader the perspectives of these countries from the aspect of their common experiences.

In the first part of the booklet, theoretical considerations of the methodology are summarized in articles by Epp Lauk and Martin Oller Alonso, as well as Tobias Eberwein and Halliki Harro-Loit. This is followed by pieces focusing on various domains of media, with Evangelia Psychogiopoulou and Anna Kandyla guiding us through the field of media law, Marcus Kreutler looking at media accountability, and Peter Berglez and Mart Ots at the sustainability of journalism. Lenka Waschková Císařová's article explores journalistic competencies, while Ragne Kőuts-Klemm, Iveta Jansova and Lilia Raycheva's chapter deals with research on media usage patterns, followed by an article on media related competencies by Alnis Stakle and Anda Rožukalne. The last methodological chapter of the book is written by Dina Vozab, Zrinjka Peruško and Filip Trbojević, who explain the possibilities of applying fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis to assess the risks and opportunities of deliberative communication. Finally, Martin Oller Alonso and Sergio Splendore invite readers on a journey to discover the Mediadelcom meta-analysis method. Three case study exercises will allow students to deepen the practical application of this approach.

Thank you for joining us and enjoy the exploration!

The Editors

Navigating the media matrix

Uncovering risks & opportunities for deliberative communication in a transforming European landscape

Epp Lauk & Martin Oller Alonso

This book focuses on how to detect risks and opportunities (ROs) for deliberative communication in the news media and produced by the media (Figure 1). It is based on research for the first phase of a European Commission funded project called "*Critical exploration of media related risks and opportunities for deliberative communication: Development scenarios of the European media landscape*" (Mediadelcom). As the title indicates, the second phase of the project will focus on producing models that will help policy makers and media experts to predict potential risks and opportunities for deliberative communication, and to make informed decisions.

ROs for deliberative communication in rapidly transforming (news) media (e.g. ownership, working conditions etc.)

ROs for deliberative communication induced by media transformations (e.g. usage patterns, biased content, low quality of news etc.)
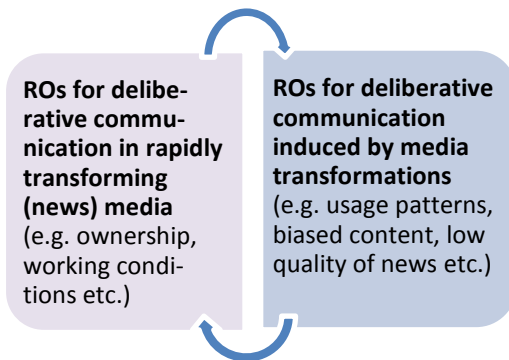
Figure 1.1. Risks and opportunities for deliberative communication

Why "deliberative communication"?

Mediadelcom advocates for the notion that engaging in deliberative communication has the potential to bolster and fortify democratic principles. Deliberative communication refers to a type of communication that aims to facilitate informed and rational discussions with mutual respect among individuals with different opinions and/or interests. Bayer (2018: 45) summarizes preconditions necessary for deliberation as follows: "*(a) public access or transparency, (b) inclusive participation, (c) equal rights to all participants (concerning their rights to speak, criticize, disagree, and suggest other options)".* There are three more conditions for deliberative communication to happen: sufficient, adequate, and truthful information and a public forum for this communication as well as dialogic communication culture in society. Providing these conditions is the function of the news media. By promoting an open and inclusive deliberative process, news media outlets can help build trust and foster informed decision-making among their audiences.

We all know that no ideal conditions exist for deliberative communication. But, to paraphrase Winston S. Churchill, we also know that democracy is the best of all bad forms of government. So, what are the risk factors that endanger the realization of deliberative communication in a democratic society?

Some risk factors are more visible than others. Some of the risks that have gained more attention include the systematic collection of data, the amount of money given to research, annual reports to monitor dynamics etc. Other risks get less attention or may be more complicated to monitor (follow).

One of easily recognizable risk factors in modern democracies is a gradual decrease of freedom of expression and information. This can come in many forms. For example, there is growing tendency of filing lawsuits against journalists and opinion leaders by people of power if they are publicly criticized (SLAPP cases). The main aim is to intimidate and exhaust journalists both financially and morally to stop them from their criticism. Organizations and companies often suggest their employees do not disclose information to the public, even when the question is not about business secrets. Such tendencies, when they accumulate, push societies towards opaqueness. The question is, who should and could resist these measures? The answer is journalists who are motivated and skilled to reveal the mechanisms of such tendencies and to explain them to people. But what happens if there are not enough journalists in a country who dare criticize the activities of the authorities or powerful people?

Deliberation requires participants to have accurate information to make informed decisions, but if disinformation is introduced into the conversation, it can lead to incorrect conclusions or even harm. News media outlets have a responsibility to fact-check and verify information before presenting it to the public, but there is always a

risk that false or misleading information can slip through the cracks. A less recognizable risk is related to the ability and motivation of citizens to distinguish between trustful information and propaganda. Going further, if too many people are unaware or unable to identify misinformation or lies it could signal problems with the quality of the educational system or politically biased media. This presents an opportunity to place a strong emphasis on information competencies in formal education or in civil society which could lead to a society where the majority are less sensitive to propaganda.

Another risk is the potential for media bias to influence deliberation. News media outlets may present information in a way that favours one side of an issue over another. This can influence the opinions of participants in the deliberation and prevent a truly open and inclusive conversation from taking place. All these risks are interwoven and some risks might become truly dangerous for democracy while others could be balanced by opportunities.

How is the research carried out?

Our aim was to examine available research on the media to identify the risks and opportunities for deliberative communication in 14 European countries.

We started by conducting a sizable literature review on the approaches and topics in nine fields of research, including journalism studies, media economics and management, media consumption/user research, media literacy, media and communication ethics, information and media regulation, political communication, media and communication policy and systems, and sociology of media and communication. We used the close reading of various academic publications and asked – where can we find the discourses of risks and/or opportunities? We then synthesized four domains of ROs' research (see Figure 2).

After defining the four domains, we worked out the lists of indicators (conceptual and operational variables) for identifying the ROs in each domain. These variables guided the assessment of the state-of-the-art of media monitoring capabilities in each of the 14 participating countries.
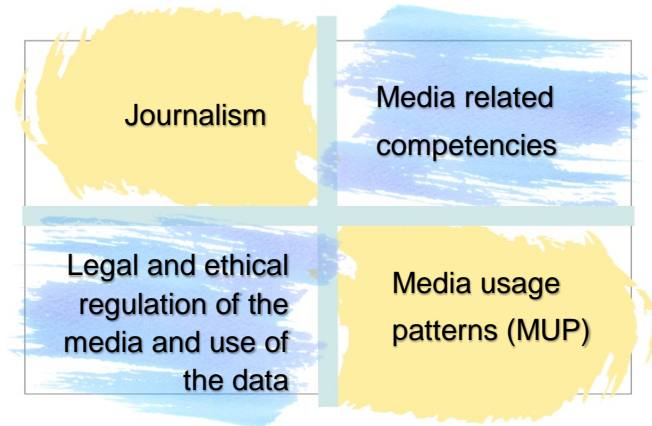
In the second stage, we created a bibliographic database to assess potential national expertise in media development and deliberative communication, which is used to predict and manage media risks and opportunities. The database has more than 5600 systematized and classified references (in an Excel file).[2]

The third stage involved producing national reports on the investigation and monitoring capabilities of media and deliberative communication, answering crucial questions about media-related risks and opportunities.[3]

In the fourth stage, we carried out a content analysis (manual and computational) of the national reports, extracting information on media and deliberative communication research in each country and complementing the "domains database". The analysis per domains' value can be likened to that of gold, as it enables an immeasurable range of comparative possibilities across all dimensions and areas of study in deliberative communication. In the fifth stage, we focus on data-based media governance, using motivational modeling and agent-based simulation to predict media-related outcomes and support deliberative communication and social cohesion.

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[2] The database is open for all at: https://datadoi.ee/handle/33/515

[3] Case study 1: https://dspace.ut.ee/handle/10062/89278
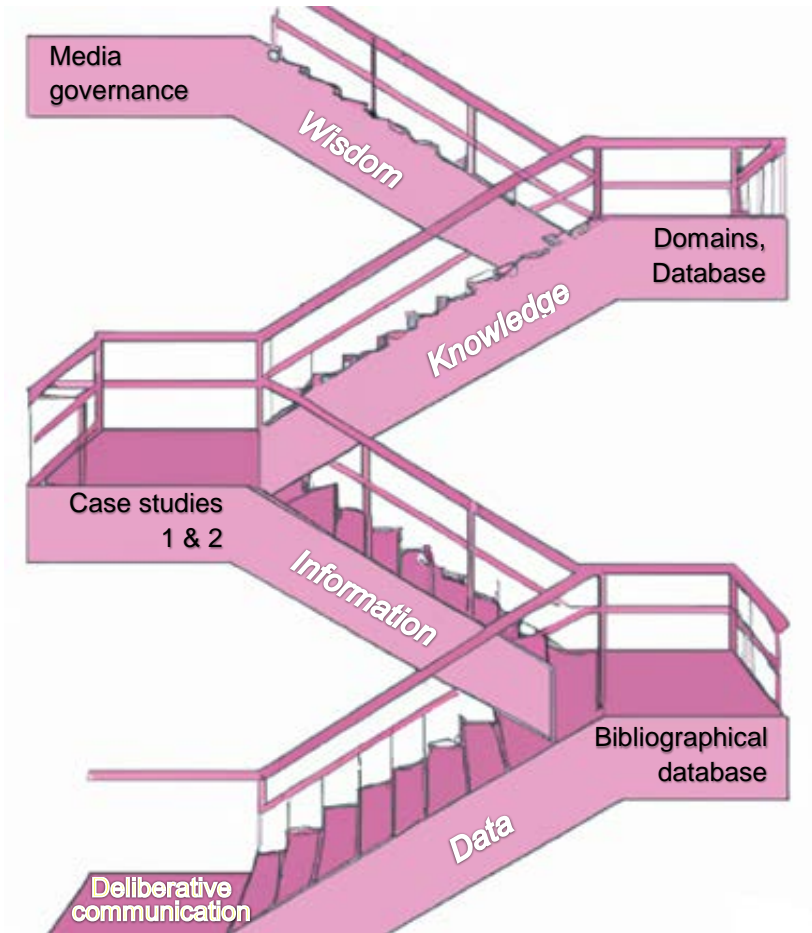
Figure 1.3. Steps of Mediadelcom method

This e-book welcomes the reader to a brief excursion through the thicket of the research on diagnosing the ROs that emerge for deliberative communication during media transformation. The book presents some theoretical and methodological approaches that can be utilized by doing meta-analyses of existing studies on the media transformations.

References:

Bayer, M. J. (2018). *Deliberation in the lab. The effect of communication on information sharing, cooperation, and consensus* [Dissertation zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades eines Doktors der Sozialwissenschaften (Dr.rer.soc.)] Konstanzer Online-Publikations-System (KOPS). http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bsz:352-2-z1tlv29358su0.

Media monitoring

Watching the watchdog

Tobias Eberwein & Halliki Harro-Loit

Media and journalism have an important role in modern societies: By collecting and presenting relevant news to their audience(s), they fulfil an information function. Thereby, they help to create a public sphere – a key requirement for deliberative communication. Quite often, journalists also act as watchdogs that help to control political and other elites. This becomes possible when the media are free from state interference – at least in democratic media systems.

But how can we ensure that media and journalism do truly live up to such expectations? Who watches the watchdogs?

While journalistic content should remain free from political control, it is the task of good media governance and media policy-making to create an environment that serves the media's functions in the best possible way. To make this happen, policy-makers depend on reliable data. They need to know what is going on in the media. Which kinds of news channels are currently available in their country and how much are they used and trusted? How many journalists are active and are they really free from external influences? Does the legal framework enable pluralistic media coverage? Which measures are in place to increase media literacy and how effective are they?

Such questions can be answered with the help of media research and various media monitoring projects. For example, the NGO *Reporters Without Borders* publishes an annual *World Press Freedom Index* that measures the state of media freedom around the world. The *Media Pluralism Monitor* offers a tool to assess different weaknesses of media systems that may hinder media pluralism in Europe. The *Worlds of Journalism study* conducts surveys among journalists to examine perceptions of the profession around the globe. The *Reuters Institute's Digital News Report* reveals insights about the usage of news in a digital media environment.

The Mediadelcom project collected a large number of studies on media and journalism that have been carried out and published in each of the project countries. Some offer extensive datasets – in some cases even enabling longitudinal analysis; others are small cases studies focusing on selected phenomena. Some studies are realized by large international research groups; some are conducted by students. Without question, all of them contribute to the aim of monitoring the media and media-related changes. However, the availability of systematic data does not automatically lead to better media policies.

Mediadelcom, therefore, applies the well-known "knowledge pyramid" to describe the quality and the usefulness of different sources for monitoring purposes. This model differentiates four fundamental categories: data, information, knowledge, and wisdom. For example, many media organizations collect data on the question which media products are used for how long. But only when this data is processed and logically linked, it becomes information. The organization of such information (e.g., in in-house reports by media organizations or in academic media and journalism research) creates knowledge. The level of wisdom eventually indicates the extent to which the acquired knowledge is applied and leads to evidence-based decisions in media policy-making.

The "knowledge pyramid" helps to understand that knowledge and wisdom have critical importance for media policy-makers. It is also a relevant tool to find out who collects what kind of information and knowledge and who finally turns the knowledge into wisdom. What are the motives and competencies of these people? Mediadelcom's key aim is to identify those actors in media monitoring that are most valuable for highlighting risks and opportunities for deliberative communication. Its focus is on four central research domains: (a) legal and ethical regulation of the media; (b) journalism; (c) media-usage patterns; and (d) media-related competencies.

Read on:

Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom. (2022). *Monitoring media pluralism in the digital era: Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the year 2021.* European University Institute. http://hdl.handle.net/1814/74712

Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Ramaprasad, J., & de Beer, A. S. (Eds.). (2019). *Worlds of journalism: Journalistic cultures around the globe.* Columbia University Press.

Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Robertson, C. T., Eddy, J. & Nielsen, K. R. (2022). *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2022.* Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/Digital_News-Report_2022.pdf

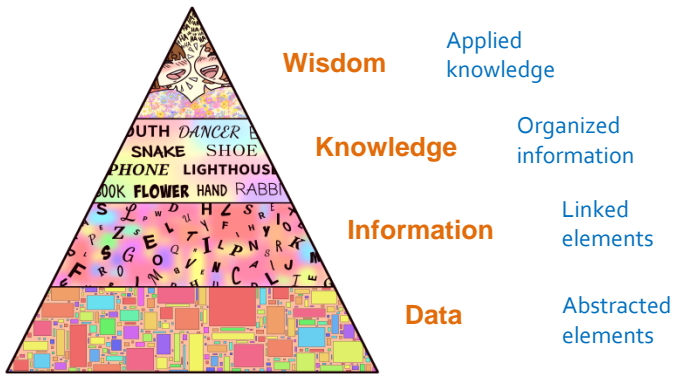Reporters Without Borders. (2022). World Press Freedom Index. https://rsf.org/en/index

Figure 2.1. The "knowledge pyramid".

In some cases, media monitoring does not help to shape knowledge-based media policy. In those instances, we can say there is a risk concerning media monitoring capability. For example, there may be many different media researchers in the country, but their careers are promoted only if they publish many articles. It doesn't matter which topics they study and what is the scope of the studies carried out for these articles. This country could acquire a lot of knowledge about the media performance, but still one can't find answers, for example, to the questions about whether journalists' working practices support deliberative communication in society, or how many people in the country care about the news. Such a country would need discussions and agreements on the monitoring agenda. What are the topics in which we can see a lack of trustful knowledge? There should also be a motivated body to coordinate the wisdom acquisition and the motivation of policy makers to take care about possible risks concerning deliberative communication – for example, people's ability to distinguish propaganda or a situation where a large number of journalists are no longer interested in serving the public good, but are instead loyal to political powerholders or need to work just for pay. It is important then to know the loyalty hierarchies of the journalist community and the motivation behind them.

Freedom of expression
and freedom of information
What are they and how to monitor their protection?

Evangelia Psychogiopoulou & Anna Kandyla

In Europe, citizens and journalists enjoy the right to freedom of expression and information, but in some cases it is under increasing pressure from government, authorities and other leading figures. Laws and legal action can also have a negative impact on freedom of expression and information and the media's ability to operate. In countries where freedom of expression and information is affirmed and protected, the extent of legitimate state intervention through laws and regulations is strictly limited to the pursuit of the public interest in a functioning democracy and a restricted category of general interest objectives such as the protection of one's dignity or the protection of minors. As for legal action, legal intimidation through SLAPPs (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) is a growing threat to freedom of speech and freedom of information. Abusive lawsuits have increasingly become a means to silence public watchdogs, including journalists, but regulatory responses to stop such tactics and protect vital actors in society who serve the public interest have been slow.

Freedom of expression and freedom of information are vital preconditions for deliberative communication through the media. Freedom of expression is a fundamental

human right and is safeguarded by the constitutions of individual EU Member States. Freedom of expression is explicitly protected in the EU's *Charter of Fundamental Rights* (CFR) which came into force in 2009, along with the *Treaty of Lisbon*, and applies to all EU member states when they act within the scope of EU law. Freedom of expression is also included in the *European Convention on Human Rights* (ECHR), the first convention of the *Council of Europe*, to which all EU member states are party. Article 11 CFR and Article 10 ECHR assert that everyone has the right to freedom of expression. Both articles also explain that free speech protects the right to voice opinions, views and ideas and to receive and impart information. Freedom of information is thus a corollary to freedom of expression.

However, freedom of expression and freedom of information are not absolute. States may intervene on a number of grounds considered legitimate to justify restrictions on free speech and freedom of information in the public interest. Thus, any attempt to map and monitor the protection afforded to free speech and freedom of information through the media at the national level should look at the existence of laws and regulatory safeguards that create an enabling environment for the exercise of each of these freedoms. On this basis, Mediadelcom analyzed whether free speech and freedom of information are explicitly recognized in and facilitated by national laws and whether restrictions placed upon these freedoms pursue legitimate aims and are proportionate to the legitimate aim pursued. For example, rules regarding defamation, hate speech or disinformation must not impose overly broad restrictions on freedom of expression. To give an example, Hungary adopted in 2020 the *Coronavirus Protection Act* which expanded the section of Hungary's *Penal Code* on scaremongering, criminalizing not only false statements that disturb the public order but also those which at the time of a Special Legal Order (i.e. a state of danger) are capable of hindering or preventing the efficiency of the defense measures against the emergency.[4] The *Constitutional Court* said it was necessary and proportionate to put limits on speech if there was an overriding social interest in doing so. This provision generated a lot of uncertainty in the Hungarian journalistic community.

Moreover, domestic legislation should seek to reconcile personal data and copyright protection with freedom of expression and access to information. Aspects considered relevant for assessing the legal protection afforded specifically to freedom of information also include the protection of journalists' sources and the protection of whistleblowing through the media. These are both vital for exposing corruption, maladministration and instances of wrongdoing. Effective protection of journalistic

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[4] See P. Gábor/ Mertek Media Monitor (2020), *Hungary's Two Pandemics: COVID-19 and Attacks on Media Freedom (Media Freedom Rapid Response, European Centre for Press & Media Freedom)*, https://www.ecpmf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Legal-opinion-Hungary_2020.pdf.

sources requires the recognition of the right of journalists not to be compelled to reveal the sources of information disclosed in confidence. Effective protection of whistleblowing through the media requires laws and regulations that provide legal protection against sanctions and other retaliatory acts and access to appropriate remedies to whistleblowers who disclose directly to the media. The EU's *Whistleblower Directive* (2019) *provides* that *member states* may protect those who blow the whistle through public channels such as the media. The existence of provisions requiring the disclosure of media ownership information is another important aspect for freedom of information. Accessible and reliable information about who owns the media is needed for the public to be able to assess the credibility of news and to identify the range of interests which may influence the media's content.

The existence of such safeguards should be complemented with effective implementation. Rules properly designed to create an enabling environment for the exercise of freedom of expression and information may exist, but they may be subject to ineffective implementation. For assessing whether or not enabling safeguards for freedom of expression and freedom of information set forth in legislation are effectively implemented, Mediadelcom highlights the importance of judicial, quasi-judicial or administrative bodies entrusted with monitoring and enforcing functions and assesses their tasks and performance.

Read on:

Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12012P/TXT

European Convention on Human Rights.
https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/convention_eng.pdf

European Commission. (2022). *Shaping Europe's Digital Future. Media freedom and pluralism.*

https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/media-freedom

European Court of Human Rights. (2022). *Guide on Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Freedom of Expression.*
https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/guide_art_10_eng.pdf

Is GDPR a threat to journalism?

Several Mediadelcom country reports have highlighted that GDPR* is causing "side effects" to freedom of expression and access to public information.

"Such cases where journalists may be doing some investigative reporting about corruption, for example, about businessman who's getting some favours from the government, and the businessman will use this as a legal pretext to suppress the story. Another case was instances where government officials will refuse to release information under the freedom of information legislation because they say it would violate the GDPR, people's privacy. I assume, these were not the intended effects of the GDPR, but the way that it's implemented in particular countries."

Professor Daniel Hallin from the University of California, San Diego, who is also a member of Mediadelcom's advisory board, shared his thoughts in a Mediadelcom podcast episode #29.

*GDPR is the EU General Data Protection Regulation, that protects personal data and privacy.

Media accountability

What is it, and how can we monitor it?

Marcus Kreutler

Sometimes, the media go too far: Be it overly sensationalist coverage, pushy research techniques, or inappropriate photo selections – you can probably think of more than one good example from your own experience. But does the state send the police to punish them? Hopefully not, at least not in democratic societies that guarantee freedom of expression. The borders of what is not legally forbidden are frequently far wider than those of good, ethically sound journalism. As communication scholar Claude Jean Bertrand (2000: 22) put it: *"Media can cause serious harm without violating the law."* This is where media accountability comes into play. The term includes all kinds of activities that aim to hold the media accountable to stakeholders of functioning and fair social discourse, so the overall goal is to provide the public with responsible journalism (Fengler, 2019).

When it comes to accountability, journalists, at least in Europe, will often first think of journalistic codes of ethics or specific councils that decide on cases of dubious journalistic behavior. Traditionally, these have mostly been set up as press councils, but many of them today cover at least some other media types, such as online publications, and some are even called media councils to reflect this. If you feel that a specific news piece was incompatible with professional journalistic standards, you can complain to these councils, which will investigate the case and possibly sanction the offending publication: Not with legal sanctions, but through internal or public reprimands, which are usually something that journalists prefer to avoid – you don't want other experts in your field to publicly disapprove of your work.

But such mechanisms of journalistic self-regulation are only one part of media accountability – the part that focuses on what the journalistic community can do to support responsible journalism. Media accountability can be understood in a broader sense, including activities by other actors (Bardoel & D'Haenens, 2004): Media compa-

nies that may introduce their own codes of conduct or appoint ombudspersons to discuss their work with the audience, members of the public engaging in media criticism, and also political actors that may decide to implement statutory instruments which are decidedly independent from political decision-making (as they would otherwise represent state intervention). In some countries with limited media accountability practices, foreign actors such as foundations may also be motivated to help in establishing such instruments.

Given this multitude of instruments, any attempt to map and compare media accountability in different countries requires a broad understanding of the field: While one country might lack a functioning press council, media observatories could potentially play an important role in holding the media accountable – it is the result that matters, not necessarily the tool. The Mediadelcom research consortium followed this broad idea (Fengler et al, 2022) and analyzed both main developments in media accountability during the first two decades of our century and the national capabilities to monitor the field.

As a classic instrument of media self-regulation, independent media councils seem to retain a central role for media accountability in Europe: Countries with well-established councils (Germany, Sweden), but also countries with some controversies around such councils (such as Estonia, where two councils are competing), were found to also feature a rather lively academic debate on media accountability. This could also be seen in Austria, where the re-foundation of a press council in 2010 marked an upturn in monitoring activities. A lack of such instruments often goes along with limited professional interest or polarization within the journalistic community (e.g., Poland, Hungary). Public or market actors' initiatives to fill the gap are quite rare, even if an academic debate on "what journalism should do" exists. Since there seems to be some interplay between the existence of successful accountability tools and a lively monitoring landscape, we can identify both a risk and an opportunity here: One field may trigger development in the other – both in a negative and a positive way.

References and read on:

Bardoel, J., & d'Haenens, L. (2004). Media responsibility and accountability: New conceptualizations and practices. *Communications*, *29*, 5-25.

Bertrand, C. J. (2000). *Media ethics & accountability systems*. Transaction.

Fengler, S. (2019). Media accountability. In *The international encyclopedia of journalism studies*. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118841570.iejs0078

Fengler, S., Eberwein, T., Karmasin, M., Barthel, S., & Speck, D. (2022). Media accountability. A global perspective. In S. Fengler, T. Eberwein, & M. Karmasin (Eds.), *The global handbook of media accountability* (pp. 3-57). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429326943-2

Monitoring the sustainability of journalism – critical factors

Peter Berglez & Mart Ots

Journalism relies on a number of conditions that are central for its development, resilience, and long-term functioning within the media system. This includes market conditions (ownership structures, etc.); the development of public service media companies; production conditions (impact of digitalization; resources for investigative and foreign reporting, etc.); working conditions and level of diversity among the staff, such as balance between male and female workers, and journalistic competencies, including education, training and perceptions of professionalism.

Monitoring capacities in a country

In order to monitor how journalism is faring, since the conditions are diverse, there is need for a broad range of data. The first thing to do is to examine whether there are actors producing the right types of data, that allow you to monitor all important conditions. Some institutions like public authorities or research institutes may already have a mandate to collect data from various sources and monitor journalism for a certain purpose, which could provide a good starting point.

Then you need to look for extent of longitudinal, i.e. year-on-year, data. Structured data available over a series of years enables you to observe how journalism is transforming over time, and allows you to draw conclusions about change. It also highlights trends that allow you to create future predictions and scenarios. Ideally, such data is collected with similar methods every year, making comparison possible about, for example, the number of media organizations; the balance between public service and private owned media; journalists unemployment rates; digitalization in the newsroom, and so forth.

Quality of the monitoring contributions

Low-quality data is associated with monitoring risks. Often there is a wide range of stakeholders publishing information about journalistic conditions and performance. A major challenge is therefore to assess the trustworthiness, reliability and continuity of data sources. Usually, a high level of academic research is viewed as a good sign and associated with monitoring opportunities. This is because this knowledge has been produced with scientific methods, although there might, of course, be good and bad science. In society, different actors might have different status and legitimacy to produce data about journalism's sustainability in society.

Coverage of topics

Besides quality, diversity of data is important since there could be an overweight of some types of data within the journalism domain, while other types are absent. For example, it is well known that due to the demands from the advertising industry, there is a large and developed sector of research agencies and tech firms that monitors media usage including what is viewed, by whom, for how long. At the same time, it may be much more difficult to find data regarding conditions that lie outside the interest of those who commonly finance the production of data – e.g. advertising industry, policy makers and authorities. For instance, we know very little about the working conditions in newsrooms or among the journalists.

Accessibility of monitoring knowledge and data

Finally, an important aspect is the accessibility of data. The knowledge produced by scholars is often publicly available. But, a lot of information about the production of journalism (user metrics, algorithmic data, etc.), media houses keep for themselves, which then makes it more difficult to monitor journalism development in society.

Read on:

Berglez, P., Olausson, U. & Ots, M. (Eds.).(2017). Sustainable journalism. Integrating the environmental, social and economic challenges of journalism. Peter Lang.

Who can be considered a journalist

How to monitor them and their professional competencies?

Lenka Waschková Císařová

Watching Hollywood movies and reading popular literature, one would think the identity of a journalist is quite distinctive. It's probably a charismatic person who meets their sources in underground garages and publishes the revelations within a day. But just as a TV show about doctors, for example, doesn't teach us how to remove an appendix, popular depictions of journalists don't reveal the whole truth about the journalistic profession.

If you want to think about who we can call a journalist and what we can learn about journalists, you have basically two extreme options. Either you will naively wonder, along with Terry Pratchett (2001), how "ordinary" people become journalists and who tells them what to write or record. Or you will think more deeply about who the journalist could be and what their professional competences should ideally be. So how about we take you on that journey?

Defining a journalist

At a time when the concept of journalists is broadening, we can describe them as professional media content producers, which is basically anyone who is repeatedly involved in the production of professional content for the media (e.g., full-time journalist, part-time journalist, freelancer, editor, editor-in-chief, photojournalist, camera reporter, graphic designer etc.) (Deuze, 2005). To be able to define such professionals, to say who they are and what they do, it is necessary to set clear boundaries around their identities and focus our research accordingly. It also helps to shape expectations from society, because journalists are one of the key actors in mainlining (deliberative) democracy.

Competencies

As is obvious, one way to define journalists is to focus on their professional competencies. If we understand a professional competency as a potential capacity of an individual or a whole professional team to successfully handle certain situations or perform a certain task or job, we can then ask, what can be, on one side, expected, desired from and, on the opposite side, performed by journalists in their jobs (Willnat, Weaver & Choi, 2013). Hence, we can focus on the journalistic profession and competencies in order to know them better and find out whether all journalists share them. Some of the competencies include ethics, skills, motivation, honesty, and curiosity.

By examining the competencies, we can also identify the potential risks journalists face doing their job. For example, what happens if some journalists don't follow the expected ethical or editorial policies? A number of situations can arise: losing the journalist's reputation in the professional community, a one-off sanction from the employer, losing a job, and/or losing the trust of the audience. One of the expected journalistic values is professional autonomy – independence from influences both inside and outside the newsroom. In the Czech context, we can follow the example of journalist Marek Přibil, who was fired from the *Mafra* publishing house owned by the then Prime Minister Andrej Babiš. He lost his job after the anonymous release of recordings of a call between Babiš and a journalist in which they discussed a series of critical articles about the owner's political opponents. Moreover, a group of 155 journalists from the publishing house distanced themselves from Přibil's actions in a joint statement (iDnes, 2017), calling them "unprofessional and immoral" (for a context see Kotisova & Waschková Císařová, 2023).

The question of journalistic competencies can be addressed by researchers either at the national level or internationally, through comparative research. To be able to monitor professional news producers' competencies, we decided to focus mainly on journalistic knowledge, skills, practices, roles, cultures, and values as these are the most telling in this regard (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017).

These topics are very broad, but they offer a flexible picture of the journalistic profession and its competencies, and how it can contribute to informed society and media policy. Therefore, if we want to potentially monitor such a topic, we have to take into account several factors: the big picture, different levels of media production analysis (e.g., international, national, local; systemic, organisational, individual), and different time periods. In order to fulfil such an expectation, the monitoring procedure has to be both deductive – longitudinally mapping the systemic and organizational level, including a national and/or international framework, and gradually getting down to the individual level of the journalist; and inductive – go from individual actors (journalists) to map data to the systemic level with a similar depth of access.

This approach based on gaining knowledge from monitoring the journalistic profession and competencies helps in disclosing/mitigating risks and opportunities in (deliberative) communication. So, specifically, it may cover a certain time frame, for example, 20 years in the history of research on journalists in specific countries (Mediadelcom, 2022); take into account all possible producers of relevant data (typically academia, industry and NGOs); monitor national data and international comparative findings (e.g., *Worlds of Journalism*); and last but not least, consider the quality of the existing data, and its accessibility for all members of society.

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Who is collecting data about media usage practices?

Ragne Kõuts-Klemm, Iveta Jansova & Lilia Raycheva

Every European country collects information about its citizens' media usage on a regular basis. We know a lot about audiences and how they access the media, but that information isn't always being shared. Why not?

As Finnish researcher Juha Herkman (2008) concludes, as much as the media industry is a big business, media usage data has become big business too. Media houses are interested in information about the audiences and their characteristics, because it allows them to better provide attractive content for their users and sell the contact with their audience to firms and other interested parties, i.e. advertising.

Who is behind the research?

The commercial research agencies that collect media usage data provide information about reach and audience share of a media outlet, popularity of an outlet compared to others, and the sociodemographic profile of audiences. All this is monetizable data. The biggest data collectors in Europe are internationally operating research agencies like *Nielsen*, *Kantar*, *Reuters*, *GfK*, et. al. They rely on tested and verified methodologies that enable media houses to make business decisions.

Media outlets can also find out, thanks to the online environments, about their users, and analyze audience behavior based on the web metrics. This is of course, additional to their more classical research via peoplemetres, viewership, etc., that they regularly gather. The data on online users extracts only a few audience characteristics and scholars claim that in this way users are like ever-amalgamating data points without clear identities (Fisher & Mehozay, 2019). Data owners can rarely make sophisticated analysis to understand audiences as unique persons. This is also connected to the fact that even though companies/content providers are able to collect large

amounts of data (we are talking about big data here), they are still not really able to analyze them and use them in their further strategies. Commercial and public terrestrial broadcasters with their related on-demand-services collect big data about the usage of their services, representatives of the media industry, however, disclosed that they are still not able to use such data fully, losing the game to bigger foreign providers such as *Netflix* and others. Another layer to this is subscription-based services (i.e. paid newspapers, paid video-on-demand service, etc.), that are refusing to share their usership data with the outside world (both the academic and public spheres).

As we can see, even though there is overwhelmingly diverse and comprehensive data about media usage, the availability of data is often limited to particular parties. The data is owned by private media companies, platforms, and commercial research agencies. These data are rarely used to create a common good (knowledge, policy planning, empowerment of users, etc.). There are some exceptions. Some countries have better agreements between public and private industries to share the data. In the countries with more transparency in commercial media data, the knowledge can be used as the basis for proper media policy that is in favor of media industries, audiences and democracy.

Another important source of data collection is academic institutions and universities. Their aim is to understand the media "universes" of users, how media can empower users, or how it can be an instrument for self-realization. User-centric data collection can provide input for policies that aim to enhance the competencies of users for the development of societies and democracies. This kind of data collection needs to follow high research ethics, recruit participants on a voluntary basis and be responsible for the consequences audiences can face after conclusions have been drawn or implemented. This type of data collection has to be diverse enough to enable sophisticated analysis. The description of data collection for academic purposes leads to the conclusion that academic research needs a lot of resources. This last point means that academic data collection is rare, and longitudinal data collection even more so.

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How is this all inter-related?

Media related competencies (and research), RO research and deliberative communication

Alnis Stakle & Anda Rožukalne

How can a modern person navigate the complex media ecosystem? How can each of us better take advantage of today's diverse media? What is the balance between participation in communication, the expression of creativity and the possible influence of different players in the communication environment?

Being aware of the changing processes of the modern communication environment and the opportunities of both society and individuals to learn, understand and use them, media-related competencies have come into focus and to the attention of policymakers, educators, and communication specialists. Moreover, media literacy and media education are highlighted as a solution to misinformation, political polarization, and manipulation, addressing the importance of critical thinking among other competencies.

Media related competencies is a broad concept historically related to the development of the audiovisual media (i.e. radio and TV), which has expanded to include the concept of reading, online and digital literacy. There have been very different and sometimes even conflicting ideas about media related competencies as a set of skills that provide media audiences with a variety of tools to analyze and understand information. They include the ability to access different messages or narratives in analogue and digital media, to read, analyze and decipher content embedded in those messages, to recognize message communication patterns and the actors involved in creating them, to critically assess messages, and to create your own messages for communication, employment and entertainment purposes.

Strengthening civil society

However, the concept of media related competencies is not merely connected to the above skills. It is also considered to have the potential for changing behavioral patterns in order to overcome personal and collective safety risks. Thus, media related competencies are perceived as a continuously evolving set of skills that support democratization, social participation, and the rule of law. The concept is simultaneously rooted in both the paradigm of public protectionism and strengthening of civil society. This reflects the need to provide media audiences with a secure public communication environment and an opportunity to acquire media-related competencies. Therefore, the discussion on the problematic issues is related to finding a balance between public moral panics associated with media effects and the need to regularly redefine the values of democratic societies such as freedom of expression and pluralism.

The current framework of media related competencies is grounded in three historically interconnected discourses. First, media related competencies from a protectionism perspective is viewed through the discourse of media effects. Media are described as powerful technologies that have been able to significantly reshape every person's agenda in a very short time. The focus is on ever-increasing screen time, highlighting the risk that uncontrolled media consumption may have an adverse impact on traditional value awareness and social relations. The main heavy media use related

threats are associated with the spread of disinformation, access to violence and pornography, distribution of alcohol, tobacco and gambling advertising, copyright infringements, strengthening of sexism and racism, public health risks and cyber hooliganism.

Second, interpretation of media related competencies in connection with representation and understanding of reality is a view based on semiotics, critical cultural studies, and the discourse of media ecology. In this perspective, they are perceived as a set of skills that strengthen the audience's ability to detect the influence of commercial industries on media content and to decipher ideologically saturated, prejudiced views on family, age, class, and race. Journalism is viewed as professional activity that constructs reality and unmasks prejudice; the audience must understand the ethics of journalism and the interests of media owners.

Third, media related competencies in pedagogy are viewed as a set of age-specific skills that are required in order to participate safely and purposefully in mediated communication and digital culture as a whole.

Acquiring media competency

Facilitating the understanding and acquisition of the constantly evolving digital culture is an essential aspect of media related competencies in media pedagogy, which encourages the audience to continue learning new things through self-learning and mutual learning processes.

In each of these views, media related competencies are construed as an intrusion into media power structures and prevailing ideologies, yet a discursive distinction is seen in the approaches to the questions of change in institutional and political power, representation and construction of reality and understanding of personal and social identity in media pedagogy.

Media competency and deliberative communication

Within deliberative communication, media related competencies become a meta-competence which provides both the framework and the content for balancing personal and collective values, arguments, discussions, and norms. The overarching objective of deliberative communication is to create a sustainable communication ecosystem based on an empathetic and reasoned debate and without prejudice to the possibilities of mutual contact between individuals and different social groups in order to agree on values and decision-making of public interest.

Monitoring media competency

Media related competencies in the EU are monitored in a variety of studies dominated by measuring the audience's digital skills, personal data security, self-

assessment of the levels of acquired competencies and the need for learning them, critical consumption of information and recognition of misleading information, for example international research project *EU Kids Online: Researching European children's online opportunities, risks and safety*, *Mapping of media literacy practices and actions in EU-28* by *European Audiovisual Observatory*, *Media Literacy Index* by *Open Society Institute Sofia*.

There are different approaches and traditions for media related competence studies in EU countries, which makes it difficult to compare their data with each other. A longitudinal and international comparative media related competence monitoring, based on deliberative communication indicators, would provide an understanding of the correlations among different social groups' deliberative communication and media related competence levels.

Read on:

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The role of the fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis

in explaining risks and opportunities for deliberative communication

Dina Vozab, Zrinjka Peruško & Filip Trbojević

Thanks to a rising interest in comparative communication research, there are numerous research projects and monitoring instruments on the international and European level which could be useful in assessing risks and opportunities for media. Besides longer standing instruments which monitor press freedom around the world, like *Freedom House* and *Reporters Sans Frontières*, there are now many other research and monitoring projects. On the European level, the most notable monitoring instrument is *Media Pluralism Monitor*, which evaluates risks in European media systems on achieving pluralism and diversity. The *Worlds of Journalism study* led by Thomas Hanitzsch has been analyzing the state of journalism since 2007 and *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism* at *Oxford University* has been researching digital news audiences since 2012. Therefore, there are now more studies and data which allow researchers to pose innovative comparative research questions. However, in terms of methodology, there is less diversity, as quantitative approaches dominate (Downey, 2020).

In the Mediadelcom project, we use a rather innovative methodology in media and communication studies in assessing risks and opportunities for the development of deliberative communication. Although several authors have advocated for the use of the fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) in comparative media research (Downey, 2020; Downey & Stanyer, 2010), and there are more and more studies using the method (e.g. Büchel et al., 2016; Humprecht & Büchel, 2013; Peruško et al., 2021), it's use in comparative media research, which is still predominately relying on quantitative approaches, is still limited (Downey, 2020).

FsQCA has several advantages in comparison to quantitative approaches. The fsQCA method bridges qualitative and quantitative logic in comparative research and can provide rich and complex explanations of how different causal conditions explain certain outcomes. The methodology allows the inclusion of both small-N, middle-N and larger-N cases (Ragin, 2008), which gives a lot of flexibility in the comparative research design. The method also differs from correlational thinking (which is linear and symmetrical) as it acknowledges that the relationship between social phenomena is often asymmetrical and equifinal. Asymmetry means that one type of relationship between variables doesn't exclude other possible relationships. For example, if the relationship between development and democracy is established, this doesn't exclude that undeveloped countries could also be democratic (Ragin, 2008: 15). There are sometimes more causal explanations, or "causal recipes" for the same outcome. In media systems development, this equifinality is exactly what we are looking for in solving questions about trends of risks and opportunities – countries are able to reach the same goal by following different paths. For example, perhaps in some contexts deliberative communication could be achieved with a well-regulated media and strong accountability systems, while in others it could be achieved with sustainable journalism and well informed and media literate audiences. The method could work well on either micro-, meso- or macro- levels of comparative research and is also fit for exploring multilevel phenomena or practices, for example transnational flows or globalized media cultures, and has a potential of explaining change over time (Downey, 2020).

One of the most important aspects of the analysis is calibration, which refers to assigning cases to sets, using values between 0 and 1 (Ragin, 2008). Sets can be crisp, and have only two categories. However, as is often the case in social sciences, social phenomena are more complex and fuzzy sets respond to this higher complexity and nuance. By using fuzzy sets, we can recognize that certain cases belong to the set of

countries with media freedom, but on different levels – like Norway which is ranked first by the *RSF press freedom index* and Italy which is ranked 58th in 2022.

The Mediadelcom way

In the Mediadelcom project, we analyze whether four domains – legal framework, journalism, media usage patterns, and media competencies – have an impact on deliberative communication. With this endeavor, we aim to analyze what the paths of achieving deliberative communication in Europe are by providing nuanced contextual explanation of complex causal relationships.

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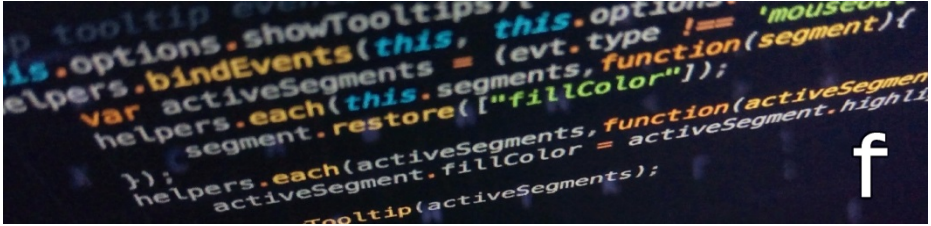
Meta-analysis could be cool!

The Mediadelcom case

Martin Oller Alonso & Sergio Splendore

Introducing a stylish approach to diachronic comparative meta-analysis reviews for deliberative communication tailored for Mediadelcom. Absolutely! A primary goal of Mediadelcom is to create a versatile diagnostic instrument functioning as a multi-scenario builder. But it doesn't end there. This cutting-edge method offers a comprehensive evaluation of risks and opportunities surrounding media monitoring and the study of deliberative communication. It also highlights the research and professional efforts made to promote social cohesion in the European Union over the past two decades (2000-2020). And furthermore, it can be applied to future projects by policymakers, educators, media critics, institutions, students, and professionals in the media industry. This methodology paves the way for the generation of knowledge, wisdom, and scientific advancements. Buckle up, folks!

Mediadelcom's proposed diagnostic tool enables the visualization of risks and opportunities in European research on deliberative communication and the evolution of media monitoring landscapes in each country individually and comparatively. But it presents a significant innovation! Instead of focusing on the conventional Western European countries, this approach brings attention to those often overlooked – the Eastern European countries. Specifically, this approach encompasses the meta-analysis of four key domains that shape the deliberative communication paradigm: **(1)** Legal and ethical regulation; **(2)** Journalism news production; **(3)** Media-related competencies of journalists and the public; and **(4)** Media usage patterns.

The Mediadelcom consortium is about to blow the research community with its innovative approach which aims to evaluate the sufficiency of research and data in predicting European media landscape research trends by conducting a holistic meta-analysis of media and institutions transformation in the European Union, mainly in the non-Western region. In an era where it feels like the world is crashing down and the

European dream is under siege by radical ideologies, education, research, and communication become our secret weapons to battle the risks that this new normal brings. With COVID-19, global tensions, economic turmoil, and shifting power dynamics rocking the EU's stability, it's time to buckle up and dive into this exhilarating challenge.

Are you ready for the secret sauce to transform data into wisdom? It's all about the number and qualifications of the professionals involved, the attractiveness of the job market, the compromise of public/political institutions and the influence of research agencies on monitoring capabilities. But who exactly carries out the monitoring or research is a crucial question. Is it transnational organizations, comparative/ international research projects, national non-academic organizations, academic research communities, professional associations, or public organizations and bodies? The answer could mean the difference between mediocrity and brilliance.

> *Join us on this journey to unlock the power of data and turn it into wisdom for a better future!*
>
> *The Italian team and the Mediadelcom consortium*

Improving research and monitoring capabilities requires ensuring data availability in open digital formats and in structured, tabular formats. In the digital jungle, a chaotic storm of data and information swirls around, while phony gurus spew their spiel, hoping to reel us in. What's their aim? Your guess is as good as mine. Beware the cyber haze and stay savvy, my dear students! Steps must be taken to enhance data reliability and promote its contribution to the spread of democracy. The world's caught in a double whammy: a viral storm wreaking havoc on our health, and a contagious wave of doubt chipping away at our trust. Does a reason lurk behind it all? Analyzing the availability of research in the subfield of deliberative communication and social cohesion in the EU reveals that data availability is not the sole issue; data provided by various actors is often inaccessible. For example, data from universities and public bodies is rarely made available, while data from transnational organizations is unprocessable and lacks a structured, tabular format. Large comparative research projects are not annual, and data from media industry facilities and independent organizations is scarce in terms of available variables. The lack of cooperation between communication process actors in Europe leads to a media environment influenced by economic and political factors, obstructing pluralism, and the development of independent online journalism. This situation is mirrored in media policies, which are insufficient and ineffective, allowing dominant players to set the rules and impact European democracies.

At Mediadelcom, we don't just stop at acquiring knowledge, we also aim to provide a critical study on how it should be used for media governance. Our method of meta-analysis poses two critical questions to the research community: how is data and knowledge used and researched across different European countries, and who would benefit from knowledge-based media governance? And of course, we don't ignore the challenges that this critical situation poses for the study of deliberative communication in Central and Eastern countries.
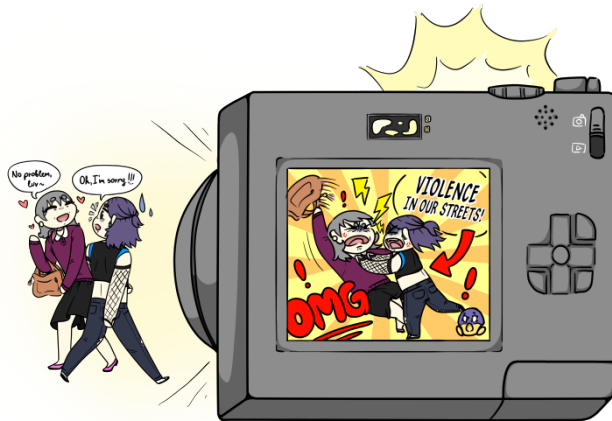
Exercises for the classroom

Exercise 1. Case study analysis of the legal environment concerning freedom of expression and freedom of information

Step 1: Select a case related to freedom of expression or freedom of information, such as a SLAPP case or a case where whistleblowers have lost their jobs.

Step 2: Carry out an analysis using the agent approach. Identify the different agents involved in the case, such as individuals, organizations or government agencies, and determine their agendas. Who were involved? How did this case come to light? And what discourses are being held by the different actors?

Step 3: Find similar cases from 10 and 20 years ago and analyze the similarities and differences with the selected case.

Step 4: Present your findings in a paper or a class presentation.

Exercise 2. Assessing the monitoring potential of a journalism related topic,

Step 1: Select a topic that is related to some kind of risk concerning journalism within the past 5 to 10 years, e.g. journalists' working conditions, threats against journalists (physical, mental, emotional or economic).

Step 2: Research and identify the actors (e.g. academic institutions, non-profit and professional organizations or government bodies) that have collected information and knowledge on the chosen topic. Has this topic gained any attention and been systematically analyzed in any annual or periodic reports? Is there a significant amount of scientific research and publications in the area? How much is this topic covered by the daily news and discussed in professional publications and forums?

Step 3: Assess the relevance of the topic in your country. Consider whether the topic is discussed or whether there is little information and knowledge available. Iden-

tify knowledge gaps and/or describe how the different aspects of the topic are discussed and what approaches are used to address them.

**Step 4:** Present your findings in a paper or a class presentation.

Exercise 3. Mapping the stakeholders' networking practices on a topic related to media consumption or media literacy.

Step 1: Identify the different stakeholders (e.g. academic researchers, professionals, non-profit organizations, public bodies, policy makers) that are working on the issue you are interested in.

Step 2: Analyze the cooperation and networking practices between these stakeholders. What is the frequency and scope of their cooperation (e.g. joint projects, policy briefing or media events)? What factors can facilitate or hinder the collaboration between them? What is the impact of their cooperation?

Step 3: Identify possible opportunities for stakeholder cooperation on your selected research topic.

Step 4: Present your findings in a paper or a class presentation.
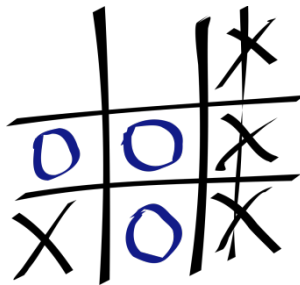
What next?

Now you've read about the Mediadelcom project and its aims, challenges and focus, hopefully you have a clearer understanding of why this research is needed and the benefits it will have. They include identifying the risks and opportunities for deliberative communication in the project countries, studying the media environment in each nation and comparing them, and developing a diagnostic tool. Furthermore, the results are important for European policy makers providing them with quality knowledge for enhancing media governance. This is vital for fostering the coherence and stability of European societies.

But most importantly, hopefully it has equipped you with information you find interesting and useful.

We hope you will stay connected to our journey.

This e-book provides you with an overview of the project so far, but there is so much more to explore. Each country has produced its own country report, which includes information and challenges they face. They can be viewed in the repository of the University of Tartu.[5]

A cross-country comparative book is also being prepared, so you can see how countries relate to each other in monitoring the four key domains.

Which countries have better practices in certain areas? We would just caution that you don't rely solely on the country comparisons to determine the overall state of a nation's media environment or its monitoring capabilities. The collection of data varies between countries, in some cases quite significantly, and small changes in a country, like a small shift downwards in one area, might not be obvious in the comparison, but could indicate a risk and area of concern. So the individual country reports provide important information.

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[5] https://dspace.ut.ee/handle/10062/89278

As Professor Daniel Hallin commented on the country case studies: *"These studies are directed toward attempting a kind of broad outline of all of media related factors that affect our ability for deliberative democracy. And I think they all have behind them an assumption of certain sets of values that are very important: the autonomy of journalism, transparency, pluralism. It is a very comprehensive examination, the way in which media institutions and media practices affect all values of transparency, autonomy, and openness."[6]*

We look forward to sharing more of our findings with you.

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[6] Mediadelcom podcast #29. Cf. https://www.mediadelcom.eu/podcast/

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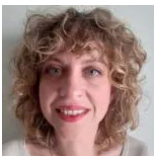
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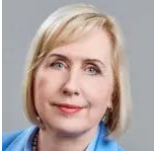
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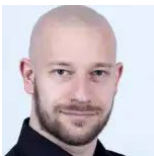
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