



CS1. Studies on national media research capability as a contextual domain of the sources of ROs

The aim of the **first case study** is to describe and analyse the **countries' monitoring capability**: the ability and possibilities of various agents to observe the developments of the media and the changes in society emanating from the media transformations, as well as related risks and opportunities for deliberative communication, and applying the obtained knowledge in making media political decisions.

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Risks and opportunities related to media and journalism studies (2000–2020). Case study on the national research and monitoring capabilities

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Executive Summary

Even though the Austrian media system is comparably small, the number and the capacity of available sources for an analysis of risks and opportunities for deliberative communication in Austria are well advanced – at least in some of the relevant research domains. Particularly in the domains of journalism and media usage, a large variety of empirical sources is available and research initiatives have reached a high degree of specialization, while criticism of a lack of data for long-term observations remains. In the domain of legal regulation, the basis of available data also appears to be well advanced, although empirical research is underrepresented. By contrast, research on media ethics and media literacy is less differentiated, due to a relatively weak institutionalization and a lack of continuous funding, among other things. The description and analysis of available sources is used as a starting point for recommendations on future research initiatives in these fields – including, for example, a more systematic examination of the role of different media-external context factors for the quality of deliberative communication.

1. Introduction

The Austrian media system is characterized by the comparably small size of the country and a resulting number of typical features (e.g., Steinmaurer et al., 2002). These include a high concentration in almost all segments of the media market and a strikingly late deregulation of the broadcasting sector. Until today, Austrian media usage is strongly influenced by journalistic content produced in neighbouring countries, particularly in Germany, which shares the same language.

Similar spillover effects are also typical for the history of media and communication studies in Austria (e.g., Karmasin & Krainer, 2013; Melischek & Seethaler, 2017): As a comparatively young and still weakly institutionalized academic discipline with a limited financial basis, its national discourse has always been affected by international trends and developments. However, while a transnational diffusion of scientific knowledge *per se* is a laudable achievement, it also entails the danger of blurring national specifics and peculiarities. This case study report aims to highlight the typical Austrian research and monitoring capabilities of media and journalism studies with regard to risks and opportunities for deliberative communication. Still, the report also has to face the task of separating relevant data sources from an ever-growing corpus of German-language literature that mainly focuses on the situation in Germany (or the German-speaking part of Switzerland). This task is by no means a trivial one at a time when many of the chairs for media and communication studies at Austrian universities are held by international

scholars with little or no interest in researching the characteristics of the Austrian media system.

In the following main sections of this report, relevant publications and data sources for an analysis of risks and opportunities for deliberative communication are described separately for the four major domains that are covered by the Mediadelcom project: a) legal and ethical regulation, b) journalism, c) media usage patterns, and d) media-related competencies. The data collection followed a multi-step search strategy and includes the results of literature reviews in the four domains (using both general library databases such as the Central Catalogue by the Austrian Library Network and specialized databases in the respective research areas) as well as additional online searches of the websites of relevant research institutions.¹ The mainly descriptive overview of the results is followed by an analysis of the data quality in the four domains and some preliminary conclusions with regard to future research tasks. The evaluation will show that, despite the small size of the Austrian media system, the number and the capacity of available sources are certainly well advanced in at least some of the domains, even though they are not without deficiencies.

2. Publications, data sources and main monitoring actors of legal and ethical regulation domain

In the Austrian media system, regulatory policy has a high significance and is usually favoured over self-regulation (e.g., Berka, 2010). This is particularly relevant for the broadcasting sector, which – in accordance with a number of laws such as the Federal Act on the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF Act), the Federal Act on Audiovisual Media Services (Audiovisual Media Services Act), and the Federal Act enacting provisions for private radio broadcasting (Private Radio Broadcasting Act) – is tightly regulated by the state. Since 2001, in the course of the liberalization of the Austrian TV market, broadcasting media are supervised by the Austrian Communications Authority (KommAustria) – as required by the Federal Act on the establishment of an Austrian Communications Authority (KommAustria Act). As an independent collegial body, KommAustria is responsible for securing freedom and pluralism of opinion and fair competition in Austria’s dual broadcasting system, for example by administering the broadcasting frequencies and supervising adherence to the provisions for advertising and the protection of minors. Operational support for realizing these tasks is provided by the “Rundfunk und Telekom Regulierungs-GmbH” (RTR). Both authorities publish regular reports, for example on the financial situation and the usage of audiovisual media, as well as other media-related studies (RTR, n.d.). While RTR administers several funds to increase the pluralism of broadcasting media and film productions, KommAustria also acts as a donor for Austrian print media – in line with the Press Promotion Act of 2004. Except for an annual subsidy for the support of self-control measures of the press, however, incentives for media self-regulation and accountability are rare.

The relevance of *legal regulation* for Austrian media is partly mirrored by the comparably high academic interest in media law and adjacent areas of jurisprudence. In fact, law is historically one of the areas of studies that attracts the highest numbers of students at Austrian universities

¹ The search process was guided by more than 60 keywords (in English and German) indicating relevant subtopics for each domain – as previously defined by the Mediadelcom consortium (Mediadelcom, 2022). Due to an overabundance of different findings, the authors applied a strict selection procedure. For example, German-language publications which predominantly analyse media-related risks and opportunities in Germany and Switzerland were mostly disregarded. Similarly, many popular and “grey” publications (particularly theses) were excluded, unless they cover an otherwise underresearched field of study. In total, the authors evaluated 237 different sources, most of which are also collected in the bibliographical database that will be made available on the Mediadelcom project website (<https://mediadelcom.eu>). The authors would like to thank Susanne Behrens for her assistance in the process of the literature review.

(Statistik Austria, 2021a). Traditional faculties of law, offering a basic qualification for the legal professions, exist at the universities of Graz, Innsbruck, Linz, Salzburg, and Vienna. By now, however, many other universities offer further specialized study programs, many of which integrate specialized knowledge about the legal regulation of media and information and communication technologies (ICTs). A number of scholars have influenced the Austrian discourse about media law in the past two decades: A key role can be ascribed to the recently deceased Walter Berka, formerly professor for constitutional and administrative law at the University of Salzburg. In addition to many other publications about media and broadcasting law, Berka was the lead author of *Mediengesetz Praxiskommentar* (Berka et al., 2019) – a practical commentary on the Austrian Media Act. He also co-founded the “Forschungsinstitut für das Recht der elektronischen Massenmedien” (REM – Research Institute for the Law of Electronic Mass Media), a non-profit association located in Vienna that organizes the annual Austrian Broadcasting Forum and publishes its own book series (most recently: Berka et al., 2021). Michael Holoubek, professor of public law at Vienna University of Economics and Business and also a member of REM, has co-authored a widely used textbook on mass media law (Holoubek et al., 2014). Helmut Koziol, professor emeritus for civil law at the University of Vienna and a former director of the Institute for European Tort Law of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and the University of Graz, co-edits the book series “Medienpolitik und Recht” (Media politics and law) with many contributions on the current challenges and transformations in the field of media regulation (most recently: Koziol, 2018). Nikolaus Forgó, professor of IT and IP law and head of the recently founded Department of Innovation and Digitalisation in Law at the University of Vienna, is a renowned expert for the legal challenges resulting from technological change. He not only directs the Postgraduate Program for Information and Media Law at the University of Vienna, but also has several podcast series with a high public visibility (e.g., *Ars Aequi*, *Ars Boni*) that discuss current issues in the context of law and technology. A transdisciplinary research approach to questions of media governance and media technology, including data protection, hate speech, and disinformation under the lens of human rights and civil liberties, is represented by Katharine Sarikakis, professor of communication science and head of the Media Governance and Industries Research Lab at the University of Vienna. Governance of emerging technologies is also one of the key research issues taken on by the interdisciplinary Institute for Technology Assessment of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. The Institute for Comparative Media and Communication Studies of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and the University of Klagenfurt regularly contributes to the international Media Pluralism Monitor which intends to identify potential risks to media pluralism by evaluating media regulation in Member States and Candidate Countries of the European Union from a comparative view (for the Austrian perspective: Seethaler & Beaufort, 2021).

As a complement to the diverse spectrum of academic research, various other non-state actors – both at the national and international level – also regularly comment on current issues in the field of media law and regulation. With regard to basic legal areas such as the protection of freedom of expression, for example, Reporters Without Borders highlight notable challenges in their annual World Press Freedom Index (RSF, 2021). With regard to issues like hate speech, the NGO Article 19 offers regular analyses of the current legal framework (e.g., Article 19, 2020). The anti-racism NGO ZARA also monitors hate speech on social media and publishes an annual report (e.g., ZARA, 2020). Specialized commentary in the field of digital law and internet security is offered by organizations such as the Austrian section of CERT (Computer Emergency Response Team) or the Chaos Computer Club (C3W) Vienna as well as individual experts such as the journalist and author Ingrid Brodnig (e.g., Brodnig, 2016, 2017, 2019).

An analysis of the legal regulation of communication and media in Austria can build on a comparatively broad basis of sources. All relevant laws as well as important cases and rulings can be researched online in the Legal Information System of the Republic of Austria that allows for nuanced search criteria. For many media-related laws, practical introductions and commen-

taries are available in book form (e.g., Berka et al., 2019; Feher et al., 2013; Frohner & Haller, 2016; Kogler et al., 2018; Rögglä et al., 2012; Vartian, 2002). Additional publications and rulings can be found with the help of specialized law databases such as RIDA (Rechts-Index-Datenbank). However, useful reports by relevant NGOs as well as other online sources are usually not included. One example of an academic journal with a specific focus on Austrian media and communication law is *Medien und Recht* (Media and law), edited by Heinz Wittmann. It is probably no surprise that empirical studies with a social science approach are rather an exception in this field of knowledge.

Nonetheless, the available sources and documents cover most of the key legal areas relevant for an assessment of the risks and opportunities for deliberative communication in Austria – and they do so in a most varied manner and sometimes also with conflicting intentions. Freedom of expression, for example, can be considered as well protected in Austria. It has been anchored in Austrian Basic Law since 1867 (StGG, Art. 13) and is discussed in various popular and academic publications (e.g., Seethaler, 2018). The NGO Reporters Without Borders lists Austria on rank 17 of its 2021 World Press Freedom Index, indicating a “fairly good” status quo (RSF, 2021). In the context of the Coronavirus pandemic, however, criticism arose when the government only allowed a limited number of journalists to participate in its press conferences (Siebenhaar, 2020). Even more recently, the system of state subsidies for the press became a matter of public debate in the course of the political crisis that forced Chancellor Kurz to resign (for background: Kaltenbrunner, 2021). The fact that the Criminal Code (StGB, § 111) allows for an increased prison sentence for defamation when it has been made accessible to a wider public by means of the mass media has also been considered a potential risk to freedom of expression (Seethaler & Beaufort, 2021, p. 10). With regard to access of information, the Austrian situation has been evaluated, among others, by Access Info Europe and the Centre for Law and Democracy (n.d.) who offer a global survey of right to information laws. Austria consistently trails at the bottom of their ranking, because the Duty to Grant Information Act of 1987 is described as “one of the weakest right to information laws in the world” (ibid.). Debates about a new Freedom of Information Act have been ongoing for years, but it remains unclear as to how far the draft law from February 2021 will consider persisting critiques (e.g., Access Info Europe, 2021). Austria does not have a specific law to protect whistleblowers, because the process to implement the European Whistleblower Directive is still ongoing (Transparency International Austria, 2020). At least, a new bundle of laws to combat hate speech and disinformation – consisting of a new Act on Measures to Protect Users on Communications Platforms (Communication Platforms Act) and amendments to existing legal provisions – has been in force since the beginning of 2021. Notwithstanding, criticism by civil society actors continues to be vociferous (e.g., Article 19, 2018, 2020; RSF, 2020). One of the biggest threats to the Austrian media system remains the particularly high degree of news media concentration, which can also be seen as a result of insufficient legal restraints. As Seethaler and Beaufort (2021, 12) point out for the Media Pluralism Monitor: “Austrian media and cartel law has been ineffective in preventing mergers of media companies – from the Mediaprint deal in 1988 (a joint venture of the owners of the two biggest newspapers at the time, *Kronen Zeitung* and *Kurier*) to the 2017 merger of the two biggest private TV stations, ATV and PULS 4, both of which are now owned by the German ProSiebenSat.1 group. Moreover, changes in the media landscape have not yet been significantly incorporated into competition law.” Both of the mentioned cases have received wide coverage – also in the mass media.

Unlike the legal domain, research on *media ethics*, *media self-regulation* and *media accountability* is by comparison weakly institutionalized in Austria. This imbalance is a direct result of the legal framework for media and journalism in a country which hardly claims or fosters self-regulation of media actors (Karmasin et al., 2011, p. 23). In fact, the main institution for journalistic self-regulation, the Austrian Press Council, was effectively disbanded in 2002 and only reconvened operations in 2010, after a hiatus of almost a decade, while other media accountabil-

ity instruments (MAIs) remain scarce until today (Karmasin et al., 2018). Consequently, systematic research initiatives with an exclusive focus on Austrian MAIs are limited in number and scope.

Among the chairs for communication science at Austrian universities, none has an official denomination for media ethics or media accountability. Still, however, several scholars are known as experts in this field of knowledge. At the University of Klagenfurt, for example, Matthias Karmasin, professor at the Department of Media and Communications, has been a pioneer for research into media ethics, among other things with projects such as “Self-regulation and self-organization in Austrian print media” (2005–2006, funded by KommAustria) or as the Austrian partner within the EU-funded project “Media Accountability and Transparency in Europe” (MediaAcT, 2010–2013). At the same department, Larissa Krainer has been establishing media and communication ethics as a research area since 1998, combining the development of theoretical models with empirical research, for example with a focus on an ethics of produsage and gender issues. In 2014, Tobias Eberwein became leader of a newly established research group “Media Accountability & Media Change” at the Institute for Comparative Media and Communication Studies (CMC), which is jointly operated by the Austrian Academy of Sciences and the University of Klagenfurt. This research group hosts a variety of ongoing projects both with a view on the comparative analysis of media accountability instruments (“Mapping media accountability: International trends and perspectives”) as well as new risks and challenges (e.g., “Into the unknown: Understanding digital media ethics”, “Triple A: Algorithms, automation, accountability”). At St. Pölten University of Applied Sciences, Michael Litschka has been organizing an annual “Symposium Media Ethics” since 2016. All of the aforementioned researchers collaborate within the Interdisciplinary Media Ethics Center (IMEC), a registered association funded by its members with the aim combining philosophically founded media ethics with practice-oriented knowledge transfer and consulting, operative since 2015. Other professors at Austrian universities, such as Alexander Filipović (Department of Systematic Theology and Ethics, University of Vienna) or Claudia Paganini (Department for Christian Philosophy, University of Innsbruck), represent a theological tradition of media ethics with only a minor interest in empirical research.

By contrast, several organizations and projects explicitly showcase a close cooperation between academic research and media practice. The Austrian Press Council, for example, is among the co-coordinators of the EU-funded research project “Media councils in the digital age” that intends to assess the challenges of digital developments for press and media councils in Europe, starting in 2019. The Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF) has an internal Public Value Competence Center that realizes a continuous evaluation of the quality of public service broadcasting (e.g., through annual expert hearings) and also publishes regular reports. The “Initiative Qualität im Journalismus” (IQ – Initiative Quality in Journalism) is an association of media researchers and practitioners that organizes regular events with a focus on the quality and accountability of Austrian journalism. The private “Medienhaus Wien” (Media House Vienna), an independent research and education company financed by the funds of its shareholders, offers both practice-oriented research as well as educational concepts and consulting for journalists and media managers.

Besides, many actors from Germany and Switzerland also leave their mark on the discourse on media ethics and accountability in Austria, mostly due to the same language. Many of them are organized within the German Communication Association’s section for “Communication and media ethics”, the Munich-based “Netzwerk Medienethik” (Network Media Ethics), or the recently founded “Zentrum für Ethik der Medien und der digitalen Gesellschaft” (zem:dg – Center for the Ethics of Media and the Digital Society). However, only a small share of their activities delivers specific data on the risks and opportunities for media ethics in Austria. The tri-national “Verein zur Förderung der publizistischen Selbstkontrolle” (FPS – Association for the Advance-

ment Media Self-Control), established in 2004 as an academic watchdog for German-language institutions of media self-control, has recently been disbanded.

In contrast to the domain of legal regulation, the slow institutionalization of research on media ethics and media accountability is reflected in the fragmentary availability of data in this area. In 2011, Karmasin and his colleagues judged: “Austria lacks comprehensive research about media ethics and media accountability. The reflection of the status quo is incomplete and longitudinal analyses have never been made” (Karmasin et al., 2011, p. 26). This assessment is still largely true ten years later: There is only a little empirical research with a specific focus on Austrian MAIs, and, consequently, comprehensive academic databases that would enable continuous monitoring activities in this domain do not exist. The sole exception are several surveys among Austrian journalists that have repeatedly been questioned about their professional role conceptions, including their ethical dispositions (e.g., Karmasin, 1996, 2005; Kaltenbrunner et al., 2007, 2008, 2020; Fengler et al., 2014; Hanitzsch et al., 2019b), which are discussed in more detail in section 3 of this study. Besides, the Austrian Press Council offers a data collection with decisions on all negotiated complaints (including explanatory statements by the jury) on its website, which may be considered as a valuable resource for further research.

Even though the European Media Accountability Index by Eberwein et al. (2018b), which measures the diffusion of different MAIs in the various journalism cultures throughout Europe, lists Austria on rank 4 and points to a “highly developed media accountability infrastructure” (p. 296) in the country, the number of Austrian MAIs must be considered moderate at best. This is also reflected in the available research publications in this context, which are summarized by several state-of-the-art reports (Karmasin et al., 2011, 2018; Weder, 2010; from the perspective of the whole German-language region: Eberwein, 2020a). With regard to the Austrian Press Council, Gottwald et al. (2006) provide an in-depth analysis of possible success factors for an Austrian model press self-regulation. Comparative assessments of media councils in Europe highlight shortcomings of the Austrian Press Council in the time of its standstill before 2010 (Puppis, 2009b; Fengler et al., 2014). The phase of its re-establishment has been illuminated by accompanying research (e.g., Zimmermann & Kraus, 2007) as well as documentary reports by involved actors (e.g., Warzilek, 2013). Current challenges of the press council are monitored by the ongoing “Media councils in the digital age” project (e.g., Harder & Knapen, n.d.; Masip et al., n.d.). A comprehensive study by Paganini (2018) analyses the history and scope of different codes of ethics in Austria – as well as in Germany and Switzerland. Eberwein et al. (2016) as well as Porlezza and Eberwein (2022) point to conspicuous deficits of Austrian and other European ethics codes in the context of digitization. There is no systematic research about the role of ombudspersons and media journalism in Austria, although several trade publications as well as some Master theses have showcased an interest in this issue (e.g., Breuss, 2017; Föderl-Schmid & Ranftl, 2008; Trautner, 2008). However, several studies do stress the importance of media companies as stakeholders of media accountability by reference to the concept of corporate social responsibility (e.g., Weder & Karmasin, 2009; Koinig et al., 2019). Even though there are only few lasting examples of media watchblogs in Austria, this MAI has recurrently been scrutinized by empirical studies (e.g., Schönherr, 2008; Hutter, 2009; Bichler, 2012; Bichler et al., 2013). More recently, new ethical challenges for journalists in the digital media world, such as participation, hate speech, disinformation, or algorithmic selection, have triggered increasing attention by Austrian media researchers (e.g., Bichler, 2017; Eberwein, 2020b, 2022; Litschka, 2021; Saurwein, 2019; Saurwein & Spencer-Smith, 2020).

3. Publications, data sources and main monitoring actors of journalism domain

To capture the risks and opportunities of journalism for deliberative communication, the Mediadecom project focuses on democratic aspects of professional journalism and news media. Accordingly, economic and social dimensions of journalism are addressed extensively, including organizational as well as actor-centred factors, contexts, and relations. In Austria, academic research on journalism in this sense is anchored at three universities: the Department of Communication Science at the University of Salzburg, the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Klagenfurt, and the Department of Communication at the University of Vienna. The research area also has a home at the Institute for Comparative Media and Communication Studies (CMC) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and the University of Klagenfurt and at “Medienhaus Wien”. Besides, the University of Krems offers a course of studies in Media and Communication, which, however, is associated with little to no empirical research – similar to the training and teaching programs offered by the universities of applied sciences.

Research on journalism at Salzburg’s Institute takes place primarily in the department “Journalistik” (Journalism Studies) and at the Center for Information and Communication Technologies & Society (ICT&S). The head of the Department of Communication Studies, Josef Trappel, is one of Austria’s most renowned researchers on media policy and media economics. Furthermore, research activities were and are mainly driven by Susanne Kirchhoff, Thomas Steinmaurer, Rudolf Renger, Dimitri Prandner (since 2016 at the Institute of Sociology, Department of Empirical Social Research at the University of Linz), and Roman Hummel (professor emeritus since 2016). Between 1997 and 2004, the Salzburg Institute published the annual “Berichte zur Lage des Journalismus in Österreich” (Reports on the state of journalism in Austria), addressing current challenges facing the profession. The University of Salzburg is also the seat of the “Österreichische Gesellschaft für Kommunikationswissenschaft” (Austrian Society of Communication). This association for media and communication science and practice is in charge of publishing the quarterly *Medien Journal* (Media Journal), which has been brought out since 1977, and the bi-annual conference “Kommunikationswissenschaftliche Tage” (Communication Science Days) – both platforms regularly feature contributions relevant to journalism research in Austria.

In recent years, the Department of Communication at the University Vienna has shifted its focus on international research. Studies on Austrian journalism, media or related national specifics are therefore only sporadically done. Fritz Hausjell must be mentioned as an expert on the Austrian media system as well as journalism, media history, and public broadcasting. He was also a co-founder of the journal *medien & zeit: Kommunikation in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (“Media & time: Communication in the past and present”), in which issues of communication studies are reflected in a contemporary historical context. Also, until his sudden death in 2014, the institute’s chairman Hannes Haas was considered an expert on the Austrian media landscape. In 2021, Folker Hanusch launched, in cooperation with CMC, a comparative country study on risks and uncertainties in a changing media environment including Austria as well as Germany and Switzerland. Hanusch is also a member of the Journalism Studies Center, located at the University of Vienna. The Center is concerned with the interdisciplinary study of journalism and its interaction with societal fields across different cultural contexts. So far, however, no systematic research has been done in the research group with regard to Austrian journalism.

The most comprehensive research on Austrian journalism is provided by “Medienhaus Wien”. Since 2007, a series of journalists’ surveys has been compiled and published (Kaltenbrunner et al., 2007, 2008, 2010, 2013, 2017, 2020). The results provide detailed insights into several areas of interest such as working conditions, demographic structure data, income, working practice, satisfaction, journalistic role understanding, and self-image. In addition, the reports provide an overview of media companies and media market data.

Since 2017, the “Verband Österreichischer Zeitungen” (VÖZ – Association of Austrian Newspapers) has published the *Medienhandbuch Österreich* (Media handbook Austria) every year as the successor to the *Pressehandbuch* (Press handbook), which had previously been published since 1985. It contains data on media use, media markets, media economics and the advertising market, developments in media law and media company law, including legal rulings, and an overview of media companies. In addition, a chronicle of the respective media year is printed, documenting key personnel, legal and corporate decisions relating to the media landscape. Market studies and surveys are recorded, as are media associations and institutions, news agencies, educational and training institutions, journalism professional associations and awards. Finally, an overview of the media landscape is given – a summary can be found online.

Austria is considered to be a country that stands out due to its high media concentration. For decades, research on the *market conditions* has discussed the risks of the high media concentration and foreign market share in the Austrian media system. Main research publications were written by Josef Trappel (Trappel, 2007, 2019; Trappel et al., 2002; Donk et al., 2012), Thomas Steinmaurer (Steinmaurer, 2002, 2009; Steinmaurer et al., 2002), Birgit Stark (Stark & Magin, 2009), Andy Kaltenbrunner (Kaltenbrunner, 2019) as well as Josef Seethaler and Gabriele Melischek (Seethaler, 2015; Seethaler & Beaufort, 2021; Hanitzsch et al., 2019b; Seethaler & Melischek, 2006; Seethaler, 2021). The ownership structures of the (daily) newspaper market in particular have been well researched (Melischek et al., 2005), including new phenomena such as free newspapers (Lohmann & Riedl, 2019). In 2020, results on the development of the local and regional press were published in a country comparison of Austria and Germany (Vonbun-Feldbauer et al., 2020). Specifically on the Austrian TV market, Wolfgang Seufert provided empirical findings on the national data situation and also reflected on the economic situation of the television industry in general (Seufert, 2012). Moreover, in 2016–2017, Rudolf Renger investigated market conditions focusing on the dynamics between print and social media products of local and regional newspaper companies (Renger et al., 2016). Besides academic efforts, the journalist Harald Fidler continuously publishes information and references regarding the ownership structures of Austrian publishing houses in his media encyclopaedia *Österreichs Medienwelt von A bis Z* (Austria’s world of media from A to Z) (Fidler, 2008) and on his website (Fidler, n.d.; for another useful encyclopaedia on the Austrian media landscape see Koschnick, 2004). Relevant sources with regard to audience reach in different media segments are discussed in the context of media usage patterns in section 4 of this report.

Surprisingly little academic research is committed exclusively to *public service broadcasting* and the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation ORF. An empirical comparison was developed in 2006, exploring the question of how the professional standards of ORF news are to be assessed in terms of journalistic and political plurality in a national and international context (Lengauer, 2006). Based on a structural analysis of media economic and constitutional framework conditions, Corinna Wenzel explores the question of whether state regulation concepts of public broadcasting are needed to ensure a public value (Wenzel, 2012). A more recent study was evaluating the funding model and exploring questions of transparency (Ganter & Sehl, 2018). However, under the Media Act, the ORF itself is legally required to release annual reports on financial statements and public value. These reports contain detailed data on reach, market shares, programming, the company’s financial data, but also concepts for corporate goals such as equality.

The literature on *production* is dominated by comparative country studies, mainly but not exclusively within the German-speaking countries, for example on digitization and media convergence (García Avilés et al., 2009; Menke et al., 2019), the situation of foreign correspondents (Brüggemann et al., 2017; Terzis, 2015), and the investigation of journalistic production under neoliberal conditions (Zwicky, 2012). During 2015, a research project discussed journalistic practices and infrastructures against the background of a possible creation of an information

centre for changing requirements in the professional field of journalism (“Durchführbarkeitsstudie: Beobachtungs-/Informationsstelle für den Wandel journalistischer Arbeitsbedingungen und Anforderungen“; Feasibility study: Observation/information centre for the change of journalistic working conditions and requirements, University of Salzburg). Furthermore, the research literature directs attention to the career entry of young journalists (Hummel et al., 2012) and economic pressures that weigh on journalists (Lauerer et al., 2017). An earlier research project from 1999–2001 already approached the topic of how economization affects journalistic work or journalistic quality (Neissl et al., 2001). Also worth mentioning are research efforts around investigative journalism, which consider legal aspects as well as economic feasibility and professional implementation (Seywald, 2020).

With regard to the subject of *working conditions*, as briefly mentioned earlier, the study “Journalismus unter Druck: Risiken und Unsicherheiten in einem sich wandelnden Medienumfeld” (Journalism under pressure: Risks and uncertainties in a changing media environment) started in 2021 as a cooperation between CMC (Josef Seethaler) and the University of Vienna (Folker Hanusch). This project is dedicated to risks and uncertainties faced by journalists in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. The aim of the study is to gain a better understanding of how journalists in different political, socio-economic and cultural contexts perceive risks and uncertainties in each case, what coping strategies they develop, and how they adapt. In 2017–2018, journalistic decision-making and selection processes were in the spotlight of a study at the University of Salzburg (“Work in P(rog)ress – Neue Nachrichten- und Arbeitsprozesse im österreichischen Journalismus”; Current news and work processes in Austrian journalism). In general, the comprehensive studies by Medienhaus Wien mentioned above are thoroughly informative in this respect.

A considerable number of studies are committed to young journalists and journalistic training. The literature provides overviews of training paths and further education (Hooffacker & Meier, 2017) as well as field reports and critical discussions of journalistic education (Kaltenbrunner, 2001). Other research relates to changes in the journalistic field and career strategies. The emphasis is on self-perception, such as the perceived need for training and/or other profession-related practices such as network building (Kirchhoff et al., 2013), curricula of relevant education and training institutions (“Die österreichische Journalistenausbildung im Kontext einer veränderten Berufswelt”; Austrian journalism education in the context of a changing professional world, University of Salzburg, 2018), and entrepreneurial journalism, professional self-employment and business start-ups (University of Salzburg in cooperation with the Board of Trustees for Journalism Education, KFJ, 2021).

The professional situation of women in Austrian journalism was explored by Johanna Dorer at the beginning of the millennium (Dorer, 2002). Furthermore, in 2012–2013, Susanne Kirchhoff headed a Europe-wide research project named “Women and Media Industries in Europe”, examining company structures in the context of gender as well as the personal experiences of established female journalists. The results also shed light on working conditions of women in media organizations and the representation of women on television (Kirchhoff & Prandner, 2017).

One of the wider interests of Austrian journalism research relates to *professional culture*. Given the comparatively close relationship between journalists and politicians (Maurer & Pfetsch, 2014), only little research has been done on this topic. Moreover, conflicts between political interests and media actors are hardly ever discussed publicly (Maurer & Riedl, 2020; Plasser & Lengauer, 2010). Also, light was shed on political alliances and networks of politicians with journalists, and the use of intimidation as a strategy to control the interactions between political actors and journalists (Maurer & Beiler, 2018). Besides, media policies for the period 2000–2005 were examined, which were exercised by a government with right-wing populist participation (Kaltenbrunner, 2006). More recently, using press releases and a selection of media content, the interaction of media and EU politics in Austria over the last ten years was examined

(“Drahtseilakt EU-Krisenmanagement: Zur Wechselwirkung von Medien und Politik in Österreich”; *Balancing act EU crisis management: On the interaction of media and politics in Austria*, Hajo Boomgaarden, University of Vienna). Furthermore, the influence of the advertising industry on journalistic work was explored (Gadringer et al., 2012; Reimann & Schopf, 2012) as well as the connection of journalistic work, economic pressure, and social responsibility (Aichberger et al., 2017). Also of interest were job profiles, journalistic roles (Karmasin & Kraus, 2010; Kraus, 2009; Riedl, 2019), and the self-perception of journalists (Kirchhoff & Prandner, 2016) at free newspapers, private broadcasting and online media in Austria. Key research projects in this regard are “Journalismus im Wandel” (Journalism in transition, 2011–2012) and “Medienkarrieren im Umbruch” (Media careers in transition, 2010–2011), covering topics such as working conditions, self-image and role image, gratifications in professional life, motivation and career expectations. In addition, the extent to which initial job motivations and expectations were met or disappointed against the background of journalistic day-to-day work was examined (Nölleke et al., 2020). And finally, a comparative country study offered insights into sociodemographic characteristics, working environment, independence and journalistic autonomy, understanding of roles and digitization (Hanitzsch et al., 2019b).

There are several notable international studies with Austrian participation: As mentioned before, Austria has been part of the Media Pluralism Monitor since 2015 (Josef Seethaler, CMC). The research project assesses the risks for media pluralism in EU member states and candidate countries based on four pillars: basic protection, market plurality, political independence, and social inclusiveness (e.g., Seethaler & Beaufort, 2021). Austria is also part of the Worlds of Journalism Study, which was launched in 2007 to assess the state of journalism throughout the world. The study’s main objective is to help journalism researchers, media practitioners, and policy makers to better understand the worldviews and changes that are taking place in the professional views of journalists, the conditions and limitations under which journalists operate, and the social functions of journalism in a changing world (e.g., Hanitzsch et al., 2019a). The Austrian research team is also led by Josef Seethaler, CMC.

4. Publications, data sources and main monitoring actors of media usage patterns

Research into media usage patterns is often subdivided into applied audience research and academic usage research (e.g., Marr & Bonfadelli, 2010). In Austria, commercially oriented audience research is clearly the dominant branch. Most of the relevant key figures for an analysis of media usage patterns are collected by commercially oriented market research or contract research, although not all related studies are publicly available (VMÖ, 2007). In contrast, academic usage research is by comparison weakly institutionalized and mostly focuses on either secondary analyses of commercial usage data or varying current issues. However, there is not, as yet, a distinct and typically Austrian tradition of academic research into media usage and media effects (for an overview from the perspective of the German-speaking countries: Stark & Kist, 2020).

Availability of usage data from applied audience research varies for each media segment: For print media, the Media Analysis (“Media-Analyse”) is the biggest study for surveying the performance figures of newspapers and magazines distributed in Austria. The results are based on a survey (approx. 15,000 interviews per year) conducted by the market research institutes GfK Austria and IFES. However, their usage data slightly differ from those figures collected within Austrian Consumer Analysis (ÖVA – “Österreichische Verbraucheranalyse”). Additional data on the reach of print media are collected by the Austrian Circulation Control (ÖAK – “Öster-

reichische Auflagenkontrolle”) – an association of publishers and (media) agencies. Voluntary members report their data on print run, paid circulation, and distributed circulation.

The “Radiotest” is a measuring instrument for radio consumption in Austria, commissioned by the public broadcaster ORF and the private radio stations. Its results are based on around 13,000 computer-assisted telephone interviews (RMS Austria, n.d.). For television, two databases are relevant: The “Teletest” study provides data since 1991 on the (classic) TV market with time-shifted viewing up to six days after broadcast, initially without web-based use on PC or mobile. The market research institute GfK records the TV consumption of around 3,200 people aged 12 and over and around 340 children in 1,570 Teletest households, representative of the population (AGTT, n.d.). Besides, the Moving Image Study (“Bewegtbildstudie”), which has been carried out annually since 2016, uses surveys to provide results of daily reach and market shares for television and videos for TV linear, TV recorded, TV online, online video, DVD, and the like. The media authority KommAustria is responsible for conducting the study (RTR, n.d.). KommAustria is also legally obliged to publish an annual report on the daily reach and user numbers of all audiovisual media, based on self-assessments by the media houses (RTR, n.d.). The Austrian Broadcasting Corporation has its own research unit (ORF Medienforschung), which – besides analyses of the available data on audience reach – also conducts ad-hoc research on current issues as well as monitoring tasks.

The Austrian Web Analysis (ÖWA – “Österreichische Webanalyse”) has been providing a full survey of the use of participating offerings (web/apps) since 2003. Results include page impressions, visits, unique clients, use time, and the percentage of accesses from Austria. In addition, online surveys and telephone surveys on Internet usage are conducted. However, the results refer exclusively to Austrian websites. In 1996, the market research institute Integral started surveying participants about their online usage for the Austrian Internet Monitor (AIM) (Integral, n.d.).

In an attempt to synchronize some of the above-mentioned single-media studies and live up to the realities of cross-media usage in the present, the “Media Server” study has been developed as an all-media survey in Austria that covers the media genres of print, television, radio, Internet and outdoor advertising. The first survey was conducted in 2014/2015. The study was repeated in 2019. Interestingly, the results partly differ from the findings by studies such as Media Analysis and Teletest.

In addition to these sources, various private research institutions conduct regular studies on specific questions with regard to media usage. For example, Gallup Austria repeatedly analysed media usage habits by Austrians in the course of the Covid-19 pandemic (e.g., Gallup Institut, 2020). The “Institut für Strategieanalysen” (ISA – Institute for Strategic Analyses) recently published a study on media usage in the pandemic by people with a migration background, financed by the Austrian Integration Fund (Perlot & Filzmaier, 2021). MindTake Research identified “winners” and “losers” of the Covid shutdown among Austrian websites (MindTake Research, 2020). Broader examples of recent audience studies in the field of contract research are, to name just a few, SORA’s baseline study *Internet und Demokratie in Österreich* (Internet and democracy in Austria) (Mayerl et al., 2018), realized on behalf of the Austrian Federal Chancellery, the *Mediendiskursstudie Wien* (Media discourse study Vienna) on the information habits of citizens in Vienna (most recently: IFES, 2021), commissioned by the City of Vienna, the Consumer Studies by the Austrian Advertising Council (most recently: Österreichischer Werberat, 2018), as well as various studies about digital media usage by kids and adolescents (e.g., by saferinternet.at; see also section 5 below).

In the field of academic research on media usage, several actors and projects stand out, each of them representing very specific thematic foci: Since 2015, Josef Trappel and his team at the University of Salzburg have been partners of the “Digital News Project”, coordinated by the British

Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. For this project, that currently compares 46 countries and can thus be considered the largest international study on news media usage in the digital media world, detailed findings on media usage patterns in Austria are published in annual country reports, based on an online survey of 2,000 national participants (for the 2021 edition, see Gadringer et al., 2021). The University of Salzburg has a specialized Department for Media Usage and Digital Cultures, co-directed by Christine Lohmeier and Sascha Trültzsch-Wijnen, which, however, favours a Cultural Studies approach to researching the influence of new technologies on media appropriation (see also section 5).

At the University of Vienna, various departments and researchers showcase an interest into questions of media usage, although none of them has an official denomination for this research area. One example is the Advertising and Media Psychology (AdMe) Research Group, led by Jörg Matthes, which currently integrates projects such as “Social Media Use and Adolescents’ Well-Being”, financed with the help of the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), as well as many other media effects studies. Claudia Wilhelm, newly appointed professor for Media and Intersectionality, has an FWF project on “Time Allocation, Media Selection, and Displacement Effects”. Together with researchers from neighbouring disciplines, Hajo Boomgaarden, professor for Empirical Social Science Methods, launched the “Austrian Corona Panel Project” in March 2020 – a panel survey among 1,500 respondents that also includes questions about the information behaviour during the Covid-19 pandemic.

At the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Birgit Stark was, for many years, one of the few academic experts that paid attention to an analysis of long-term change processes in Austrian media usage (e.g., Stark, 2009a; Stark & Rußmann, 2009). More recently, the three-country study “Media Performance and Democracy” (Austrian partner: CMC) evaluated the relationship between content and usage-related criteria for an assessment of media quality in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland.

Scholars at other Austrian universities – such as Theo Hug at the University of Innsbruck or Margit Böck at the University of Klagenfurt – cultivate a broader interdisciplinary approach to media usage research and focus on aspects of media pedagogy and media literacy in their current studies (see section 5 for more details).

From an international perspective, media usage patterns in Austria have been discussed in several comparative studies that relied on secondary analyses of data from some of the sources mentioned above (e.g., Latzer et al., 2012; Grossenbacher et al., 2017).

Thus, the data basis for an analysis of risks and opportunities for deliberative communication in Austria can be described as thoroughly diverse in the media usage patterns domain. This is particularly notable at the structural level: Access to the media segments and diversity in the Austrian media system are displayed in a wide range of studies from applied audience research. Data from key sources such as Media Analysis, Radiotest, Teletest, or the Austrian Web Analysis are often subjected to secondary analyses by academic researchers with questions regarding, for example, usage patterns in selected media sectors or cross-media trends (e.g., Stark, 2009a, 2009b, 2010; Stark & Karmasin, 2009; Stark & Rußmann, 2009) – sometimes even from a comparative perspective (e.g., Grossenbacher et al., 2017; Hagenah et al., 2015; Latzer et al., 2012). Habits and trends of news media usage and the functionalities of the media are not only monitored by the Austrian country studies within the Digital News Project (most recently: Gadringer et al., 2021), but also by a number of studies with specialized approaches (e.g., Prandner & Glatz, 2021; Trilling & Schoenbach, 2013, 2015). The relevance of public service media from an audience perspective is discussed, for example, by Gonser and Reiter (2018) as well as Gonser et al. (2017). Developments of trust in Austrian media can be assessed from a comparative perspective with the help of Eurobarometer data as well as on the basis of the surveys for the Digital News Project (see above), with a few small-scale qualitative studies (e.g., Russmann & Hess,

2020) providing further insights. The most elaborate assessment of news media quality in Austria and the role of the audience has been developed in the Media Performance and Democracy project (e.g., Hasebrink et al., 2021; Beaufort, 2020). Besides, a systematic literature review reveals a large number of further studies on specialized research questions, for example with regard to motives for media usage by specific populations, for specific technologies, or in specific situations (e.g., Biruhs, 2015; Gallner-Holzmann et al., 2020; Kaufmann, 2016; Perlot & Filzmaier, 2021; and many more).

5. Publications, data sources and main monitoring actors of media-related competencies domain

In Austria, media literacy and media education have for decades been essential in both research and teaching (Paus-Hasebrink & Hipfl, 2005). With the advent of digital media, however, they have developed into a core discipline with an interdisciplinary approach (Trültzsch-Wijnen & Brandhofer, 2020). Moreover, today, media education is increasingly restricted to digital competencies (Cwielong et al., 2021; Oppl et al., 2021; Swertz, 2021; Brandhofer et al., 2018). Of course, media-related competencies do not only concern media use, but also media production. Since we assign media production – despite phenomena such as produsage, platform journalism, and user-generated content – predominantly to (traditional) journalism, the corresponding explanations can be found in section 3.

Besides international data sources like the OECD and Eurobarometer or PISA, Statistics Austria, “responsible for performing scientific services in the area of federal statistics” (Statistics Austria, 2008), provides data on the educational attainment of the Austrian population. The Germany-based portal “Statista” provides data relevant for Austria as well. Moreover, Austria has been part of the Digital News Project since 2015. As a national partner, the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Salzburg is responsible for the Austrian sub-study (see section 4 above).

The most relevant legal sources for this domain are school curricula. In addition to many actions at the EU level, since the school year 2018/19, the mandatory exercise “Digital Basic Education” has been implemented nationwide at lower secondary level (Oppl et al., 2021). Moreover, regulations concerning cyber-criminality, user rights etc. must be considered. Since 2016, Austria has got its own law against cyberbullying (§107c StGB).

Research on media literacy is mainly carried out by public institutions such as universities and university colleges, where, however, different measures to improve media competencies are mostly realized by private initiatives usually supported by the federal ministry. The Department of Communication Studies at the University of Salzburg, for example, has developed into a centre for research on media education. Two projects by Ingrid Paus-Hasebrink are outstanding in this context: firstly, the multinational research network “EU Kids Online: Researching European children’s online opportunities, risks and safety” in which Paus-Hasebrink and her team has been participating for years; secondly, the long-term study (2005 to 2021) on the role of media in the socialization of socially disadvantaged adolescents (“Mediensozialisation 2005–2021”). Moreover, the Center for Information and Communication Technologies & Society (ICT&S) at the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Salzburg, directed by Thomas Steinmaurer, among other topics focuses on “Digital literacies / empowerment” and “Citizenship & participation”. At a regional level, at the Department of Media and Communications of the University of Klagenfurt (AAU), Caroline Roth-Ebner carried out two projects (2018, 2019) in cooperation with local schools to promote media literacy among pupils, parents, and teachers (“Schaut her! Ich zeig’s euch digital!” and “Flipped classroom”). Likewise at the AAU, the Department of Informatics Didactics, being part of the Faculty of Technical Sciences, “focuses on

didactical issues for educators at Universities as well as elementary, primary and secondary schools". At the University of Vienna, on the other hand, the Department of Education plays a vital role in this field. In addition to universities and universities of applied sciences, like for example the FH-Joanneum Graz that offers a postgraduate Master's course on "Media competence and digital literacy", there are in particular universities of teacher education ("Pädagogische Hochschulen") where research on media literacy and, of course, most notably on media education is carried out.

Regarding non-university activities and projects, there are many private institutions and organizations mostly financed by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, which are dedicated to promoting media literacy and competences in media use among young people and pupils. Therefore, many initiatives offer teachers documents, which they may use in the classroom, like for example *saferinternet.at*, *digi.komp – Digitale Kompetenzen für Lehrende*, or *digitalreport.at*. The latter, initiated by the journalist Ingrid Brodnig, is not limited to pupils, but also provides a wide range of information on digital media for citizens. In addition to financial support for private initiatives, the government has taken several measures to improve (digital) media literacy, as for instance the "8-point plan for digital learning" or the "Austrian youth strategy". Also, not just limited to digital education, the portal *erwachsenenbildung.at*, operated by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, "informs about education information systems, basic issues and current topics of Adult Education in Austria and the EU".

Organized as a long-term project and funded by the Federal Ministry, a team around Christian Swertz is responsible for the publication of the leading Austrian journal *Medienimpulse* (Media Impulses – Journal for Media Education). Accordingly, most of the articles with an Austrian focus have been published in this journal. Its multidisciplinary orientation comprises "education, communication science, media science, sociology, psychology, computer science, and philosophy". As the leading journal in this field, both renowned experts and young scholars contribute with their studies. Following the ongoing debate on the term "media literacy", for example, Böck and Kress (2010) discuss different approaches like "New Literacy Studies", "Multiliteracies", and "Multimodality". Referring to Trültzsch-Wijnen (2016), Roth-Ebner and Duller (2018) discuss how the concepts media literacy and media performance "can be related to each other in media pedagogical practice".

The journal *Medienpädagogik* (MediaEducation) is a joint project by researchers from Germany, Austria and Switzerland (DACH). In this context, the publication series *Jahrbuch Medienpädagogik* has been published annually since 2001 and provides studies with an interdisciplinary approach including Educational Sciences, Communication and Media Studies, and Psychology. Like Cwielong et al. (2021), a current article by scholars at the University of Innsbruck explores "DataPolitics" and the question how to deal with data in the digital era (Bachor et al., 2021).

6. Analysis of Research and Monitoring Capabilities and Quality

The description of Austrian publications and data sources in the four domains covered by the Mediadecom project reveals notable discrepancies in the relevant fields of research. The following section intends to assess the quality of available data sources in the four domains and their capabilities as an instrument to monitor the risks and opportunities for deliberative communication in Austria. The focus is on the following dimensions: (a) availability of data, (b) recency and continuity of data, (c) complexity of data-gathering, (d) trust and reliability, and (e) availability of experts and/or specific research structures.

6.1. Legal and ethical regulation

In the domain of legal and ethical regulation, the availability and quality of research data is highly heterogeneous. The field of media law is traditionally considered significant in Austria and, consequently, key legal texts as well as critical commentary (both by academic actors and NGOs) are accessible on a continuous basis. The discourse on media ethics and media accountability, on the other hand, is considerably more fragmentary, due to a weaker institutionalization and a lack of continuous funding. Nevertheless, academic interest in these issues has been growing since the re-establishment of the Austrian Press Council. However, empirical research in both the legal and the ethical subdomains is still more of an exception than the rule. Interestingly, examples for international comparative research approaches have become more frequent in the recent past – also in the field of media ethics. Nonetheless, the continuing dominance of normative evaluations of the prevailing risks and opportunities in this domain arguably impact on the presumed reliability of the available data which are often guided by (open or concealed) political, economic, or ideological interests. As a measure of quality management, future assessments of legal and ethical measures within the Mediadecom project should be substantiated by additional research interviews with independent experts. As the description in section 2 of this report has shown, the presence of experts and research structures is traditionally strong in the field of (media) law, and it has recently been improving in the area of media ethics and media accountability.

6.2. Journalism

A well-documented problem in the journalism domain is the lack of valid structural data for different market segments of (news) media and reporting, because there are no official media statistics. Although broadcasting companies are required to disclose their ownership structure, they are not published. The ownership structure can only be traced in extracts from the company register archived in the Commercial Court. However, complex ownership structures are hardly visible there. As the private television market is dominated primarily by German stations, only gross advertising figures are available for Austria. Possible changes in advertising market shares can hardly be recorded (Angerer et al., 2012). However, academic journalism research has certainly been flourishing in the recent past, not least thanks to several large-scale journalists' surveys that have been repeated and refined over the two decades covered by this report, thanks to financial support by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF). A notable trend can be identified in the growing importance of international comparative studies – see for example the Worlds of Journalism project. Whereas most academic research is easily findable through traditional literature and indexing databases, data collections and non-published results by private organizations such as “Medienhaus Wien” are only accessible to a limited extent, and some of its publications are not catalogued in either university libraries or on international search platforms, resulting in poor visibility. While the quality of most academic publications in this field is

usually secured by peer-review procedures, such mechanisms are lacking for structural data. Compared to the other domains evaluated by the Mediadelcom project, the availability of Austrian experts and research structures in the field of journalism studies can be considered as strong.

6.3. Media usage patterns

With regard to research about media usage patterns, it is necessary to differentiate between applied audience research and academic usage studies. Applied audience data are essentially available for all media segments – and since the introduction of the Media Server in 2014/2015 also for a cross-media analysis. However, the collection techniques of the relevant studies have not been coordinated for a long time and vary over the years. Therefore, Austria lacks a meaningful data basis for long-term observations and comparisons between media types (as in the German “Langzeitstudie Massenkommunikation”). In principle, the available studies are trusted as an established “currency” to assess audience reach, and thus the advertising value of Austrian media. However, there have also been incidents that cast doubt on their credibility. For example, the case of Radiotest: In April 2016, it was admitted by the commissioning market research institute GfK that the results were manipulated by employees in favour of the public broadcasting stations. As a consequence, an additional research institute has been appointed as a control body since 2018. Academic usage studies have long been highlighting the well-known deficits of commercial audience data (e.g., Stark, 2009a). At the same time, the state of research on media usage patterns driven by academic actors has remained sketchy, with some studies relying on secondary analyses of the available market data and others focusing on highly specialized research approaches with little capacities to highlight more general trends. Although the Austrian reports for the Digital News Project have become a benchmark to address questions of news usage and trust since 2015, the data basis for evaluating critical junctures in this domain is shallow. There are only few academic usage researchers with a profound interest in the specific characteristics of the Austrian media system – also because appointment committees at Austrian universities seem to have preferred international experts for the relevant posts in recent years.

6.4. Media-related competencies

At first glance, the availability of data regarding media-related competencies is good. There are a lot of recent studies, as well as some longitudinal studies. The data are trustworthy and, due to its digital access, gathering is usually convenient. The difficulty, however, lies in the nature of the domain itself. How do we define media literacy? Which research areas must be included? How broadly do we have to focus the domain? Depending on these questions, in particular the amount of complexity of data gathering is varying. Accordingly, the availability of experts and specific research structures is good, but depends on the multidisciplinary approach to this domain.

7. Conclusions

Despite a comparably late institutionalization of media and communication sciences in Austria, the case study report can build on a broad bandwidth of research publications and other data sources that are relevant for an analysis of risks and opportunities for deliberative communication in the country. Particularly in the domains of journalism and media usage, a large variety of empirical sources is available and research initiatives have reached a high degree of specialization. In recent years, the complexity of different data collection procedures seems to be growing and there is a discernible trend towards internationally comparative research settings, first and

foremost in the field of journalism research. Unfortunately, data quality in the area of media usage is still marred by the interests of commercial research institutions and their continuing struggle to synchronize the established “currencies” for measuring audience reach in different media sectors. In the domain of legal regulation, the basis of available data also appears to be well advanced, although empirical research is underrepresented. By contrast, research on media ethics and media literacy is less differentiated – presumably a result of either weak institutionalization or the typically interdisciplinary character of these (sub-)domains which makes it difficult to identify a clearly defined canon of literature.

The analysis presented in this report, thus, also highlights possible tasks for future research initiatives on the risks and opportunities for deliberative communication. These should include, among other things, more systematic inventories of the structures of Austrian news media in all market sectors as well as more comparative assessments in each of the relevant research domains, which must however pay attention to the special characteristics of the Austrian media system. Investigations into the ethical foundations of media actors should strive to collect more empirical data which can be used for evidence-based assessments beyond merely normative demands. An unsolved problem is the lack of data for long-term observations and processes of social change in the context of media and their usage, which would be a prerequisite to identify critical junctures in this field of knowledge. To increase the visibility and transparency of media and communication research in Austria, a broader discussion about scientific publication strategies and open access/open data concepts seems inevitable.

Last but not least, a systematic examination of the role of different media-external context factors for the quality of deliberative communication seems to be particularly relevant for the Mediadecom project. The importance of such a contextual analysis has been highlighted by other large-scale comparative research projects in the past, for example with regard to journalism cultures (e.g., Hanitzsch et al., 2019a) or media accountability systems (e.g., Eberwein et al., 2018a; Fengler et al., 2014, 2022). These projects illustrate that possible context factors enabling or disabling deliberative communication can be identified at the most extreme levels, for example in the political system, the economic system, the scientific system, but also in society at large, in cultural history, in transnational influences etc. However, not all of these context factors can be distinctly allocated to the conceptual domains covered by Mediadecom. Consider, for example, the case of research funding as a context factor with a clear and definite impact on the research agenda of media and communication studies: In Austria, a variety of sources are available to describe trends in public and private funding of the research sector. The Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research publishes a “Bundesforschungsdatenbank” (BFDAT – Federal Research Database) with information on public funds in all academic disciplines. Specific projects on media and communication funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) can be identified with the help of the FWF Project Finder. A similar project database is available for the Anniversary Fund of Oesterreichische Nationalbank (OeNB). Information on the funds administered by KommAustria and RTR are also published online (RTR, n.d.) and in the annual Communication Reports (e.g., RTR, 2021). These and similar sources make it possible to identify notable fluctuations both with regard to the amount of funds made available for media research and the preference for certain issues that are considered worthy of funding. A systematic evaluation of such trends – not only in the field of research funding, but also taking into account other extra-media context factors – would be a relevant task for an assessment of risks and opportunities for deliberative communication and could possibly help to identify critical junctures in the recent history of Austrian media. However, such a contextual analysis should be prepared systematically for all countries represented in the Mediadecom project, in order to guarantee comparability of the generated insights.

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