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News Media Monitoring Capabilities in 14 European Countries: Problems and Best Practices

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Abstract

Social acceleration has been a catalyst for rapid changes concerning the mediascapes of European societies. Democratic societies need deliberation, but what kinds of journalism and communication cultures are supported by different stakeholders and structural possibilities? The aim of this article is to conceptualise and analyse the risks and opportunities concerning the monitoring capabilities in key domains of the media field. This includes the performance and normative regulation of news media (journalism) as well as media usage patterns and competencies of different actors, all of which influence the quality of deliberative communication across cultures. The monitoring potential is related to various stakeholders who gather data and information on media and media usage, transform the information into knowledge, and use this knowledge to create evidence-based media policy. What interests and values are served by which stakeholders and how does this actual monitoring serve the media policy in different European countries? What is the role and resources of media researchers? These questions are answered with the help of an extensive literature review and a synoptic analysis of the monitoring capabilities of 14 European countries, based on original case studies. The article will, thus, broaden the conceptual understanding of risks and opportunities for deliberative communication in democratic societies—and at the same time offer an initial inventory of typical problems and best practices for monitoring deliberative communication across Europe.

Keywords

deliberative communication; Europe; media monitoring; monitoring capabilities; risks and opportunities; structure and agency

1. Introduction

Social and technological acceleration has been a catalyst for rapid changes concerning the mediascapes of European societies. Media and journalism research has been trying to capture and analyse the impact of these changes for social communication. However, in data-saturated societies, it is worthwhile to ask: What is the actual knowledge about the diachronic changes concerning the news media? Is media governance based on acquired wisdom relying on data and analysis? What could be a reasonable and effective monitoring system that allows to reveal important changes, but at the same time is flexible enough to respond to changes?

With this study, we hope to provide answers to these questions by pursuing two aims: First and foremost, we intend to develop a concept of *monitoring capabilities* concerning media-related risks and opportunities (ROs) for deliberative communication. Second, based on desk research conducted within the framework of the Horizon 2020 project Media-Related Risks and Opportunities for Deliberative Communication: Development Scenarios of the European Media Landscapes (Mediadelcom), we also provide initial insights into the monitoring capabilities in 14 selected European countries. The analysis of typical problems and best practices of media monitoring draws on a collection of systematic country studies that has been compiled during the project, in order to evaluate academic publications and other data sources relevant to ROs for deliberative communication (Mediadelcom, 2022b).

However, before the results of the analysis can be presented in more detail, some theoretical reflections are required to provide a conceptual background. For the aim of monitoring deliberative communication, it is important to consider ROs *for* the news media as well as the ROs arising *from* the media. Besides, to allow for a holistic view on ROs, it is necessary to differentiate between structures and agents supporting deliberative communication. In the context of the present study, we will offer an analysis of the monitoring capabilities related to the ROs for deliberative communication. Accordingly, the following sections are supposed to offer a theoretical starting point for an assessment of relevant research infrastructures across Europe, but not an evaluation of the state of deliberative communication itself which is reserved for another phase of the Mediadelcom project.

2. Monitoring Media-Related Risks and Opportunities

Monitoring media transformations around the globe has been a popular objective of media and journalism researchers for a long time, and there is a considerable number of media-related monitoring projects offering international comparisons, which are repeated at specific time intervals. These studies make it possible to analyse different aspects of media change both diachronically and comparatively between countries—many of them based on annual reports. Their points of focus, however, vary considerably.

For example, the World Press Freedom Index, compiled by the NGO Reporters Without Borders, publishes an annual ranking of, currently, 180 countries worldwide to compare levels of press freedom enjoyed by journalists and the media (for the most recent edition, see Reporters Without Borders, 2023). Similarly, Freedom House offers an annual survey and analysis of internet freedom around the world (Freedom House, 2022). The International Research and Exchanges Board's Media Sustainability Index provides an in-depth examination of the conditions for independent media in 80 countries across the world, making it possible to study "how media systems change over time and across borders" (International Research & Exchanges

Board, n.d.). The Media Pluralism Monitor presents a tool to assess different weaknesses of media systems that may hinder media pluralism in, currently, 32 European countries, based on indicators covering areas such as fundamental protection, market plurality, political independence, and social inclusiveness (Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom, 2023). The Worlds of Journalism study conducts recurring waves of surveys among journalists in more than 120 countries to examine perceptions of the profession around the globe and to distinguish a range of journalism cultures (e.g., Hanitzsch et al., 2019). The Platform for the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists provides annual reports on serious threats to the safety of journalists and media freedom in Europe to reinforce the Council of Europe's response to the threats and member states' accountability (Safety of Journalists Platform, 2023). The Media for Democracy Monitor, although only repeated irregularly so far, scrutinises the democratic performance of leading news media in Europe (Trappel & Tomaz, 2021). Developed by the same network of researchers, the Euromedia Ownership Monitor is a pilot project to examine media ownership transparency in 15 European countries (Euromedia Research Group, 2022). The prototypical Media Accountability Index allows for an assessment of the international diffusion of varying practices of media self-regulation (Eberwein et al., 2018). The Reuters Institute's *Digital News Report* reveals insights about the usage of news in a digital media environment (Newman et al., 2023). The Media Literacy Index assesses the resilience potential among media users to withstand the impact of fake news (Open Society Institute Sofia, 2023).

In addition to these media-focused monitoring projects, various international studies related to neighbouring academic disciplines also grant relevant insights concerning media change. These include, to name just a few examples, the Varieties of Democracy study that describes characteristics of political regimes around the world—inter alia by measuring indicators like media censorship, media corruption, harassment of journalists, or internet penetration (Varieties of Democracy Institute, 2023). Similarly, the Eurobarometer surveys commissioned by the European Parliament regularly look at the media habits of EU citizens, their trust in different media sources, as well as attitudes towards the threat of disinformation (European Parliament, 2022). The European Social Surveys also include indicators relating to media use, internet use, and social trust—among many other things (European Social Survey, n.d.). Taken together, all of those and the aforementioned international monitoring projects compile important data for tracking media change processes in Europe and around the world, even though their methods of data collection differ considerably.

Moreover, national data sources can help to broaden the perspective. Indeed, several European countries have various monitoring projects that either focus on news media directly or include media-related factors alongside other issues. These types of sources include, for example, national media statistics, annual reports by media organisations and other institutions related to media and journalism, but also regular research projects carried out by academic actors at national universities, research units in the media industry, or independent monitoring units. However, only small portions of these sources are directly accessible to international researchers because they are mostly available in only the respective national languages. Besides, the data quality also varies significantly from country to country.

The empirical part of the study presented in this article enables us to provide an evaluation of the news media monitoring capabilities in 14 European countries. However, a critical analysis of existing monitoring projects demonstrates that only a few of them are directly focused on the discourse related to ROs of deliberative communication. Consequently, to serve as a functional basis for our study (and for the Mediadecom project in general), the monitoring approach as such needs to be revisited: Which aspects are

essentially monitored and how far are they relevant for the observation of deliberative communication? Which methodological approaches can be considered well-established and efficient? How can the quality of the collected data be assessed?

As shown by the examples of international monitoring projects mentioned above, there are certain traditional topics that have been considered important to trace, which include freedom of expression and freedom of the media, media pluralism and media independence, as well as general trust in the media, etc. In recent years, various other issues have moved into the focus of comparative media and journalism research. These issues include transparency of media ownership, the role perception and accountability of journalists, the safety of journalists, conditions of media usage in the online world, more specifically the spread of disinformation, and different aspects of media literacy, particularly digital competences of children and young people. Most of these issues are noteworthy for a debate about risks concerning deliberative communication in democratic societies, but the various monitoring projects are usually not connected, and in some cases—as already mentioned—the methodology invites critical scrutiny. Existing monitoring projects concerning freedom of the press and that of expression can illustrate this claim. Most studies on freedom of expression focus either on existing legislation (e.g., Media Pluralism Monitor) or use (expert) interviews in which different individuals subjectively assess, for instance, the degree of media freedoms in their own countries (e.g., World Press Freedom Index). Such methodological approaches have limitations. Assessments based on legal documents are unable to take into consideration everyday communication practices, because in EU countries, freedom of expression is generally guaranteed by law, and it is the daily implementation of these laws that matters. In the case of expert interviews, however, limitations arise from readers of the study being unaware the interviewees' personal experiences can influence the reliability of the results. In contrast, a systematic collection and analysis of national cases (ideally including document analysis and additional interviews) would reveal the motives and power balance regarding different agents.

To bypass any limitations of previous monitoring projects, our study uses a conceptual basis that is both integrative and dynamic. To address the problem of a missing connection between previous monitoring initiatives and include upcoming issues in comparative media and journalism research, we apply a four-domain model, as proposed by Mediadelcom, including those dimensions of news production and usage in democratic societies where the discourse about ROs for deliberative communication is most visible. The four domains are: (a) legal and ethical regulation of the media; (b) journalism; (c) media-usage patterns; and (d) media-related competencies (Mediadelcom, 2022a; see also Lauk & Berglez, 2024). One important idea behind the four-dimensions approach is that each of these domains includes elements of structure and agency (see Section 3). To address the specific methodological challenges discussed above, we proceed from the notion that national media systems—particularly in Central and Eastern Europe (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2019)—have responded to the transformations of the 21st century in a variety of ways and therefore cannot be properly assessed by a universal matrix of variables alone. Hence, our study additionally draws on a collection of national worst and best-practice cases that may exemplify the challenges of monitoring deliberative communication in the countries studied—thus offering a possibility to understand relevant practices beyond legal documents and expert opinions.

3. The Interconnection Between Structure, Agency, and the Implementation of Relevant Values in Daily Practices

Democratic societies need deliberation. However, deliberation—as a form of “mutual communication that involves weighing and reflecting on preferences, values and interests regarding matters of common concern” (Bächtiger et al., 2018, p. 2)—requires several structural prerequisites (institutional, political, normative, etc.) that support specific values. If such structures do not exist in certain media systems or are transformed as a result of political, economic, or technological disruptions, societies are likely to face risks that may threaten the ideal of deliberative communication. At the same time, change processes may also open windows of opportunities for deliberative communication. The identification of such ROs is the ultimate aim of the monitoring approach conceptualised in the sections that follow.

Traditionally, the structures of media and journalism have been the focus of comparative media systems research. For example, Hallin and Mancini (2004) provide a systematic approach to analyse the relationship between media and politics in different Western democracies. Their typology of three ideal models of media systems (liberal, democratic-corporatist, polarised-pluralist) gained a lot of popularity and has later been advanced and modified (e.g., Brüggemann et al., 2014; Castro Herrero et al., 2017; Dobek-Ostrowska et al., 2010; Hallin & Mancini, 2012). Yet, some authors also point out that a comparison of media systems could better explain the differences between countries if it would take into consideration the notion of journalism culture (see, among others, Hanitzsch, 2007; Lauk & Harro-Loit, 2017), which includes professional values and ideologies, journalistic role perceptions, and professional and media education.

However, social structures and culture depend on individuals who fill them with life. In other words, we argue that media-related ROs concerning deliberative communication in democratic societies to a large extent revolve around groups of individuals who act and interact according to their own motivations and agendas. Margaret Archer provides a useful concept that relates agents and structure. In developing a *Realist Social Theory* (Archer, 1995), she models “structure,” “culture,” and “agency” as distinct strata of social reality—each element possessing distinctive emergent properties which are real and causally efficacious but irreducible to one another. While agency is used as a generic term describing the “people” that constitute parts of society, structure includes certain roles and positions in institutional and systemic settings, and culture comprises the values, beliefs and ideologies behind them. Within this view on social reality, Archer also differentiates varying forms of agency (see Archer, 2017). For example, she defines Corporate Agents as organised interest groups that are actively involved in forming and reforming structures (Archer, 2017, p. 25). They are conscious of certain strategic aims and coordinate their activities to make them real (e.g., journalists’ unions, media organisations, etc.). Primary Agents, on the other hand, lack these qualities. They “neither express interests nor organize for their strategic pursuit” (Archer, 2017, p. 25). This does not mean, however, that collectives of Primary Agents have no influence on social structures at all. Primary Agents also react on their structural context, and every passive Primary Agent can become an active Corporate Agent, based on its relationships with other collectives.

Such conceptualisations offer a fertile ground to understand processes of news media monitoring. To assess the ROs for deliberative communication, it is necessary to analyse if and to what extent the assumptions created by the structure as well as by the action of certain agents support norms and values necessary for deliberative communication (see also Nord & Harro-Loit, 2022). These include:

- Universal values—or “protonorms”—such as respect for human dignity and truth/truthfulness, which form a necessary precondition for trust between individuals, organisations, and institutions (Christians, 2019);
- Basic human rights such as freedom of expression and free access to information, which, however, need to be balanced against human dignity, privacy, and the like (Cohen-Almagor, 2001);
- The protection of journalistic autonomy as a prerequisite for professional impartiality (Waisboard, 2013);
- Demands for pluralism and diversity at the level of media contents, media outlets, media ownership, or any other level of media practice (Karppinen, 2007);
- Differing forms of media accountability, which can be directed towards the profession, the market, political actors, or the public (Bardoel & d’Haenens, 2004; Fengler et al., 2022);
- The more recently established ethical principle of transparency in journalism, which has increasingly been spurred during the digital transformations (e.g., Koliska, 2022).

The Mediadecom project seeks to provide a model for the assessment of media-related ROs that allows us to ask whether and to what extent the existing structures in a particular country and the agents operating in that structure—(news) content creators and consumers, politicians, regulators, educators, etc.—implement the above-mentioned values in their daily practice. What are their motives? Which options for action do they have? How far do their actions influence the trajectory of media development in their respective structural contexts?

To answer these and adjacent questions, we propose to use Archer’s theoretical differentiation between structure, culture, and agency (SCA) as a starting point and draw on the Agent-Oriented Modelling approach (e.g., Railsback & Grimm, 2011; Sterling & Taveter, 2009) to develop an analytical model. Agent-based models offer possibilities for understanding how complex social (and other) systems arise from the characteristics and behaviours of making up these systems. Typically, such models consist of three elements (Macal & North, 2010): (a) a set of *agents*, their attributes and behaviours; (b) a set of agent *relationships* and methods of interaction; and (c) the *environment* in which the agents are situated.

To synchronise the theoretical assumptions discussed above, we suggest a model that distinguishes each kind of agent involved in news media monitoring, enables us to focus on their interactions, and considers the role of the structure and culture around them as drivers of ROs for deliberative communication:

1. Agents: The analysis will identify both Corporate Agents and Primary Agents (including their knowledge of and motivation to implement norms and values of deliberative communication), as well as the lack thereof;
2. Relationships: The analysis will examine the relationships and the interactions between these agents, if they exist;
3. Environment: The analysis will consider the structural context (e.g., media system, political system, economic system, but also relevant institutions) as well as the cultural context (e.g., journalism culture, legal environment, and other normative influences).

The key elements of our understanding of news media monitoring in the context of SCA model are summarised in Figure 1.

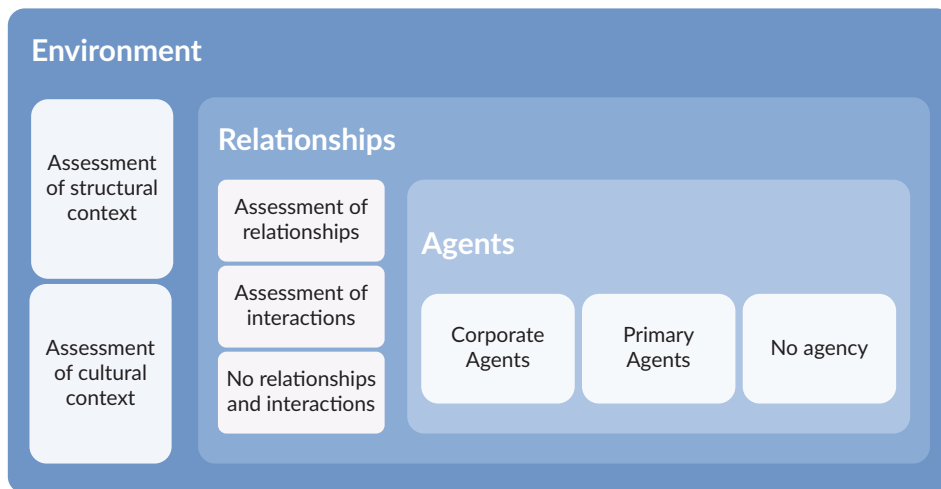


Figure 1. SCA model for news media monitoring.

4. Assessing Media Monitoring Capabilities

In line with the requirements of the Mediadecom project, we understand the idea of a media monitoring capability as the abilities, possibilities, and motivations of various agents to observe and analyse the developments of the media and the changes in society emanating from the media transformations as well as related ROs for deliberative communication. This involves a regular examination of all kinds of sources, such as: (a) academic research in media and journalism studies and adjacent disciplines; (b) data producers and knowledge users in the private sector and NGOs; (c) public authorities responsible for data collection and knowledge production. Ideally, used data and obtained knowledge can be applied in the processes of political decision-making.

To assess media monitoring capabilities, it is necessary to determine the quality and usefulness of different sources for monitoring purposes. For this aim, it is helpful to distinguish between data, information, knowledge, and wisdom, as proposed by the well-known DIKW model (see, e.g., Ackoff, 1989; Frické, 2018; Rowley, 2007) that has found wide application within information science and knowledge management. This hierarchical model, that has also been presented in the form of a “knowledge pyramid” (Kitchin, 2014), exemplifies that data always precedes information, which precedes knowledge, which precedes understanding and wisdom (see Figure 2). We have modified this conceptualisation to the needs of our analysis:

- **Data:** Examples of useful data can be found in all instances of automatically recorded statistics on media usage;
- **Information:** When this data is processed and logically linked (e.g., to show an editorial board which media products were consumed for how long), it becomes information;
- **Knowledge:** The organisation of such information (e.g., in in-house reports by media organisations or in academic media and journalism research) creates knowledge;
- **Wisdom:** The level of wisdom indicates the extent to which the acquired knowledge is applied and leads to evidence-based decisions in media policy-making.

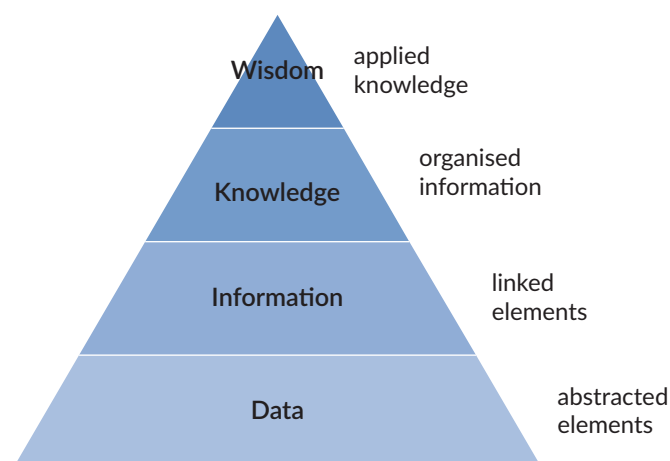


Figure 2. The “knowledge pyramid.” Source: Adapted from Kitchin (2014, p. 10).

In other words, for an assessment of media monitoring capabilities, knowledge and wisdom have critical importance. The capability of media monitoring concerning the ROs of deliberative communication depends on whether and to what extent information can be collected and processed in a given country to generate knowledge about changes in the structure and the activities, competences, and interactions (relationships) of different agents. In many cases, the availability of information depends on the public access to data and the motives of data owners. It is very important that media governance is eventually based on wisdom as a form of applied knowledge. However, the acquisition of wisdom usually takes time—and deliberative communication. Ideally, each type of agent needs to be motivated to be actively involved in this process.

Research has for years addressed the problem that academic knowledge is insufficiently applied in media governance processes and, more general, in the development of democratic societies (e.g., Jensen, 2012). Quite often, a better dissemination of academic research results has been proposed as a recipe to solve this problem (e.g., European IPR Helpdesk, 2015). However, with a view to the empirical analysis of the country case studies compiled within the framework of the Mediadelcom project (see Section 6), we put forward the argument that better dissemination practices are by no means a sufficient cure to solve the underlying problem of the increasing fragmentation of media and communication studies into various sub-fields with ever-growing amounts of data and knowledge (see, e.g., Buhmann et al., 2015; Corner, 2013).

Another critical issue concerning media monitoring seems to be related to the ability to trace media-related changes over time. The diachronic dimension of media monitoring is particularly demanding because it requires repeated studies and analyses to be carried out at specific time intervals. However, repeated studies not only need stability and resources, but they also have to address specific methodological challenges. As the mediascape changes, the research methodologies also need to be adapted (Stanyer & Mihelj, 2016). These and further obstacles of effective news media monitoring processes can be discussed more systematically based on the empirical study summarised in Section 5 and following sections.

5. Methodology

To address the problems and open questions, we conducted a secondary analysis of 14 country reports on national research and monitoring capabilities, which were produced for the Mediadelcom project (Avđani,

2022; Berglez et al., 2022; Eberwein et al., 2022; Gálik et al., 2022; Głowacki et al., 2022; Harro-Loit et al., 2022; Kreutler & Fengler, 2022; Peruško & Vozab, 2022; Polyák et al., 2022; Psychogiopoulou & Kandyla, 2022; Raycheva et al., 2022; Rožukalne et al., 2022; Splendore et al., 2022; Waschková Císařová et al., 2022). They cover a broad variety of countries and media systems from all parts of Europe including Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Sweden. This selection represents a range of historical, economic, and cultural media landscapes, as well as varying practices of media and journalism research across the European continent. The selection adheres to the criteria of geography (by including countries from Northern, Western, Southern, and Eastern Europe), size of the media market (according to the population size), and political-historical background (comprising both established democracies and countries with a communist past). In each of the countries covered by our study, national research teams compiled systematic case studies that aimed to provide an overview of the extant literature and other data sources relevant to an analysis of ROs for deliberative communication in the four research domains covered by Mediadelcom (i.e., legal and ethical regulation of the media, journalism, media-usage patterns, and media-related competencies). Each country report consists of four parts: (a) an introduction with general remarks on the national situation and short explanations of structural peculiarities relevant to the country; (b) an annotated bibliography describing the most relevant literature and other data sources in the four domains, with short descriptions focusing on what each specific source allows researchers to evaluate; (c) an analysis of the research and monitoring capabilities in the country; (d) conclusions that evaluate the national situation in order to highlight specific gaps or unavailability of existing data that are relevant to the four domains (for further background information on the country selection and the general methodological approach by Mediadelcom, see Lauk & Berglez, 2024).

In the Section 6, we attempt to summarise the key results of a secondary analysis of the country studies. Our study is designed to highlight both the main problems associated with existing initiatives to monitor deliberative communication in the countries covered by the project, and the opportunities and best practices among these initiatives. The analysis followed a two-step procedure: In Step 1, we conducted a qualitative content analysis of the 14 reports, using techniques of summary and structuration (see, e.g., Mayring, 2014). Drawing on the basic conceptual approach described above, this part of the study helped to identify key agents in news media monitoring, their relationships, as well as their structural and cultural contexts in each country, which were then summarised in brief country profiles. Step 2 of the analysis enabled us to make a comparative assessment of the country profiles by application of the analytical model of the “knowledge pyramid.” A differentiation between available data, information, knowledge, and wisdom in the cases of the previously collected material made it possible to identify the best (and worst) practices of news media monitoring. This analytical procedure not only proved helpful to understand recent trends within media and communication studies across European countries, but also generated valuable new insights for media policy-makers.

6. Results of the Empirical Study

6.1. Problems and Challenges of News Media Monitoring

ROs for deliberative communication can be understood as a matrix of interrelated factors, some of which may increase risks when combined, while others may change from risks to opportunities under certain circumstances. The dynamic character of our research object makes it difficult to lay out a conclusive and

comprehensive set of answers referring to questions about the capabilities of news media monitoring. Nonetheless, based on a systematic secondary analysis of 14 country case studies, we can identify at least six general types of monitoring-related challenges that are the ultimate cause of the broader problem of insufficient knowledge and wisdom in European media and journalism research. The six are: (a) information fragmentation; (b) information overproduction; (c) lack of consistency in studies or interruption of repeated or longitudinal studies; (d) low or uneven information and knowledge quality; (e) missing research competencies; and (f) very little evidence that acquired wisdom is used for media governance.

As the Mediadelcom country studies show, information fragmentation is a multifaceted problem. All analysed reports collect considerable numbers of (academic and non-academic) publications in each of the four research domains covered by the project. In sum, national research teams evaluated more than 5,600 relevant texts and other data sources (Mediadelcom, 2023). Each of the countries can name specialised journals or other periodic publications for certain issue fields (yearbooks, regular conference proceedings, etc.)—even the smaller ones in the sample, such as Austria, Croatia, Estonia, and Latvia (Eberwein et al., 2022; Harro-Loit et al., 2022; Peruško & Vozab, 2022; Rožukalne et al., 2022; see also the contribution by Köuts-Klemm et al., in press). Such sources are easily traceable with the help of library databases and search engines. However, contemporary academic publication metrics (and the well-known pressure to “publish or perish”) as well as the increasing importance of project-based research planning seem to favour piecemeal publications in short articles over coherent long-term dissemination strategies for media-related research. Furthermore, there is an obvious lack of strategies that motivate researchers to supply relevant databases with the necessary metadata to support information aggregation (see, e.g., Harro-Loit et al., 2022). Such trends often complicate the aim of drawing a coherent picture of ROs concerning deliberative communication.

Closely related is the issue of information (and knowledge) overproduction: In some of the Mediadelcom countries—particularly those with a longer history of empirical media and journalism research, such as Sweden or Germany—the problem is usually not the lack of information, but rather an overabundance (Berglez et al., 2022; Kreutler & Fengler, 2022). In those cases, monitoring initiatives not only have to face the task of identifying relevant sources in a mass of fragmented publications (see above in this section), but also of assessing their quality and usefulness for application in, for example, international comparisons. Sometimes, this task is aggravated by the uneven quality of available data, as reported, for example, in the Bulgarian case study (Raycheva et al., 2022; see also below in this section).

A further recurring problem is the lack of consistency in studies or the interruption of longitudinal studies. According to our analysis, this issue is related to a lack of continuous funding. Large-scale diachronic studies with a consistent methodology need resources—and, as several country studies show, a solid financial basis for such undertakings is rather an exemption than the rule (see, e.g., Eberwein et al., 2022; Psychogiopoulou & Kandyla, 2022). Exceptional cases like the reference week analysis by German press statistician Walter Schütz depend on the personal commitment of individual actors, which is necessarily discontinued when they retire or die (Kreutler & Fengler, 2022). Some countries (e.g., Estonia and Latvia) also report a detrimental influence from higher education and research policy (Harro-Loit et al., 2022; Rožukalne et al., 2022).

Several reports also note a low or uneven quality of information and knowledge. This problem is quite often related to issues of precarious career paths in the scientific community—and consequently, some countries have limited amounts of well-qualified researchers and analysts (see, e.g., the cases of Romania and Bulgaria:

Avădani, 2022; Raycheva et al., 2022). However, current challenges to academic freedom in Hungary, obviously related to the transformation of the higher education system driven by the right-wing Fidesz government, demonstrate that this issue may also have political reasons (see Polyák et al., 2022).

Additionally, several country studies highlight the problem of missing research competencies—at least in some knowledge areas. While most countries report a broad bandwidth of studies and a sound institutionalisation of research initiatives in the domains of journalism and media usage, the fields of media law, media accountability, and media literacy are comparatively underdeveloped from an international perspective—resulting in insufficient expertise about pressing issues (see, e.g., Harro-Loit et al., 2022). Again, this question may be related to varying national traditions in higher education, but it also raises concern about the precarious career paths that some countries offer to young academics with a doctoral degree.

Eventually, the analysed country reports hint at a communication problem, becoming apparent in the observation that very little acquired wisdom is used for media governance. This deficit accompanies the recurring complaint that a lively public discourse about the results of media and journalism research is hardly perceivable at the national level and across Europe, sometimes also due to language barriers (see, e.g., Głowacki et al., 2022). Some notable exceptions are highlighted in Section 6.2.

6.2. Opportunities and Best Practices of News Media Monitoring

Despite the various hints at problematic developments, the analysed country studies also make it possible to identify relevant opportunities and best practices for news media monitoring in Europe. It may not be surprising that such opportunities are mostly related to resources. Obviously, the wealthier countries in our sample (such as Sweden, Germany, to some degree also Italy and Austria) have more resources to monitor media and journalism (see Berglez et al., 2022; Eberwein et al., 2022; Kreutler & Fengler, 2022; Splendore et al., 2022), while in the case of low-resource countries, favourable development prospects depend on the clever and efficient use of available financial backing. At any rate, the analysis makes it clear that successful monitoring initiatives often build on interaction between participating agents (e.g., research groups, journalists, politicians, civil society actors, etc.). The more heightened the cooperation is, the better the opportunities for efficient monitoring. On the other hand, however, it seems noteworthy that the post-socialist countries in our sample often report a lack of cooperation or even division between participating agents (see, e.g., Głowacki et al., 2022; Polyák et al., 2022). Possibilities for optimising such shortcomings may be illustrated by means of several best-practice cases which were highlighted in the Mediadecom reports.

Among the various best practices showcased by the Swedish study (Berglez et al., 2022), the media research centre Nordicom stands out. Located at the University of Gothenburg, Nordicom has been collecting and publishing statistics as well as books, reports, and newsletters relevant to all domains of the Mediadecom study since the 1970s—although with a specialisation in the field of media usage. Most research results are available in a vast database; Nordicom also publishes the leading academic journal for media and communication researchers in the Nordic countries (*Nordicom Review*). With its NordMedia Network, the institution can be seen as a hub that connects researchers across countries and disciplines. Recently, increasing attempts at coordination and collaboration with other national actors (such as the Swedish Media Authority) have been noted.

In Austria, a similarly inclusive role is played by the Public Value Competence Centre of the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation ORF (see Eberwein et al., 2022). As an internal unit of the public broadcaster, it realises a continuous evaluation of the quality of the ORF's media contents (e.g., through annual expert hearings) and also publishes regular reports and a book series. All these initiatives are characterised by a notable ambition to create a dialogue between media actors, academic research, and other experts.

The Ministry of Culture of Latvia offers an example of how state actors can also function as a motor for research-based media monitoring. As the Latvian case study (Rožukalne et al., 2022) reports, several key studies on recent media developments in the country would not exist without financial support from the ministry. This funding in the field of media literacy has spawned important networking activities.

Mertek Media Monitor, which is also the Hungarian partner of the Mediadelcom project, is an instance of an influential non-governmental media research organisation (see Polyák et al., 2022). It provides media law and media market analysis, engages with the industry through journalism research and content analyses of Hungary's media outlets, and regularly conducts media consumption surveys. The example of Mertek shows that there is a greater media monitoring potential in the civil sector in Hungary because small watchdogs and think tanks can offer great added value for the study of media.

This list of best practices seems disparate at first sight, and is by no means conclusive. However, the selected cases share the characteristic that they draw on extensive networks of participating agents that increase the potential of their media monitoring endeavours. All of them stress the motive of cooperation, which can be understood as a deliberate strategy to overcome fragmentation of relevant information and increase knowledge and wisdom in the sense of the DIKW model described in Section 4. Therefore, successful attempts to institutionalise such cooperative practices are not simply an illustration of our attempt to conceptualise media monitoring capabilities as a structure-agency process that strongly emphasises the importance of relationships and interactions between types of participating agents (see Section 3). These attempts may serve also as a stimulus for policy-makers in those countries that could not yet exploit the opportunities of their monitoring capabilities.

7. Conclusions: Suggestions for Enhancing Monitoring Capabilities

The key intention of this article was to develop a concept of monitoring capabilities concerning media-related ROs for deliberative communication. To this end, we discussed the shortcomings of existing monitoring projects in media and journalism studies and introduced the holistic research approach selected for the Mediadelcom project, by focusing on four domains in which the ROs discourse is most clearly visible—i.e., legal and ethical regulation of the media, journalism, media-usage patterns, and media-related competencies. We then used Archer's differentiation between SCA to develop an SCA model of news media monitoring that promised to be helpful for gaining a better understanding of media-related ROs. Subsequently, we elaborated our specific approach for assessing news media monitoring capabilities that draws on the "pyramid of knowledge" and distinguishes between data, information, knowledge, and wisdom. With this conceptual basis, it became possible to give an initial overview of current trends in Europe by analysing 14 country studies on national research and monitoring capabilities related to media and journalism that were compiled within the framework of Mediadelcom. The synoptic analysis highlighted general problems of media-related monitoring processes—such as information overproduction, information

fragmentation, the lack of both longitudinal studies and application in media governance processes—but also collected noteworthy best practices that may exemplify opportunities.

We are convinced that the results of this research do not only contribute to the academic discourse about ROs for deliberative communication, which is still characterised by considerable knowledge gaps. Above all, we also hope that it may serve as a starting point for practical applications, which could help to enhance media monitoring capabilities across Europe, and beyond. In fact, our analysis implies multiple suggestions on how current challenges in this field could be minimised and how relevant research could eventually be applied in media governance processes. Most possible solutions sound quite simple. Of course, it would be beneficial to ensure consistency in key areas of media and journalism research—for example, by providing continuous funding for essential diachronic data collection. It would help a lot to provide better access to media usage data—for example, by making open access policies a mandatory standard for all publications based on publicly funded research. The aim should be to make media and journalism research easier to distinguish in national statistics—not only by recognising the discipline as a research field, but also by harmonising relevant keywords and other metadata that are required to retrieve available insights from national and international databases. Finally, it would be necessary to reflect more systematically on academic knowledge production in general and develop clearer strategies for knowledge governance. This would imply the will of legislative authorities to improve the conditions of employment for early and mid-career researchers—an issue that is by no means restricted to the academic field assessed in this article. However, our study pinpoints one key recommendation that comes to the fore in almost each of the analysed reports: the need to strengthen interaction and cooperation between agents involved or interested in monitoring media-related ROs, both within academia and society at large. The country studies collected by Mediadecom provide manifold suggestions and encouragement in this regard. While an in-depth comparative analysis of these studies is a task reserved for future publications (Oller Alonso et al., in press), the study presented here may at least offer an initial inventory of typical problems and best practices for monitoring deliberative communication across Europe. Naturally, this can only be a first step.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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