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Mediadelcom's approach and methodology

Martín Oller Alonso, Halliki Harro-Loit, Epp Lauk

Mediadelcom is by nature a qualitative meta-study with a holistic approach. The project's empirical material comes from an enormous inventory of previous research and available information sources augmented by the existing information about knowledge producing institutions and agents. Based on the preliminary review of journalism, media, mediated communication and related studies, theories and methods, necessary theoretical concepts (deliberative communication, capability of monitoring media (CMM), monitoring governance, and theoretical grounding for an agent-targeted analysis) have been synthesised. Paterson et al. (2001, p.1) define a meta-study as "a research approach involving analysis of the theory, methods, and findings of qualitative research and the synthesis of these insights into new ways of thinking about phenomena".

Mediadelcom uses "a new way of thinking" for developing a toolbox for diagnosing and identifying potential risks and opportunities (ROs) for deliberative communication that accompany news media's transformations. Furthermore, application of these theoretical-methodological concepts goes beyond explanations of research findings and enables us to propose a novel way for advancing media policy – wisdom-based media governance.

The Mediadelcom approach adopts the three-level structure suggested by Gary Goertz in his *Social Science Concepts* (2006). At the basic level, theoretical proposition (deliberative communication) is formulated using various theories (e.g., deliberative democracy, media governance, DIKW hierarchy etc.). The second level adds constitutive dimensions for the basic level – conceptual variables structured according to the four domains defined for empirical research (journalism, legal and ethical regulation, media usage patterns and media related competences of people). For detecting the risk levels of CMM (low, medium, high), specific conceptual variables were formulated (see Figure 18 in Chapter 9). The third is

the operationalisation level, at which operational variables were formulated as indicators for the empirical analysis within each domain of mediascape (Table 2 in Appendix).

The four domains each cover an area of research relevant for comparative qualitative meta-analysis and assessment of the sample countries' capability of monitoring mediascapes (CMM):

1) Journalism frames the ROs, which are related to transformations in news production and dissemination, the business of journalism and journalism as a profession, including professional skills and competencies. The umbrella concept relates to the questions of the sustainability of journalism, the potential agency of news media when acting in the capacity of watchdog, and how media act as socio-ocultural glue ensuring that societal groups, institutions and citizens remain in dialogue.

2) The Media-related competencies (MRC) of lay members of society. Media users competencies affect the sustainability of journalism and the ways in which people use media.

3) Media usage patterns (MUP): Any availability or deficit in knowledge of the changes in both media usage and citizens' news engagement influences the decision makers' ability to devise informed resolutions. A risk can emerge if private companies have more and better data and knowledge on citizen's news consumption patterns than the public, a risk that is related to access to data. Media companies can acquire various data (e.g., metrics of visitors to their online output) that they often keep secret for business purposes. The news media's ability or failure to provide reliable information and analysis of facts and developments affects the ability of citizens and the electorate to make informed choices. ROs relating to media consumption are also affected by citizen engagement in deliberation.

4) Legal and ethical regulation of the media and the use of data. Here, the ROs relate to data protection legislation at EU and national levels, to informational self-determination, to freedom of information and expression, to media accountability and to access to information.

HOW THE MEDIADELCOM APPROACH AND CMM ARE RELATED

The conceptual relationship between the Mediadelcom general approach and the CMM concept is explained in Figure 7, which illustrates the conceptual, methodological and empirical relations in more detail. The top level presents the main methodological concept of the Mediadelcom approach (based on the model of 4 domains). The middle level presents the conceptual and empirical contribution for the book (the theoretical framework, methodology for the Bibliographic database and the database itself, and 14 country reports (Case Study 1).

The lowest level depicts the results of the research based on the Mediadelcom holistic approach and presented in the current book: the analysis of the availability and sufficiency of relevant information and knowledge; diachronic analysis of the development of the CMM in the 14 EU countries; assessment of the risk levels and comparison of the countries based on this assessment. The novel outcome of this meta-study is formulation of wisdom-based media governance concept.

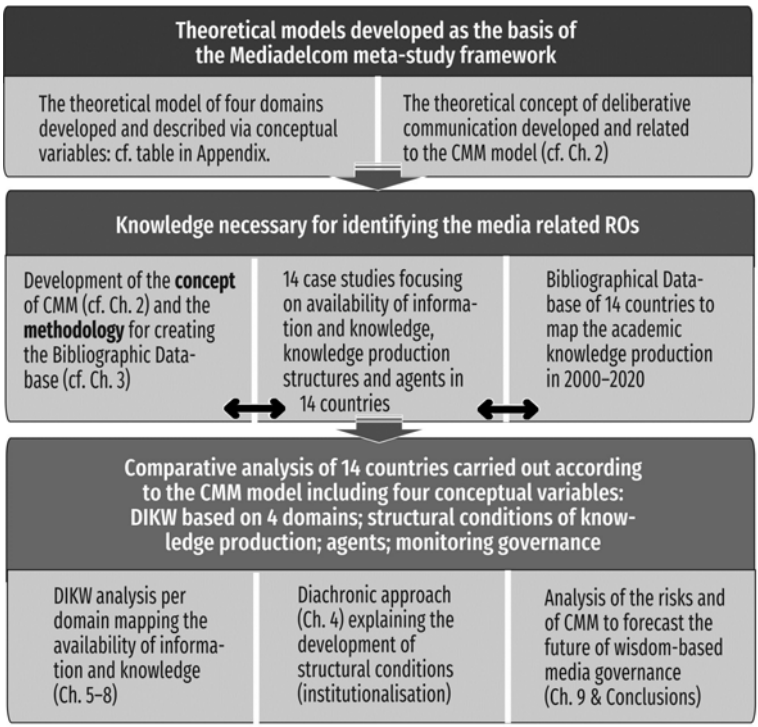

Figure 7. The theoretical and methodological components of the Mediadelcom approach and conceptual, methodological and empirical connections between the Mediadelcom general approach and the CMM.

We do not anticipate discovering the perfect situation for the analysis and study of deliberative communication in the participating countries. However, the Mediadelcom consortium will undoubtedly identify, which knowledge mobilisation and monitoring actors enhance deliberative communication.

Empirical material for Mediadelcom research and the current book was gathered by composing country reports (Case Study 1) that focused on the inventory of existing research in the four domains. The country reports also contain information about the main research traditions and institutions and their historical contexts and analyses for the current CMM situation in each country. The institutional mapping was further extended by identifying journalism and media

scholars who had conducted studies in at least one of Mediadelcom's four media domains.

Each of these case studies paid particular attention to the availability and quality of information and knowledge produced so far. Mediadelcom consortium team members additionally carried out expert interviews with scholars who have knowledge of media-related risks and opportunities in their countries and who have excellent experience in comparative studies, to provide explanations for the availability and quality of information and knowledge. The country reports also assessed the national capability of monitoring mediascapes.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REVIEW OF CMM RESEARCH: THE DATABASE

In parallel with the research for the country reports that comprise CS1, the teams identified the relevant research and sources for assessing CMM in their country and compiled a national bibliographic database. In the final stage, these databases were assembled into one Excel table with 5,622 entries, searchable using 20 variables. As a result, the database contains published academic articles, academic books and book chapters, various (research and industry) reports, and relevant doctoral dissertations. Non-academic publications were included only when there was no academic publication available on a particular RO-related topic.

Depending on the conditions and size of the countries and their communities of media scholars, the selection processes differed slightly. Some countries applied the "everything relevant we can find" method (e.g., Estonia, Latvia, Czechia, Hungary, Greece, Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania). The countries with a very large number of research institutions and researchers applied stricter selection criteria, focusing on high quality (peer reviewed) and high impact (WoS/SCOPUS-referenced) sources, impactful edited books, and on selecting the most prominent authors (Italy, Poland and Germany). For example, the Austrian database does not include Austrian German-language publications that focus mainly on Germany and Switzerland. The German database does not cover all 16 federal states equally, rather, the selection is made according to the relevance of pre-defined domains in the research carried out by particular federal states.

As the data has specifically been gathered on the research done in the four mentioned domains on potential ROs to deliberative communication that stem from news media development, this database is **not representative** of all academic publications in the fields of media and journalism research. Consequently, generalisations and comparisons based on the consolidated database are limited. The single country databases make it possible to outline each country's monitoring capabilities, while the consolidated database enables us to demonstrate broader tendencies.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE REPORTS

While the country case studies can stand alone and count as valuable input for wisdom-based policy at the national level, the major aim of this book is to present a comparative analysis of the CMM in Europe.

At the first stage of the empirical analysis four expert groups were formed, with each group focusing on a specific domain (see the Notes at the end of the chapter). All the studies followed the two-dimensional structure of the variables, i.e. the operational and conceptual variables of the four CMM domains. As the empirical findings in the case studies were aggregated from multiple sources, the texts had to be reduced according to the given variables. The analysts had to take into consideration the possible biases of the authors of CS1 and ask for further explanations and additional sources if needed.

The analysis of the CS1 texts on journalism and media-related competencies was carried out in two phases. The legal and ethical regulation and accountability domain as well as the media use domain did not need computerised content analysis as there were fewer variables than in the other two domains.

(1) Manual content analysis

Manual content analysis allowed Mediadelcom researchers to apply a qualitative method (Mayring, 2023) that involved a systematic review and interpretation of written material. During the manual content analysis, researchers coded the sections of their respective domains for each of the fourteen countries being studied. This process identified keywords (variables) that established the patterns and themes under analysis. By examining these patterns and themes (sections of the text containing the keywords and their surrounding context), researchers acquired the necessary information, to be inserted into the relevant section of the coding tables.

The results of the content analysis are presented as qualitative analytical overviews. The tables used in the content analysis were used to create illustrative figures that have been included in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

(2) Computerised content analysis

By deconstructing the lexicon, experts can establish the range of investigation according to the factors they aim to analyse within each area. As Tian and Stewart (2005, p. 292) point out, computerised content analysis is "potentially more objective" than manual content analysis due to the improved precision and dependability offered by technological tools. Popping (2000) argues that studies using computerised content analysis as their main method can easily be verified

and validated by other researchers, providing higher reliability and reproducibility of the results, thanks to its quantitative nature.

To begin the analysis, two steps are necessary: first, establish the domain database structure based using the theoretical framework of operational variables developed earlier. Second, convert the document with all 14 CS1s into Microsoft Word format. After that, an initial text 'cleaning' is needed to identify the specific vocabulary based on individual terms (words).

At the next stage of the analysis, a search algorithm (keywords/variables) is applied to the document case studies assisted by *Antconc* software. This process extracts sections of the text that displays the hierarchical relationships of the operational variables studied, based on (1) the frequency of each keyword appearance, and (2) the lexical positioning of the keyword. Consequently, researchers extracted information related to each variable, finding out for which variables the existing information and knowledge was sufficient and for which it was partly or entirely missing.

CONCLUSION

As we explained, Mediadelcom's approach is based on the 'meta' aspect of every element in the cycle of research studies that extend analytic strategies into syntheses by using holistic approaches. As Timulak (2013, p. 3) points out: "the variety and diversity in the approach to qualitative meta-analysis is also reflected in the fact that there exist various 'brand name' methods of conducting" this form of analysis. This is relevant for the Mediadelom approach. The holistic nature of the approach means that we combine country case studies, diachronic analysis and comparative methodology. Thus, the brand identity of the Mediadelcom approach is diachronic and comparative qualitative meta-study.

The new knowledge created by Mediadelcom through a critical inventory of the existing studies and information sources empowers media policy experts and analysts to adequately assess the potential of JMC research to improve media governance. Mediadelcom's approach creates a toolbox for analysis and understanding of the current situation on national and European levels.

A limitation, as well as a strength, of the methodology is its holistic nature. The combination of numerous variables based on various theories and methodologies makes it sometimes difficult to find consensus among researchers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds and prompts uncertainty and debate, for example on the selection of sources. In addition, other questions arise, for example: should a bibliographical database include student research if it is an important source of knowledge creation in a particular country? How can the disciplinary boundaries of the JMC be more precisely defined?

The excessively increasing variety of topical issues and research trends places researchers in the parable of the three sightless people who each touch a different part of an elephant and reach wholly individual and wildly incorrect conclusions. In this vein, a holistic approach would enable these same three sightless people to investigate much more effectively and come up with a significantly more complete picture.

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Notes

Content analysis expert groups' members come from following universities:

(1) The domain of Legal and Ethical Regulation and Accountability: the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy; the Erich Brost Institute for International Journalism, TU Dortmund University; the Mertek Media Monitor; St. Kliment Ohridski University Sofia; the University of Warsaw.

(2) The domain of Journalism: Masaryk University, Università degli Studi di Milano, Örebro University, Mid Sweden University, the Austrian Academy of Sciences, and St. Kliment Ohridski University Sofia.

(3) The domain of Media Usage Patterns: the University of Tartu, St. Kliment Ohridski University Sofia, Riga Stradiņš University, Masaryk University, and Jönköping International Business School.

(4) The domain of Media Related Competencies: the University of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, the Center for Independent Journalism in Bucharest, Riga Stradiņš University, the Faculty of Political Science at Zagreb University, St. Kliment Ohridski University Sofia.

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