

MEDIA FOR DEMOCRACY MONITOR, EDITION 2020: A CROSS NATIONAL STUDY OF LEADING NEWS MEDIA

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Concept

The “Media for Democracy Monitor” has been developed by the applicant back in the years 2008/2009, addressing the topic of the performance of news media within contemporary democratic societies. The findings have been published already twice (2011; by Peter Lang and by Nordicom). The fast transformation of public communication and the ongoing shifts in relevance and importance of mass media for public deliberation within contemporary democracies require a constant monitoring of its performance. This monitoring, which should take place every few years, demonstrates on the one hand the ongoing transformation processes in each participating country, but will also provide solid empirical evidence for adjustments to national and regional media and communication policy designed to foster and strengthen democratic discourses. For comparative reasons, the newly started monitoring project will limit changes of indicators to a minimum, but the design needs to be adjusted to the new realities in public communication, which is most evident in the field of social network sites (SNS), such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp and Twitter. These (relatively) new forms of para-social communication are considered as main drivers of change, both in terms of audience attention, but also with regard to economic shifts, in particular of advertising budgets, re-allocated from the traditional mass media to SNS. The research design suggests a common template for research in all participating countries, which is adjusted with all teams before the empirical data collection can begin. As the two countries Taiwan and Korea (South) are new to the Media for Democracy Monitor, the applicant as principal investigator and coordinator intends to visit the local research teams to explain, discuss and adjust (if necessary) the research design.

Objectives and envisioned findings

The main objective of the project is the monitoring of the changing role of mass media and other forms of public communication with regard to the communication requirements of contemporary democracies. By comparing different countries (and therefore different models of democracy) best practices are identified and learning lessons for nation states with regard to media policy designs are expected. The final result of the Monitor edition 2020 is an open access data bank with national information on all indicators, together with a final publication with learnings from this comparative analysis.

Methodological design

Each indicator has its own empirical character, but in general, information is gathered from existing national sources (desk research), and from interviews with media executives and journalists.

Some own calculations are needed with regard to the economic performance, and the breakdown of consumption (using, again, existing sources).

Preliminary timeline

Coordination visits will take place in the first half-year of 2019, empirical data collection is planned for the second half of 2019 and the first half of 2020, publication of the results are expected in fall 2020 or early 2021.

Impact and dissemination

This research is close to media practice (journalism), as well as media policy (regulation). The results will be published in a research compendium similar to the Nordicom volume (2011). Furthermore, all findings will be displayed on the project's website (to be developed), and each national team decides on the right format to discuss findings within its own country. Finally, findings will be presented at international conferences, such as ICA, IAMCR and ECREA.

Sustainability

Ideally, this monitoring exercise will be repeated every five to ten years in order to document the changes in public communication, relevant to democracies. The applicant has undertaken already two such waves, and the forthcoming research period will demonstrate a longitudinal development for ten countries.

Boldness

This project scrutinizes on the one hand the democratic performance of the mass media in times of transformation, which is normally taken for granted in most scientific writing and in the public debate. On the other hand, this research demonstrates the increasing weaknesses of mass media in their role as supporters of democracy and provides comparative empirical evidence, instrumental for media policy decisions.

Conclusion

This application for travel grants is addressed to facilitate the extension of the scope of the Media for Democracy project to the two countries Taiwan and Seoul, adding two Asian democracies to the country sample which is currently by majority composed of European countries. It enables the project coordinator and applicant to team-up with and encourage two national teams to contribute to the edition 2020 of the Media for Democracy Monitor.