Media, democracy and transparency

Results of a comparative journalists’ survey in 14 European and Arab countries

University of São Paulo
Prof. Dr. Susanne Fengler
May 29, 2014
Research project MediaAcT: **Comparative study in 14 countries**

- Analysis of **status quo of media self-regulation** and media accountability in Europe

- Survey of journalists’ attitudes towards media accountability

  ➔ Key interest 1: Impact of established and innovative media accountability instruments

  ➔ Key interest 2: „Cultures“ of accountability in Europe and comparison with exemplary Arab states
Media Accountability (MA): **Definition + Instruments**

“Any non-State means of making media responsible towards the public.”
(Bertrand 2000: 108)

---

**Media self-regulation instruments**
(professional + organisational level):

- Press codes + press councils
- Media criticism
- (trade journals + mass media)
- Ombudsmen
- Newsroom + journalists’ blogs

**Media accountability instruments**
(involving the audience):

- Users‘ Comments
- Media users‘ blogs
- Social Media (Twitter, Facebook)
  etc.

→ Low cost of criticism in digital age
Media Accountability: **Levels of influence**

Adapted Shoemaker/Reese (1996) model.
Media Accountability:
Informal institutions of media regulation (North 1990)
How effective is media self-regulation? Observations from research

- Media journalists - who cover media issues for quality media - shy away from criticizing their colleagues and supervisors. (e.g. Fengler, 2002; Malik, 2004; Porlezza, 2005)

- Studies dealing with ombudsmen reveal similar self-imposed restrictions. (e.g. Evers, 2009)

- Broadcasting stations tend to criticize the print media and vice versa, often with a political bias with regard to specific industry interests regarding media policy. (e.g. Krüger/Müller-Sachse, 1998; Weiss, 2004)

→ Collective and individual self-interests of media professionals obviously restrict the impact of established media self-regulation instruments. New models may be needed to hold the media to account more effectively.
Project Phase I: **Status quo of media accountability in Europe**

**United Kingdom:**
Press council on national level  
Media criticism in mass media  
Variety of accountability instruments  
Strong participatory approach

**Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria*, Estonia***:
Press councils on national level  
Media criticism in mass media  
Variety of accountability instruments

**Poland*, Romania:**
No press council on national level  
Little media criticism in mass media  
Emerging accountability culture online

**France, Italy, Spain***:
No press council on national level  
Little media criticism in mass media  
Emerging accountability culture online

**Jordan, Tunisia***:
Self-regulation instrumentalized by regime  
Emerging accountability culture online
Project Phase II: **Journalists’ survey in 14 countries**

Research goal: Journalists’ attitudes towards media accountability and self-regulation

Online survey of 1,762 journalists

National samples of 100 to 237 journalists, selected according to a two-step pattern along the categories of nine different media types and five different positions in the journalistic hierarchy

Field phase ended February 29, 2012

First results
Journalists across countries support the concept of media accountability...

Journalistic responsibility is a prerequisite for press freedom
...at least in theory.

Journalists are concerned about criticism they get from their audiences

Means
Media transparency: *News outlets should*...

Journalists support actor and production transparency instruments – but prefer those instruments who are less “costly” for themselves.
Which of the following have most impact on journalists‘ behavior in (country)? (Total means)

- Impact of most MAI is considered rather low. In-house and professional codes rated highest among MAI.
- Media law and journalism education considered as highly relevant factors.
What do journalists think about established MA instruments?
“High impact” or “very high impact” ascribed to… (in percent)

- United Kingdom
- Finland
- Netherlands
- Germany
- Austria
- Switzerland
- Poland
- Estonia
- Romania
- France
- Italy
- Spain
- Jordan
- Tunisia

Company codes are considered to have higher impact in journalism cultures with comparatively weak journalistic professions.
What do journalists think about established MA instruments?
“High impact” or “very high impact” ascribed to… (in percent)

- Low impact of audience feedback – journalists from “politicized” media systems value the impact of audience criticism even less high.
"To whom do you feel responsible as a journalist?"

"Highly responsible" or "very highly responsible" (in percent)

Strong individualistic orientation of journalists still dominates the profession and may explain general skepticism of (self-)control.
How critical are the critics? „I have frequently criticized a piece of journalism myself“ (in percent)

Journalists in many countries are remarkably hesitant to criticize colleagues.
Discussion: Do we need new incentive systems to strengthen media accountability?

To be effective self-regulation must include some form of sanction
Thank you for your attention!

www.mediaact.eu