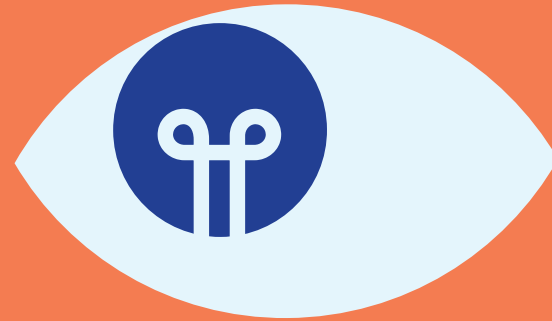# Media Literacy ToolKit

Navigating Platform Challenges:

Theoretical Insights and Practical Guidelines for Effective Responses

The Media Literacy ToolKit is intended for use alongside the Euromedia Research Group's "Green Book ("Comparative Media Policy, Regulation and Governance in Europe. Unpacking the Policy Cycle" edited by Leen d'Haenens, Helena Sousa & Josef Trappel and published in 2018). This ToolKit provides supplementary theoretical insights and practical exercises that can be implemented to enhance understanding of complex issues pertaining to the media field in a response to digital platforms' influence on structural, organizational and individual levels. The four texts, designed in the form of book chapter addendums, set the background for further conceptual explorations, while practical media literacy tasks and exercises provide valuable tips and insights.

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Addendum to the Chapter "Public Service Media in Western Europe Today: Ten Countries Compared"

Public Service Media in the Age of Platforms: Obsolete or More Important than Ever?

Tim Raats and Catalina Iordache

Public service broadcasting originated in the 1920s, when the limited technological possibilities prevented a market for broadcasting to develop. In this context, governments decided to entrust public broadcasters with a monopoly in return for a series of core values to uphold, such as diversity, universality, independence, and trust (Cañedo et al., 2022). The core remit of public service broadcasters was to act in the public interest, and their mandate was to inform, educate, as well as entertain (Donders, 2012; Horsti & Hultén, 2011).

In time, technological developments generated new distribution possibilities, first in the form of satellite and cable. These developments also brought on pressure from politicians and the industry to liberalize media markets and the growing inefficiency, bureaucracy and to some extent, politicization of public broadcasters, lead to the existence of commercial broadcasting. In Europe, this was heavily pushed by the European Economic Community (later, the European Union), which was developing a single market in 1989, one in which a liberalized television market was considered indispensable (Donders et al., 2014). Since the advent of commercial television, public broadcasters were confronted with competition, sometimes in their core domains (Syvertsen, 2003).

A third important period started in the 2000s, when digitalization was gradually reshaping media industries. The argument of limited channel capacity was no longer valid, and scarcity was replaced by an abundance of information, content, and services available via digital distribution and the internet. Once more, this confronted public service broadcasting with a legitimacy crisis (Biltereyst, 2004). Different perspectives arose in that time within policy and academic circles. For some, public broadcasters were no longer legitimate, and consumers could have access to all kinds of democratically important services elsewhere. However, the majority of scholars and policymakers still considered public broadcasting important, but mostly in domains where the market insufficiently provided quality content, such as the case of children's content, news, documentaries, or local film. For others, public broadcasting was considered more important than ever, especially as trusted guides amidst a sea of unchecked information (Jakubowicz, 2010).

Most media scholars, and public broadcasters themselves, defended a 'full-portfolio strategy', where public broadcasters should meet the diverse needs of all audience members (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2008). Using the 'Public Service Media' label (PSM), defenders of public broadcasting saw in online services and digital technologies new ways to complete existing tasks, but also innovative means to better fulfil the public remit. In a lot of media markets, the existing core tasks of public service media were complemented by additional tasks on enriching media literacy or investing in technological innovation, particularly by larger broadcasters. Criticism from private broadcasters still existed, and in some ways even increased.

Public broadcasters were accused of being market distortive, by offering all kinds of online free services which directly competed with their own new services, that were still fragile yet necessary if private media players would still want to survive (Lowe et al., 2018). As a consequence, in mid-2000s Europe, the European Commission initiated a limited number of State Aid rules for public broadcasters, that were fiercely debated, yet in practice still give a lot of flexibility and leeway for public media to operate (Raats et al., 2018).

While digitalization confronted public media with incremental challenges, the rise of global media platforms since the 2010s can be considered a real gamechanger for public service media (Evens & Donders, 2018). Contrary to traditional media companies, platforms operate using internet-based infrastructure, and thus no longer require their own infrastructure. They offer services on an ever-larger scale, and the so-called network effects arising from their scale enable them to easily expand to adjacent markets or outcompete smaller players out of the market. Finally, platform business models are heavily dependent on the use of user data, which enables them to, for example, personalize their services, advertisements, and content much more easily, a process which fairly rapidly lead to a datafication of all media industries.

For public media, these platforms and platform-like services (global streaming services, for example) have prompted several challenges (see D'Arma et al., 2021; Sørensen & Hutchinson, 2018; van Es & Poell, 2020). First, they compete directly for the viewer attention of PSM audiences, thus putting pressure on existing viewing habits, which makes it far more difficult to reach younger audiences. Second, there is increasing pressure on the programming strategies used on linear, making it more challenging to curate or 'guide' audiences towards relevant public service content. Third, public media have become highly dependent on third-party platforms for reaching audiences, for example by sharing news on social media or reaching young audiences through TikTok. However, this gives them little control over how the content is watched, who is reached, how people interact with the content, or whether people can still discern PSM content from other types of content. Worryingly, social media platforms are increasingly leading to mis- and dis-information through the rapid spread of unverified information and even fake news. On top of that, PSM services and the content they produce is struggling to remain visible and discoverable on connected devices such as smart TV interfaces or remote controls, as myriad commercial apps are seemingly much more prominent, due to their financial power and strategic negotiations (Hesmondhalgh & Lotz, 2020). The challenges come on top of increasing financial cutbacks and, in many countries, an erosion of independence from political and commercial influences.

In essence, the challenges brought about by platforms threaten some of the core tasks and values of PSM, most importantly: how to uphold universality when competition with other players is so large? They also generate a series of strategic concerns. Interestingly, most public broadcasters have been adapting by embracing some of the tactics and strategies of their large commercial counterparts (Iordache & Raats, 2023). The current transformations are characterized by a shift towards an online-first/digital-first strategy, which may eventually also lead to an online-only strategy. Central in this transformation is the prominence of video-on-demand portals which are serving as the main entry point towards PSM content. However, contrary to the shift from PSB to PSM, a portal strategy entails much more than just expanding existing services to an online service. It also entails reshaping *production and commissioning* strategies (e.g. through online exclusive or short format content), *branding* (e.g. in favour of one strong core PSM brand), organizational reform (e.g. audience intelligence research gets a much more prominent role at the heart of PSM organizations), and, most importantly, the use of algorithms, recommender systems, and personalization, in combination with existing programming and curation to better meet audience needs.

A core dilemma for PSM is to balance personalized viewer demand with offerings curated by the PSM, in the public interest. In that regard, various public broadcasters are experimenting with 'public service algorithms' or so-called 'taste-broadening algorithms' to increase diversity of consumption amongst its users. In sum, digitalization represents a core challenge but also an opportunity for the future of PSM.

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Assignment

A SWOT analysis of public service media in the age of platforms

Title of the method used	**A SWOT Analysis of Public Service Media in the Age of Platforms**
Aim	**Assignment:** To identify the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of Public Service Media online. To reflect on the value of PSM for the public interest, and specifically for young audiences, by understanding the positioning of these organisations in the digital ecosystem and finding arguments pro and against their support.
Duration	3 academic hours
Level	Novice/advanced
Brief description of the task and keywords	**The Task:** 1. Students are asked to note down key words regarding the activities, services, and content of PSM in their country/media market. They must reflect specifically on the practices and strategies of these organisations online, either through their own services (e.g., VOD portal, website) or the use of intermediaries (e.g., PSM channels on YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, PSM-produced content on Netflix).

	2. By applying the lateral reading technique, they are asked to verify the information sources. The strategy and technique of lateral reading helps mitigate the risks of online disinformation and information manipulations by promoting a more informed and nuanced understanding of complex issues. • Strengths of PSM in the age of platforms • Weaknesses to reach their remit online • Opportunities to reach their remit online • Threats to their objectives, strategies, or sustainability. 3. Students are then divided into two groups. Based on the mapping, they are asked to debate the two opposing positions: on the one hand, that digital transformations will render PSM obsolete, and, on the other hand, that it confirms it is more important than ever. The students must support their positions with arguments and reflect on the potential consequences of their proposed actions. **Keywords:** SWOT analysis, public service media, public interest, media literacy, digitalization, debate
Equipment	(White-)board, post-its, pens, computers, smartphone, internet connections
Preparations	**Background information about PSM online:** 1. Students are asked to read an EBU report (**"How Public Service Media Deliver Value"**) and chapter 2 of the book 'Public Service Media in Europe. Law, Theory and Practice' (Karen Donders)

2. Students must familiarize themselves with their domestic PSM's activities online: what websites do they offer, what social media channels are they present on, what type of content do they produce, how do they target young audiences etc.

3. Students must do their own research and identify 5 key figures about their PSM organisation. This can be anything related to: form of financial support (e.g., how is the PSM funded?), year of establishment of online service(s), the title of the most watched programme on their VOD portal etc.

Background information about SWOT analysis:

• A SWOT analysis is a simple but well-structured method that helps evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that exist for PSM organisations in the so-called 'age of platforms'.

• The method helps students reflect on all angles related to the value of PSM for their age group, and bring arguments both for and against the importance and support of PSM.

	Practical steps to follow in the application of the SWOT analysis and debate: • Consider the evidence: research and identify information regarding the goals, activities, and output of the PSM organisation. Verify the authenticity of this material or the potential biases. • Explore the broader context: what is the added value of the above, in the existing media context; does PSM provide services or content that other players in the market don't? • Divide the key points identified into the relevant sections, making sure that each student has contributed to all four categories. • Refine the ideas: some contributions can be grouped into more comprehensive entries. • Compile the contributions into a visually accessible figure/table that can be used for the subsequent debate. This can make use of colours, and ideas can then be prioritized according to relevance and importance. • Critical thinking: engage with the information presented, by debating the subject based on evidence and experiences.
Process (explanation and advice for students or teachers on how to organize the training in a group of students – what to show, what questions to ask)	**Study process:** The SWOT analysis is a clear and straightforward method that encourages students to consider all angles of the subject matter and its context. The goal is to go beyond personal experiences and knowledge towards identifying and discussing more aspects than initially considered (e.g., students may be familiar with a specific series from Netflix, without realising that is was originally produced by the PSM; students may be familiar with the PSM's channels on social media but not with its VOD service or news app).

Summing up	**Questions for reflection, responses, and reactions:** Based on the side they took in the debate, participants can be asked to consider the consequences of their arguments. For example, if PSM is found to be obsolete in the platform age, then who will take on the role of fact-checker, provider of universal service, attention to diversity and inclusion etc? The same can be asked of the second group, who must reflect on the role PSM can/must play in reaching its remit (now that it is more important than ever) and how it should communicate this better to young audiences.
Suggestions for further reading and analysis	**Public Service Media in Europe. Law, Theory and Practice (Karen Donders)** **Public Service Media's Contribution to Society: RIPE@2021 (Manuel Puppis and Christopher Ali). Download available at:** https://www.norden.org/en/publication/public-service-medias-contribution-society-ripe2021

Media and Democracy in the Age of Digital Platforms: A Complex Connection

Hannu Nieminen & Josef Trappel
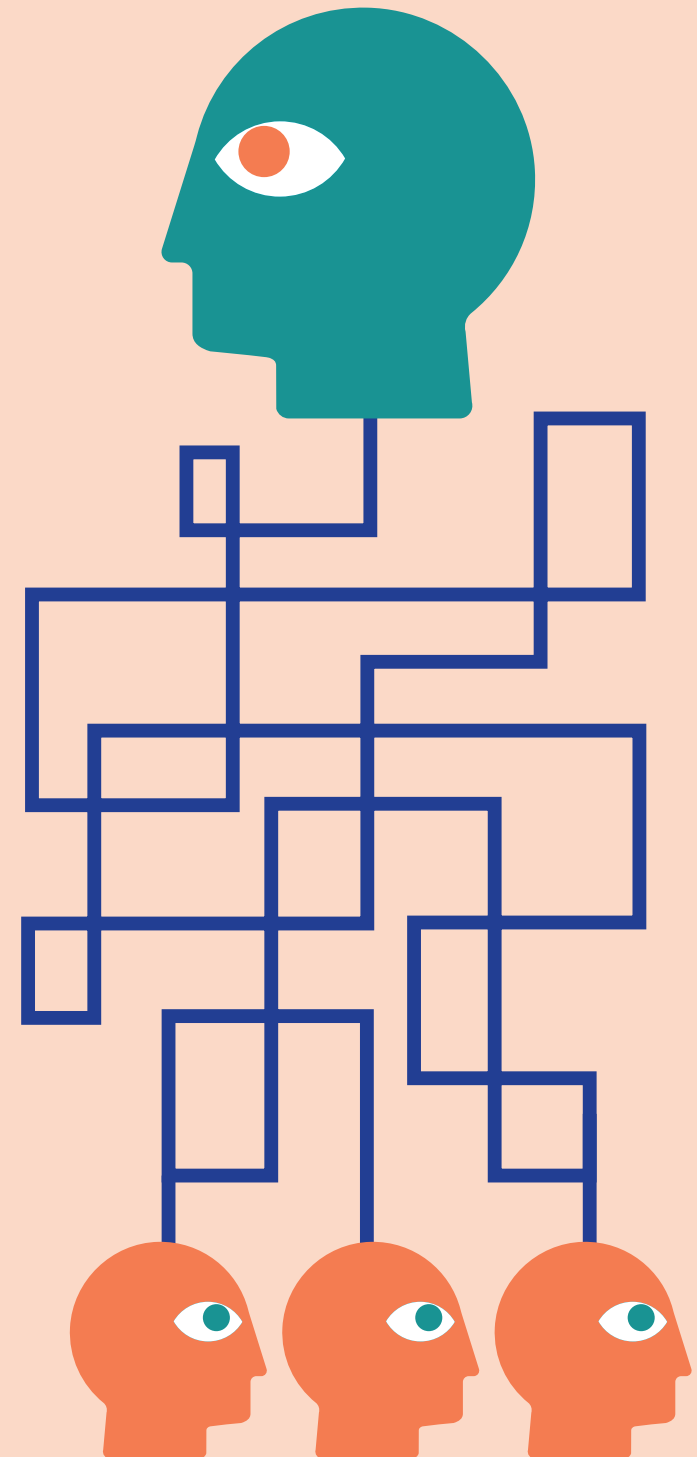
From a historical viewpoint, the relationship between the media and democracy is not permanently fixed. It is much influenced by developments in other fields of society: in economic relations, in the political system, in technological advances, cultural transformation and so on. Our traditional understanding of the relationship between the media and democracy developed in the decades before the end of the last century. It was based on the European model of liberal democracy as shaped after the Second World War under the conditions of the Cold War[1]. Although the forms and arrangements of national democracies differed in many ways from country to country, they were based on a set of shared values articulated in common agreements.[2]

From the start, the media played a central role in the European understanding of liberal democracy. The media was understood to have a mediating role between the political system (including political parties, the parliament, the government and the state administration) and civil society, consisting of the activities of voluntary associations as well as people's everyday lives. In this role, the media was understood to follow – although not often openly articulated – the ethical principles of social responsibility or the public good. This was seen as being in contrast to primarily serving the markets or political interests.[3]

The basic elements of the media's social responsibility ethos were, to state them briefly, independence from political and commercial influence, truth-seeking, serving the public interest and diversity and pluralism of opinions.[4] To fulfil these aims, the media system first needed to secure a sustainable national market for the news media, that is, the media needed to be financially viable through subscriptions and advertising; second, the needs of the audiences were satisfied with the supply of the national media outlets; third, professional journalism served the information and communication needs of the political system; and finally, the population had access to all the main media, both technologically and financially.

The regulatory framework for the European media aimed to provide the necessary conditions for socially responsible media. The main elements included, among others, rather wide press freedom based on the belief that self-regulation served media autonomy better than governmental control; in many countries, press (and media) subsidies to support the diversity and pluralism of media services; and strong and autonomous public service broadcasting, independent from the government and from the markets.[5]

By the end of the twentieth century, however, historical conditions had fundamentally changed and transformed the entire media landscape. One of the main factors was economic globalisation, facilitated by new digital communication and information technology. This required respective rearrangements on a political level, too, which meant an increasing role for international and intergovernmental structures, including the European Union (EU). Due to the rapid development of new digital communications and the expansion of the internet, national control of the media market was broken. Newspapers were among the victims, as both advertising income and subscription revenues declined rapidly as their audiences migrated to the internet. An essential part of the gradual erosion of the national media system has been the mounting challenge to public service broadcasting, which is claimed – against contrary evidence – to weaken the market potential of private media services.[6] Together, these parallel societal developments created the ground for another major shift in the relationship between the media and democracy.

Referring to his seminal contribution to the discussion on the role of the media and communications for democracy in his book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, originally published in 1961,[7] Jürgen Habermas described the present configuration as 'A New Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere and Deliberative Politics',[8] characterised by the increasing power of social media platforms. Some of the main features of the influence of platformisation in the relationship between the media and democracy are, first, that it promotes the media system, which, by undermining the national media markets, severely weakens the economic basis of the national media system and its democratic role. Second, platformisation corrodes the role of professional journalism and, at the same time, rejects the truth-seeking function of the media. Finally, by fragmenting the national public into smaller, platform-based publics and opinion networks, platformisation thwarts the formation of the national public sphere, which is necessary for the functioning of liberal democracy.[9]

If we accept this historical account of the relationship between the media and democracy, it seems that today, the promise of the ethics of social responsibility embedded in the ideal of liberal democracy has all but vanished. We are witnessing a historical breakdown of the relationship between the media and democracy, the result of which is that the mediating role of the media between the political system and civil society has ceased to exist. The problem is that, even after this analysis, we have not yet been able to define more precisely what the new role of the media is in our societies after the new structural transformation of the public sphere.

Assignment

Develop your own argument on the relationship between media and democracy in the time of platformisation and algorithms

Title of the method used	Critical analysis of the relationship between media and democracy in the time of algorithms
Aim	To write an essay based on one or more of the following questions: • Evaluate the Chapter 10 and the Addendum critically and amend this historical account from the viewpoint of your own country. If possible, develop counter-arguments and questions. • Discuss the theories of the filter bubble and echo chambers. What is your own conclusion based on your experience in your country? • In the 1990s, Jürgen Habermas et al. initiated a discussion about the European Public Sphere, which would be instrumental in developing an inclusive European liberal democracy.[10] Assess the perspectives towards the European public sphere today. Is it still a feasible normative ideal? If so, how can we get there?
Duration	Six academic hours (for an essay of 2000 words)
Level	Advanced

Brief description of the task and keywords	Students are asked to answer the assignment questions based on: • Chapter 10 "Media and Democracy: A Couple Walking Hand in Hand?" • The addendum to the chapter 10 • The reference literature to the addendum, and • Other relevant literature sources.
Equipment	Computer, internet connection, library access
Preparations	Students are asked: 1. To read Chapter 10 and the Addendum, as well as the relevant reference literature. 2. To develop their own argument, based on critically questioning the premises of the Chapter 10 and the Addendum. 3. To consult with other relevant literature, testing their argument as well as the arguments of the Chapter 10 and the Addendum.
Process (explanation and advice for students or teachers on how to organize the training in a group of students – what to show, what questions to ask)	Students will be given a brief introduction to the problematics of the relationship between media and democracy, based on the Chapter 10 and the Addendum. Students are briefed 1) how to find the original arguments in the Article 10 and the Addendum, and 2) how to formulate their own argument, based on the critical reading of the reference literature.

Summing up	**Questions for reflection, responses and reactions:** As the main purpose of the exercise is to develop students' critical competence in reading and assessing the validity of arguments, the main aim of the assignment is the development of critical faculties and students' ability to create an original argument, supported by solid research literature.
Suggestions for further reading and analysis	• Special Issue: A New Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere? (2022) Theory, Culture & Society, Volume 39 Issue 4, July 2022. https://journals.sagepub.com/toc/tcsa/39/4. • Special issue: The Liquefaction of Publicness: Communication, Democracy and the Public Sphere in the Internet Age (2018) Javnost - The Public, Volume 25, Issue 1-2. https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rjav20/25/1-2. • O'Mahony, P. (2021). Habermas and the public sphere: Rethinking a key theoretical concept. European Journal of Social Theory, 24(4), 485–506. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431020983224.

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Addendum to the chapter "Media Diversity and Pluriformity: Hybrid 'Regimes' Across Europe

Media's Influence on Democratic Discourse in the Digital Age

Jolan Urkens, Jaron Harambam & Leen d'Haenens

Over the past decade, and particularly since 2016, societies have grappled with the emergence of illiberal and conspiratorial narratives. The internet, especially social media, has often been blamed for providing a platform where these voices gain prominence. These emerging voices do not neatly align with traditional partisan divides and frequently challenge the objectivity and impartiality of traditional media, asserting their neutrality and independence.

While media pluralism is acknowledged as a fundamental aspect of democracy (Ihlebæk et al., 2022), the extent to which particularly these new voices contribute to the diversity of democratic debates remains a contentious issue. Some scholars argue that these voices spread disinformation, posing a threat to democracy (Bennett & Livingston, 2018; McIntyre, 2018), and are therefore responsible for the allegedly impending demise of democracy. In contrast, others claim they may enhance media pluralism and public engagement, which is expected in a healthy democratic society (Harambam, 2023; Harcup, 2016).

The challenge in evaluating whether media practices hinder or contribute to media pluralism in democracy arises from the diverse interpretations of key concepts. Assessing whether a media discourse can be considered democratic is inherently normative and depends first and foremost on how media pluralism is conceptualized. Scholars often differ in (and mostly remain implicit on) how they conceptualize media pluralism (Hendrickx et al., 2022; Ihlebæk et al., 2022; Joris et al., 2020), but diversity regarding content is widely recognized as one of the cornerstones of a well-functioning democratic debate (Ihlebæk et al., 2022). Therefore, we propose that assessments of media diversity in light of democracy should focus on three critical aspects:

1. Actor diversity: This involves considering who participates in the discourse and who is given a voice?

2. Discursive diversity: It encompasses the topics discussed and the manner in which they are addressed.

3. Epistemology: This examines which claims are deemed legitimate and authoritative, and the reasons behind such judgments.

Differing interpretations of these criteria can lead to varying conclusions regarding the state of media pluralism in democratic societies. Furthermore, one's preferred democratic model significantly influences their assessment, as posited by Raeijmaekers and Maeseele (2015). Three prominent democratic paradigms include:

1. **Liberal Democracy:** Rooted in theories by figures like Lippmann and Hayek (Harjuniemi, 2022), liberal democracy emphasises representation through elected officials. In this framework, media is expected to uphold objectivity, balance, and impartiality, serving as a "mirror of society" or a "marketplace of ideas" to inform the public for rational decision-making during elections.

2. **Deliberative Democracy:** Propounded by Habermas (1999), this model focuses on rational discourse. Media is tasked with constructing public consensus through inclusive debate, with journalists acting as gatekeepers to ensure a balanced and informed exchange of ideas.

3. **Agonistic Democracy:** Advocated by Mouffe (1999), agonistic democracy embraces the conflictual nature of diverse societies. In this view, media should foster adversarial debates, acknowledging competing interpretations without deeming them enemies. Agonistic media pluralism is assessed based on its capacity to expose, expand, or exclude various perspectives from the debate.

Liberal Media Pluralism emphasizes the viewpoints of experts aimed at informing the general public who take on a more passive and receptive role (Ferree et al., 2002; Raeijmaekers & Maeseele, 2015). While news stories may include a variety of groups, it is the elites, including politicians and experts, who hold a privileged position as primary actors in this framework. Balanced and neutral discourse prevails, but authoritative, expert informed claims are more important than experiences of laypeople. Journalists in this paradigm diligently pursue factual accuracy, adhering to an ideal of scientific precision. This perspective implies that an objective truth exists, and conflicting knowledge claims are subordinated to this overarching truth. Epistemologically, this orientation leans towards a form of positivism, albeit a light one.

Deliberative Media Pluralism entails that media organizations foster a deliberative public sphere that gives voice to, and facilitates debate between, competing ideas (Helberger, 2019; Raeijmaekers & Maeseele, 2015). Actor-wise, there is no a priori preference, and the aim should be to include an array of perspectives, as broad as possible, as long as their discourse is rational. In practice, this criterion favours the higher educated. Epistemologically, legitimate claims are the result of thorough rational debate in which adversaries concede to the better argument until a consensus triumphs.

Agonistic Media Pluralism expects media content that promotes adversarial yet open-ended discourse. It particularly encourages to focus on actors that are traditionally marginalized and therefore often excluded from voicing their opinions in the media. Contrary to both liberal and deliberative understandings of media pluralism, the agonistic ideal views elite opinions with great suspicion and favours the views of "common people" especially those in subordinate societal positions (Maeseele & Raeijmaekers, 2020; Raeijmaekers & Maeseele, 2015). The only prerequisite for media organisations is to refrain from consensus claims or similar authoritative discourse that delegitimize other viewpoints, as different perspectives are seen as inherently and incommensurably conflictual. Related to that, knowledge is seen from a similar vantage point, negating the existence of a universally (be it empirically found or consensually reached) binding truth. Since viewpoints are inherently and necessarily conflictual, competing epistemic claims are not only allowed but imperative.

In conclusion, assessing news and information media content against these democratic models reveals different evaluative criteria. For instance, liberal democracy expects detached media that adhere to market logic while monitoring government, deliberative democracy seeks media that facilitate open debates and maintain a balance of perspectives, and agonistic democracy requires media that enable diverse yet respectful conflicts. Evaluations of whether certain media practices are good or bad for democracy should be substantiated with empirical arguments, ideally based on systematically developed criteria. This framework goes beyond binary evaluations of media content as either "good" or "bad" for democratic discourse, encouraging a nuanced understanding of how content can be seen as democratic, depending on different ideas of democracy.

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Assignment

Analysing Media Sources and Content Through Democratic Lenses

Title of the method used	**"Analysing information media through democratic lenses"**
Aim	**Assignment:** 1. To explain the concept of lateral reading (developed at COR, Stanford University) and show how to apply this information consumption technique to help students become discerning consumers of information and to enhance their media literacy skills. This technique encourages critical thinking and helps individuals navigate the complexities of modern media landscapes. Evaluating media content through the lenses of arguments and actor diversity enables students to make well-informed judgments about the accuracy, credibility, and potential biases of news stories, ultimately fostering a more informed and engaged citizenry. 2. To combine the insights gained from the democratic theory analysis with the lateral reading strategy, students will develop a more comprehensive and critical understanding of the media landscape and news content. This approach empowers students to recognize how different media sources and news stories align with various democratic ideals and contribute to shaping public discourse.
Duration	3 academic hours

Level	Novice/advanced
Brief description of the task and keywords	**The Task:** 1. The proposed **task** aims to guide students in recognizing media outlets within their familiar media landscape that align with the principles of three distinct democratic theories. By identifying these media sources, students can then select a series of news articles related to a specific subject for analysis. This analysis will focus on pinpointing elements within the news content that exemplify the core concepts of each democratic theory: the marketplace of ideas (liberal democracy), open debate facilitation (deliberative democracy), and conflict-driven power struggles (agonistic democracy). 2. To enhance students' comprehension of the chosen media sources and news content, a specialised approach known as Lateral Reading will be introduced. This strategy involves obtaining information from various sources in parallel, rather than relying solely on the primary source at hand. This approach allows for a more comprehensive and critical evaluation of the media landscape and news stories, enabling students to discern the underlying nuances and biases present. The task unfolds in the following manner: 1. **Media Source Identification:** Students will identify media sources that align with each of the three democratic theories: liberal democracy, deliberative democracy, and agonistic democracy. These sources should be ones they are familiar with in their everyday media consumption. 2. **News Story Selection:** After identifying the media sources, students will select a series of news stories on a specific topic. These stories should be diverse in their perspectives and coverage, representing a range of viewpoints relevant to the chosen subject.

	3. **Democratic Lens Analysis:** For each news story, students will engage with the content through the lens of the three democratic theories. They will seek to identify elements that align with the principles of the marketplace of ideas (liberal democracy), facilitate open debate (deliberative democracy), or contribute to conflict and power struggle (agonistic democracy).
	4. **Lateral Reading Application:** To enrich their analysis, students will employ the Lateral Reading strategy. This involves consulting various sources beyond the chosen news story to gain a broader understanding of the topic and verify the accuracy and credibility of the information presented.
	Keywords: media literacy, lateral reading, democratic theories, marketplace of ideas, debate, actor diversity
Equipment	Computer, smartphone, internet connection
Preparations	**Background information about journalism and fact-checking:**
	1. Students are asked to read the proposed chapter (**Media's Influene on Democratic Discourse in the Digital Age**), commenting upon the suggested framework to analyse media pluralism according to different democratic theories.
	2. Students must familiarize themselves with the topic of democratic discourse, the different democratic theories and how that plays out in media content, and with the analytical framework.
	3. Students are given a few examples of media sources and media content (from mainstream media and social media posts) and are asked to look for elements that align with the principles of the three democratic theories by applying the strategy of lateral reading.

Background information about lateral reading:

- Lateral reading is a term used to describe a consumption where readers evaluate the credibility and reliability of a source by seeking information from multiple sources and contexts, rather than relying solely on the content of the original source.

- Instead of accepting information at face value, lateral reading involves actively investigating the media source and comparing it with other reputable media sources and to compare the different rationales, arguments and key actors around which the information is built, to master a technique allowing deeper engagement with the complexities of the media platform society.

Practical steps to follow in the application of the lateral reading strategy:

- Media source evaluation (consider whether the source is accurate); fact-checking (identify and verify the claims by consulting multiple sources to check discrepancies and inconsistencies);

- Engagement with the news media content through the lens of the three democratic theories (look for ways in which objectivity is cared for, e.g., through empirical facts, through a balanced and rational presentation of perspectives, or through situated knowledge, conflictual perspectives);

- Looking for the ways in which consensus is sought (top-down, balanced, bottom-up);

- Engaging in critical thinking on the diversity of actors (e.g., experts, politicians, people, marginalised groups) who play a role in the media content (engage in critical thinking by questioning the information presented, examining its logical consistency, and assessing the evidence provided).

|	
Process (explanation and advice for students or teachers on how to organize the training in a group of students – what to show, what questions to ask)	**Study process:** Lateral reading epitomizes the strategy of delving deeper into the argumentations and facts that are not "seen" on the surface of online information by questioning "What's the evidence?", "Who's behind the information?", "How does it affect me?" Ultimately, this task fosters media literacy and critical thinking skills by encouraging students to engage with media content through multiple lenses and information sources. Through a well-rounded analysis, students will not only discern the role of news and information media in democratic societies but also develop a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in media platform dynamics.
Summing up	**Questions for reflection, responses and reactions:** Students are recommended to undertake a task involving the investigation of websites or social media groups frequented by their relatives or friends. The objective is to delve into a deeper understanding of the components within the media content. By engaging in conversations with their family or friends, they will delve into how these elements contribute to truthful coverage, balanced debates, constructive conflicts, and the diverse roles played by various actors in the information disseminated on these platforms. The technique of lateral reading, coupled with critical thinking, will serve as a guiding framework for this exploration.

Suggestions for further reading and analysis	• COR: Civic Online Reasoning Center, Stanford University (https://cor.stanford.edu), to read more about the lateral strategy;
	• An analytical framework is provided to evaluate media pluralism according to different democratic lenses.
	• Habermas, J. (1999). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. 10. print. Studies in contemporary German social thought. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
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	• Raeijmaekers, D. & Maeseele, P. (2015). Media, pluralism and democracy: what's in a name? *Media, Culture & Society 37*(7): 1042–1059. DOI: 10.1177/0163443715591670.
	• Harjuniemi, T. (2022). Post-truth, fake news and the liberal 'regime of truth' – The double movement between Lippmann and Hayek. European Journal of Communication, 37(3), 269–283.

Addendum to the Chapter "Testing the Boundaries: Evolving Norms and Troubling Trends for Journalism"

Reviving Resilience in the Digital Public Sphere: How Collaborative Partnerships Aid in Countering the Problem of Disinformation

Auksė Balčytienė
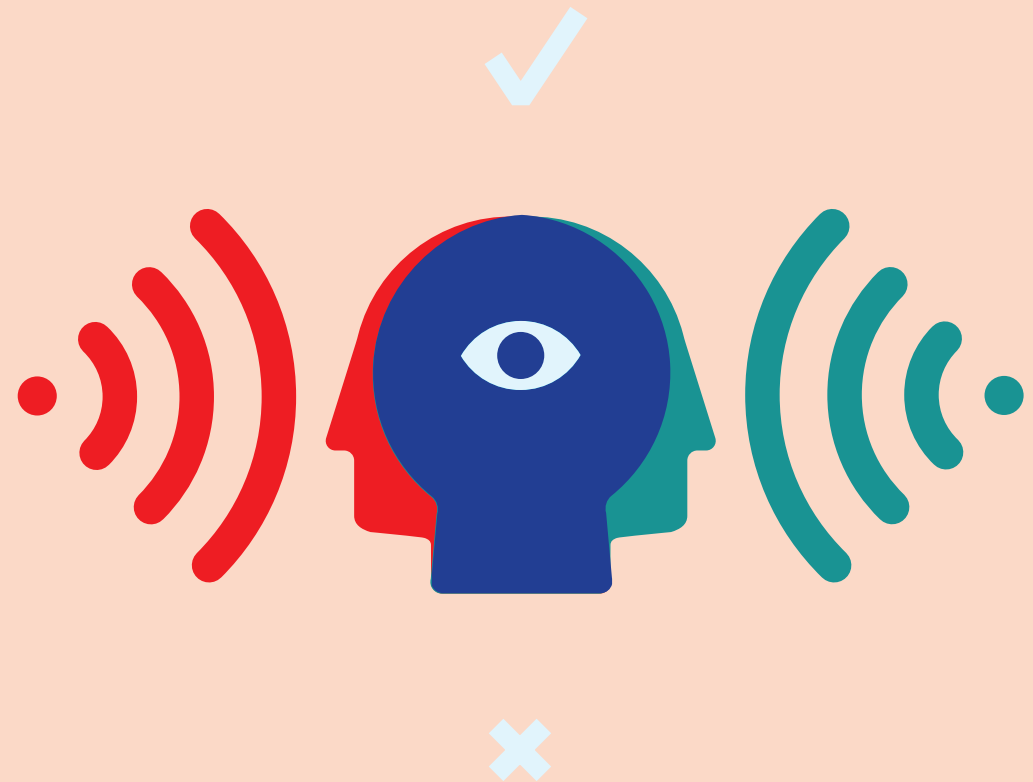
Fact-checking as journalistic response to the influx of disinformation. Most conventional policy approaches to digital disinformation promote solutions focused on platform regulation, strengthening media viability, and developing both group and individual capacities for media literacy as forms of digital resilience (Drotner, 2022; Golob et al., 2021).

To rejuvenate the digital public sphere, many media organizations adopt a specific journalistic strategy – fact-checking, which serves as a valid response to the dominance of disruptive communications, including fabrication of facts, provocations toward conflict, and other kinds of dysfunctional online content. Furthermore, it turns out that information verification can become a strategy used to scrutinize all "contemporary risks", including challenges of increasing uncertainty. To attain greater levels of trust, one can employ the approach of informed questioning to nurture critical "situational awareness" (see, for example, Morelli et al., 2022; Knuutila et al., 2022).

The involvement of various stakeholders in countering disinformation. Despite the rising attention to online disinformation and its social and political implications, such as the growth of populist polarization, instigations to conflict and dominance of hate speech, as well as ongoing debates on effective strategies to combat these (Kreiss, 2021), there is often no clear consensus on the definition of the problem of disinformation or on viable solutions to address it.

To begin with, online disinformation calls to be defined as a "wicked problem" (see, for example, Head, 2022; Baker et al., 2023). Wicked problems are emblematic of a wide range of socio-cultural characteristics. They are also distinguished by high complexity and a lack of clear definitions. Drafting policies to address wicked problems requires a holistic understanding of the context, including structures and actors. In the case of developing valid responses to online disinformation, this context is shaped by the particularities of the national information ecosystem on the one hand (Humprecht et al., 2021), and a diverse array of stakeholders – including policymakers, news media and journalists, educators, businesses, NGO activists, and even non-human actors like algorithms and artificial intelligence technologies – all offering different solutions, on the other. Similarly, online disinformation analysis invites a variety of approaches for analysis, including those encompassing digital technological and socio-political outcomes. So, considering online disinformation as a wicked problem, a single definitive approach leading to a successful solution cannot be yielded. In most cases, the focus is on fostering "societal resilience" as a desirable outcome, around which all solutions aimed at mitigating disinformation should be centered.

Striving for societal resilience with human-centered approaches. Likewise, the term "societal resilience" refers to an ambiguous social state, lacking a clear-cut conceptual definition itself (Apostol et al., 2022; Cooper et al, 2022; Garrand, 2022). Therefore, all phenomena pertaining to complex processes of information manipulations, such as falsifications and informational vulnerability, should be viewed and treated as symptoms of some deeper societal cleavages and inequalities. By adopting this view, the reactions of professional media and journalism to the surge of online disinformation should be examined not solely though structural measures like intensity of fact-checking activities performed by media organizations. This analysis should also recognize "situational awareness", i.e., the capacity of "risk perception" among all digitally engaged stakeholders.

Advocating for this perspective, policy makers in collaboration with epistemic organizations can enhance digital resilience of individuals and local communities when they acknowledge and consider all types of risks, including socio-economic differences and digital inequalities. Strategic knowledge organizations, including news media, schools, libraries, and community media, play a vital role in developing new tools, educational programs, and engaging interventions to address inequalities and vulnerabilities. Such initiatives are crucial for fostering inclusiveness, self-efficacy, and dialogue among all individuals.

Context-tailored solutions to disinformation are required. There is no single answer to what makes some societies more resilient than others and which strategies work best in which geographic and cultural context. But it is certain that democracies with lower degrees of institutional and interpersonal trust appear especially vulnerable in the situations of heightened uncertainty and are prone to information manipulations. Besides, even within more established democracies, characterized by high levels of institutional trust, press freedom, and media literacy, online disinformation poses challenges to both national security and social cohesion.

All things considerred, online disinformation and information manipulations are often addressed as a policy problem that should be countered with specific regulatory, governance, and collaborative solutions (DIGIRES, 2022). Nevertheless, we acknowledge the critical importance of the viability of epistemic institutions, primarily the news media, alongside individual resilience preparedness as foundational elements for implementation any policy or other measures against disinformation and information manipulations.

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Assignment

The proposed **Task** is designed to assist students in learning about different forms of information manipulations prevalent in the digital environment. The manipulations encompass a wide range, including clickbait headlines, satire, falsified facts, and the misuse of contextual information etc. To assist students in their reading, a specialized strategy called Lateral Reading is proposed to verify information.

Title of the method used	**"Going beyond the surface with lateral reading: How to strengthen information verification skills?"**
Aim	**Assignment:** To explain the concept of "lateral reading" (developed at COR, Stanford University) and demonstrate how to apply this information analysis technique in everyday life situations to assess source credibility and verify information using available web tools.
Duration	3 academic hours
Level	Novice/advanced

Brief description of the task and keywords	**The Task:** 1. Students are asked to define the characteristics of a news item (or, alternatively, of the selected social media post) based on a scale that categorizes degrees of deception, ranging from low to high intentional deceptions. 2. By applying the lateral reading technique, they are asked to verify the information sources. The strategy and technique of lateral reading help mitigate the risks of online disinformation and information manipulations by promoting a more informed and nuanced understanding of complex issues. **Keywords:** media literacy, digital capabilities, lateral reading, fact-checking, credibility, information verification
Equipment	Computer, smartphone, internet connection
Preparations	**Background information about journalism and fact-checking:** 1. Students are asked to read the Abstract of the chapter (**"Reclaiming a Trust-based and Resilient Public Sphere: How Journalism Meets the Challenges of the Platform Era"**). Additionally, they also can watch a brief video explanatory note (5 min) suggested by the authors of the chapter: Master Class: Journalism https://euromediapp.org/audiovisuals/master-class-journalism/?swcfpc=1).

2. Students must familiarize themselves with the topic of digital information manipulations, also with the ideal/mission of professional journalism. Here, principles of journalism must be reviewed as well as other developments: genre of fact-checking, false information (disinformation, misinformation, malinformation), etc. Students are invited to delve deeper into the concepts of "misinformation" and "fact-checking" and by applying the strategy of lateral reading, which involves exploring different internet sources, develop a contextually nuanced representation of the studied phenomenon.

3. Students are given a few pieces of false information (web links or social media posts) and are asked to identify its validity by applying the strategy of lateral reading.

Background information about lateral reading:

- Lateral reading is a term used to describe the process of "information consumption" where readers evaluate the credibility and reliability of a source by seeking information from multiple sources and contexts, rather than relying solely on the content of the original source.

- Instead of accepting information at face value, lateral reading involves actively investigating the source and cross-referencing it with other reputable online sources to gain a technique of information more comprehensive understanding.

	Practical steps to follow in the application of the lateral reading strategy: • Source evaluation (consider whether the source is accurate); fact-checking (identify and verify the claims by consulting multiple sources to check discrepancies and inconsistencies); • Explore broader context (look for agendas, potential motives, underlying narratives, identifying potential biases, provide more complete picture); • Cross-referencing (checking alternative perspectives); • Critical thinking and metacognition (engage in critical thinking by questioning the information presented, examining its logical consistency, and assessing the evidence provided).
Process (explanation and advice for students or teachers on how to organize the training in a group of students – what to show, what questions to ask)	**Study process:** "Lateral reading" epitomizes the strategy of delving deeper into the story lines and facts that are not "seen" on the surface of online information by questioning "What's the evidence?", "Who's behind the information?", "How does it affect me?" **Challenges with information verification – all these issues can be tested in discussions with students:** time constraints, lack of reliable information sources, evolving forms of deception, changing information landscape, lack of expertise, confirmation bias, etc. Each of these challenges must be taken into account in the discussion with participants. **Web tools to be applied:** Media Bias/Fact Check (https://mediabiasfactcheck.com); InVID for reverse image search, etc.

Summing up	**Questions for reflection, responses and reactions:** Participants can be advised the task of investigating the websites or social media groups that their relatives or friends frequently visit and analyze the credibility of the information presented on these platforms using the method of lateral reading and critical thinking.
Suggestions for further reading and analysis	**Sources to read more about the "lateral reading" strategy:** • COR: Civic Online Reasoning center, Stanford University (https://cor.stanford.edu); • DIGIRES Baltic Research Foundation for Digital Resilience (http://digires.lt) and MILToolKIT "Media Literacy without Myths: How to Find the Truth and Discern Lies" (https://digires.lt/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Metodologinis_leidinys.pdf, in Lithuanian).

EuromediApp Project: The Why, What and How

European Media and Platform Policy (EuromediApp) is a Jean Monnet network dedicated to studying, analysing and discussing benefits and challenges of digital platforms in Europe and worldwide. By bringing together knowledge and research capacity from all over Europe and beyond, EuromediApp provides space for national and transnational deliberation on how future digital services should and will be governed. More about the project and network: https://euromediapp.org.