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Who Watches the Watchdog? Understanding Media Systems as Information Regimes

Mart Ots [1], Peter Berglez [2], and Lars Nord [3]

[1] Jönköping International Business School, Jönköping University, Sweden
[2] School of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences (HumES), Örebro University, Sweden
[3] Center for Study of Democracy and Communication, Mid Sweden University, Sweden

Correspondence: Mart Ots (mart.ots@ju.se)

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Abstract

This article explores institutions that monitor news media performance. It opens up critical inquiry into how knowledge about media systems is shaped, shared, and bounded in society. Using Sweden as an illustrative and data-rich case, we first map the overall media monitoring structure in Sweden. Second, we examine the kind of knowledge and data about media that monitoring institutions produce, including their motives and the underlying values they support. Third, we extrapolate questions about implicit and explicit motives to participate in an "information regime." Fourth, by means of media system theory, we discuss the international relevance of the Swedish case to understand media monitoring systems in other parts of the world.

Keywords

democracy; governance; media development; media monitoring; media regimes; media systems; Sweden

1. Introduction

How well news media fulfils its democratic roles to inform citizens, provide diversity of opinions, and act as a watchdog is one of the oldest questions in media studies. Therefore, media monitoring is regarded as a central activity that enables societies to govern the media system and hold media accountable for its performance (e.g., Tomaz & Trappel, 2022). However, despite recognizing the centrality of the monitoring role, the actors who monitor media and produce information about media's conduct and performance are rarely discussed.

"Governance" is commonly defined as mechanisms put in place to organize media systems in accordance with media policy debates (Freedman, 2008). In the academic debate, the issue of media governance has

been related to various aspects of regulation and policy (Puppis, 2010)—that is, the monitoring bodies, press and advertising councils, and public service value tests—that are used to ensure media complies with "good citizenship" (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2004). The challenges associated with media monitoring include globalization and digitalization, affecting "who" and "what" is being monitored.

In this article, we do not study mechanisms of governance, but rather take a closer look at the institutions that produce information about the media, hence rendering the media and its performance visible. There is a growing recognition that a wide range of actors (beyond the central media policy institutions) participate in media monitoring activities (Ali & Duemmel, 2019). This includes a range of organizations that contribute to upholding a commercial market (Peters & Pierre, 1998) by producing reliable information about media's performance and its product quality (e.g., circulation numbers, subscriptions, page views). It concerns not just news media's own powers to produce and disseminate information (Ali & Puppis, 2018), but also the increasing presence (and potential bias) of commercial consulting agencies in the monitoring of industry performance and policy effects (Collin et al., 2021). Collectively, we can characterize these information producers as the "information regime" (Anand & Peterson, 2000) of the media system, effectively contributing to an infrastructure of media accountability that may differ in design across countries and political traditions (Eberwein et al., 2017).

Therefore, the "forms" of information production and control can vary, ranging from legally regulated instruments of governance to ethical codes of conduct and "the disciplines of the market" (McQuail, 2003, p. 96). In an increasingly digitalized media market, one could also acknowledge the affordances of digital publishing platforms and proprietary tools for online data analytics that dictate what type of metrics on media conduct can be created. While news production traditionally was a geographically bounded concern, recent discussions include how algorithmic news dissemination on social media platforms should be monitored (Meese & Bannerman, 2022; Meese & Hurcombe, 2021; Napoli, 2015; Stockmann, 2022), and there is a general concern that monitoring methods and capabilities of regulatory bodies lag behind the technological development (Ots, 2014).

Previously, media scholars have shown an interest in the structure of media information regimes, yet they have focused on the intricate functioning of commercial advertising markets, which is dependent on a constant feed of standardized user data (Kosterich & Napoli, 2016; Webster, 2010). However, we argue that "journalism" and news production are not merely subject to the pressures of the advertising markets and dominant audience measurement standards. In its role in societies and media systems, news media is connected to the expectations of a broad range of more loosely organized actors that to various extents evaluate the performance of news organizations on specific parameters and to certain expectations and standards. The monitoring activities of these actors make the media's performance transparent, allowing society to watch the watchdog and hold it accountable.

In this line of reasoning, using the case of Sweden as an example, the purpose of this article is to map and qualitatively explore monitoring institutions in the media information regime. While the objective is not to provide an empirically exhaustive inventory of all monitoring institutions in the media system, this effort allows us to conceptually widen the outlook on media monitoring and critically reflect on the breadth of media monitoring institutions as well as their motives and focus in making news media performance visible. We discuss the coherence and risks in this information production and how it enables society to govern

news media performance. Identifying the main monitoring institutions, as well as the types of information produced and with which purpose allows this article to contribute to a broader discussion about media governance and the boundaries of stakeholder cognition of the media market and its democratic function.

2. Emergence and Structure of Information Regimes: Theory and Literature Review

To describe and analyze the ecosystem of actors monitoring media society, we draw upon the notion of information regimes. The concept of information regimes is drawn from sociology, where scholars have taken considerable interest in how organizational fields emerge and are constituted. Many of these studies have specifically focused on media and cultural industries, including studies on museums (DiMaggio, 1991), art markets (Becker, 1982), commercial radio (Leblebici et al., 1991), and contemporary music (Anand & Peterson, 2000). Common to these studies is the recognition of a shared institutionalized cognition emerging among actors, enabling them to efficiently collaborate and compete within an industry or sector. In the media field, for instance, this could manifest as any shared notions about features that characterize "good" or "valuable" news content.

Anand and Peterson (2000) pointed out the production of market information in accordance with agreed-upon standards. These standards are central for a shared cognition to emerge on what the industry is about and how the practices of its actors should be evaluated. Such information could include measures of "quality," "quantity," and "performance" produced by content producing firms or external organizations, for instance auditors. The resulting "web of information" (Anand & Peterson, 2000, p. 271), which enables actors to navigate fields of mutual activity (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), is referred to as the "market information regime." Market information allows actors to observe and understand a joint playing field, to observe each other, to evaluate the performance of themselves and others, to understand the explicit and implicit rules of the game, and to direct their priorities.

It is crucial to acknowledge the socially constructed nature of the information regime. Rather than being objectively "important" or even necessarily "accurate," information tends to be produced in ways that primarily maintain the structure of the field. Once mutually accepted, the information regime also sets boundaries for actors' selective attention (Rao, 1998). Hence, aspects that fall outside the established information regime may be disregarded. The word "regime" suggests that institutionalized structures for information tend to dominate the understandings, practices, and priorities of actors at a given time. For example, in their study of the American music industry, Anand and Peterson (2000) demonstrated how the Billboard chart, the measurement of record sales, radio station rotation, genre classification of songs, and other information sources (including the used methods and measuring institutes) have long dictated the functioning of the music industry and the actions of actors involved therein.

Subsequently, media scholars have found information regimes useful to describe the emergence, structure, and rigidity of commercial media markets, particularly those relying on complex routines for audience measurement (e.g., Napoli, 2011). This includes studies on book publishing (Andrews & Napoli, 2006), television broadcasting (Kosterich & Napoli, 2016), social media (Webster, 2010), and cross-media measurement of audiences (Taneja & Mamoria, 2012) or the adoption of user "engagement" as a media content metric (Nelson, 2021).

Audience metrics are a core component of the functioning of commercial media markets. Yet, if we broaden the perspectives of media performance and value from the advertising market to the monitoring of journalistic news production within media systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), there are numerous potential stakeholders, monitoring institutions, and value dimensions that may capture the functioning and performance of media in a broader societal context. The "media regimes" concept by Williams and Delli Carpini (2011) looks beyond metrics to the "institutions, norms, processes and actors that shape the expectations of media producers and consumers" (p. 16), where legal and regulatory pressures also play an important role. Like studies of the evolution of organizational fields, such as that of Leblebici et al. (1991), Williams and Delli Carpini (2011) took a specific interest in how media systems evolve in their constitution over time, particularly how traditional formats of news and newsworthiness have given way for new forms of commentary in entertainment or social media. The question of how this changes the information regime within the media regime remains unanswered.

Our view of information regime(s) borrows the systemic perspective of Williams and Delli Carpini (2011). Herein, monitoring functions (e.g., audience measurement technologies and standards) play a part in shaping the field (Nelson, 2021). If information production about media is the performative glue that holds the system together, we know surprisingly little about the monitoring of the media regime in its entirety and how it helps media firms set and negotiate their goals and accountability in relation to different groups of stakeholders.

Due to its commercial and democratic relevance, journalistic media operates in a demanding environment that requires constant production of information regarding its commercial legs; audience, advertising, finances, and other aspects that may be required by professional ideals; its organizational sense of purpose; and its legal or political consequences. Therefore, in our study on the monitoring capabilities in the field of Swedish journalistic production, the information regime is a useful lens to observe what is currently being emphasized (and considered important) in the functioning of the news media system, what is currently omitted, and what the consequences are from the perspective of a critical assessment of media's role for democratic development.

3. Method and Analytical Process

With the intention to map and qualitatively explore key monitoring institutions in the media information regime, a single case study (Yin, 2018) was conducted using Sweden as the context and the news media information regime as the focal case. Our approach was based on the method of the EU-funded project Mediadelcom (Szávai, 2023) for examining knowledge-based media governance and, more precisely, its tools for meta-analyses of existing data (Berglez & Ots, 2023; Oller Alonso & Splendore, 2023). The epistemological point of departure for this method (see Kitchin, 2014, p. 10) is the intertwined relations between *data* (abstracted elements), *information* (logically linked elements of data), *knowledge* (organized information), and *wisdom*, wherein applied and relevant knowledge is ideally extracted, not least for policymakers (Eberwein & Harro-Loit, 2023, p. 14). A single case study was suited to conduct exploratory work on social phenomena using multiple data sources (Ozcan et al., 2017) and Sweden represented a promising site for a single case study approach due to its rich availability of data (Berglez et al., 2022).

We operationalized the concept of information regime as the ecosystem of actors producing information as well as assessing, evaluating, or valuing the performance of the news media. Based on an empirical initiative to identify actors monitoring the news sector in Sweden (Berglez et al., 2022; Ots et al., 2023), we first

identified and classified the most important information-producing stakeholders, following the analytical processes used in prior studies of industries as social fields (e.g., Becker, 1982). Using a snowballing technique, we scanned academic institutions, public authorities, market research agencies, media, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for institutions whose core objective included regularly collecting and disseminating data about news media performance. We analyzed the monitoring institutions' implicit and explicit tasks in society, categorizing their institutional character. Given our exploratory purpose, a snowballing technique allowed us to identify the central actors of the field. In Sweden, a small country with 10.5 million inhabitants, the examples of active information producers are not unlimited, so there is a good possibility that a process of snowballing can achieve a relatively "complete" mapping of central actors. Prior studies of media systems have drawn links between categorizations of actors and the underlying political structures (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Consequently, we aimed to identify (a) overall categories of actors (e.g., public authorities, etc.); (b) particular (central) actors within these categories, associated with information production *impact*, in terms of material resources, reputation, and/or communicative efficiency (ability to reach out to target groups); and (c) subcategories of actors, in which minor actors, as they are potentially manifold, were instead clustered (see Table 1).

Second, we examined the information content of monitoring institutions' web pages and complemented this with database searches to classify each organization's data production, along with the dissemination, target audience, and public *accessibility* of these data. This allowed us to better understand the political, cultural, ethical, commercial, educational, and professional functions of different types of data (i.e., their knowledge/data *profiles*). Third, we interpreted the motives of monitoring institutions to perform certain roles in the information regime, including serving target groups, influencing societal processes, or gatekeeping governmental functions. Fourth, we explored the underlying *value system* (i.e., the normative ideas and knowledge being represented). These steps allowed us to analytically capture the Swedish "media monitoring field." Thereafter, we examined the field as "a totality" in terms of its *completeness*, the degree of internal and external *interaction* of the actors, and the existing *power relations*. Power relations in the media regime illuminate the blurring between monitoring and governance. While producing intelligence about media, intelligence (or lack of intelligence) may also influence and guide news media's and other stakeholders' behaviors, attention, and understanding.

4. Findings: Monitoring of the Swedish Media System

Our data collection allowed us to identify the most central producers of information regarding news media performance in Sweden. These firms collectively make up the backbone of monitoring media performance. They were sorted into five generic categories with different interests in their production and dissemination of information on news media performance, namely: (a) public authorities; (b) academic institutions; (c) commercial measurement institutes; (d) associations, interest groups, and NGOs; and (e) journalists and media firms (see Figure 1). All these categories of stakeholders can also be found at a transnational level (f) with EU institutions or international auditors compiling information on Swedish media development that is comparable with the situation in other member states.

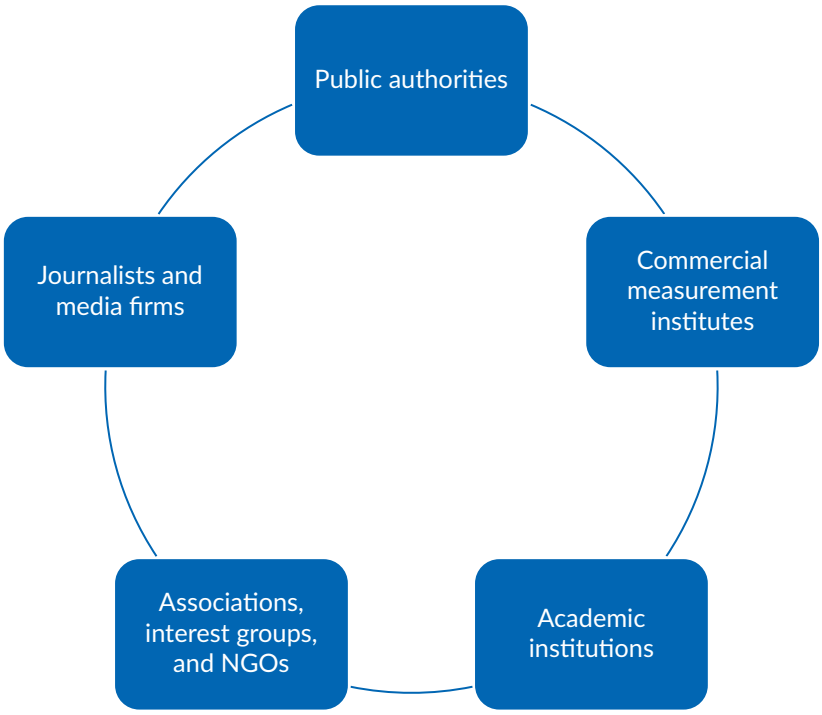

Figure 1. Categories of information producers.

4.1. Public Authorities

A range of public authorities are interested in news media performance (see Table 1). Some are specifically assigned to collect information on and monitor certain aspects of media, including media market development (e.g., MPRT), digital market infrastructures and public access (e.g., PTS), or media literacy and protection of minors (e.g., MR). Others are only concerned with the media sector as one industry of many. The KKV monitors the risks of market concentration and market distortion, while the MSB monitors risks to civil society, including threats to journalists and the media sector's ability to handle fake news and disinformation. Public authorities use their own staff, academic experts, commercial consultants/auditors, and/or market research firms in information collection, analysis, and dissemination.

Since there is a multitude of objectives within and across authorities, the information collected, produced, used, and/or distributed may look very different. All authorities tend to monitor the production of intelligence from other information producers, such as the reports of academic institutions, legislative bodies, and international monitoring bodies. Some public authorities (e.g., MPRT and PTS) are regulatory bodies responsible for monitoring certain standards ensuring that legislation is properly implemented—for example, guaranteeing subsidies are provided to the right beneficiaries, and distribution/broadcasting permits are granted on the right basis and their requirements are met. This makes such public authorities more deeply intertwined in an information regime with structures and direct reporting links to and from other stakeholders—including media firms, measuring institutes, and research institutions. The media industry needs vital resources that the public authorities control, thus they need to participate in the information regime. Other authorities (e.g., KKV and MSB) are less structured and standardized in their data

production but strive to continuously expand their understanding of the media, for instance, by funding relevant research initiatives.

According to the principle of public access, institutions under the administrative jurisdiction of the state, region, or municipality are generally obliged to make their data and documents accessible to the public on request. Beyond that, several authorities active in the media and communication area have a specific task to disseminate their insights about media developments to stakeholders in society.

Table 1. Dominant institutions per category (examples).

Public authorities	Academic institutions and consortia	Commercial measurement institutes	Journalists and media firms	Industry associations, interest groups and NGOs
Swedish Press and Broadcasting Authority (MPRT) Swedish Post and Telecom Authority (PTS) Competition Authority (KKV) The Swedish Media Council (MR) Swedish Agency for Accessible Media Statistics Sweden Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) Swedish government/ Ministry of Culture	Swedish universities Academic research institutes (e.g., Nordicom, Fojo Media Institute)	Media measurement institutes (e.g., Kantar Sifo, MMS) Media auditors (e.g., KIA index, Tidningsstatistik) Market analysts (e.g., IRM Institute for Advertising and Media Statistics) Consultancy firms (e.g., PwC, Deloitte) ech platforms (e.g., Meta, Alphabet, Hubspot)	Trade press (e.g., Dagens Media, Resumé) News media houses (e.g., Schibsted, Bonnier) Public service media (e.g., SR, SVT, UR)	Swedish Union of Journalists and Journalisten (media union) Think tanks (e.g., Arenagruppen, Timbro) Social media groups with a media purpose Institute for Media Studies (IMS) Publicistklubben Association of Advertisers Association of Investigative Journalists Swedish Internet Foundation
International				
European Platform of Regulatory Authorities (EU institution) European Audiovisual Observatory (EU institution) European Parliament's Public Opinion Monitoring Unit	Media Pluralism Monitor Reuters Institute Euromedia Research Group			World Association of News Publishers

Public authorities' mission is typically to safeguard the implementation of Swedish law in various areas, including competition law, media law, and telecommunications law, where information collection about news media is essential to, for instance, understand aspects of market concentration, monitor the use and eligibility for media subsidies, and allocate broadcasting licenses. However, the assessments are quite different. Some regulatory bodies (e.g., MPRT and PTS) have strict quantitative indicators of media quality—for example, percentage of own editorial production in a newspaper, economic industry performance, household coverage in an area, or share of population with broadband access in an area. Other institutions active in research financing, risk assessment, or media literacy (e.g., KKV, MSB, Media Council) apply more qualitative, opaque assessments and indicators on a case-to-case basis. In short, the quality of information is determined by the extent to which it allows the institution to perform its assigned task.

The overall values are grounded in the Swedish constitution: accessibility (e.g., PTS, MR), diversity (e.g., MPRT), fair competition (KKV), consumer protection (e.g., MR, MSB), and impartiality (e.g., MPRT). The general principle is that information should be made publicly available, unless it contains personal data or is classified for other reasons.

4.2. Academic Institutions and Academic Consortia

Important monitoring stakeholders are outlined in Table 1 and include universities, university colleges, and semi-academic institutions as important monitoring stakeholders. These stakeholders provide Swedish society with relevant data about media and its performance. While we explicitly mention academic institutions focusing on journalism or media and communication sciences, other academic institutions also conduct important monitoring work—for instance, in the fields of business, law, informatics, and data science—as well as an increasing number of cross-disciplinary research initiatives.

The production of data and knowledge mostly takes place within the scientific discipline of media and communications, which could be part of the humanities and social sciences. However, relevant knowledge about media in society is also produced by scholars from other disciplines, such as history, sociology, informatics, management, or linguistics. These data are produced through scientific practice. While "doing research" is becoming a wider concept for collecting and analyzing data, universities' and university colleges' research activities are supposed to represent the most advanced forms of research. As in many other countries, the approaches to media studies at various universities might differ in terms of different sub-fields, theories, or methods—for example, the tradition of statistical research, discourse studies, or whether the focus is on national or international media developments.

Whereas some research data are publicly accessible, such as reports and research publications, other data are not. This access is blocked due to paywalls and a lack of open access. Academic researchers' interest in monitoring media needs to be understood in relation to research funding. In Sweden, this relies to a large extent on individual researchers' ability to compete for grants from external funding agencies (Fagerlind Ståhl, 2021). Most of these agencies are set up to allocate research funding from the Swedish state. Traditionally, media and communication research would be associated with fundamental research—that is, research that is primarily relevant to other scholars and thus stays within the academic system. This kind of research is either funded directly by the state (which provides the universities with resources for research) or through various bodies, such as the Swedish Research Council and Riksbankens Jubileumsfond. In this

context, the most important quality indicator of whether the produced knowledge about media in society has made an impact is dissemination through peer-reviewed journals and/or books. Other tasks are increasingly encouraged by employers (universities), such as public outreach activities, where the results are supposed to be disseminated to the public and/or particular target groups outside academia. However, success in the peer-review system is what best paves the way for career development and/or different forms of influence in the university system.

To mobilize academic researchers to solve grand societal challenges, the Swedish government has geared funding towards more delimited research areas and specialized funding agencies (Swedish Government, 2020b), including innovation (e.g., Vinnova), industry-academic collaboration (e.g., Knowledge Foundation), and sustainability (e.g., Formas). Several EU research programs are geared towards similar goals, namely the practical relevance of the produced data and knowledge. Here, the "quality indicators" refer to the ability to put the produced data into practice for the sake of innovation and/or to implement it in some kind of industrial production.

In most academic research activities—not least those associated with fundamental research in media and communication sciences—the information generated about news media performance in society is connected to some idea about *democratic ideals* (e.g., deliberative democracy, equality, individual rights versus the state). Nevertheless, this value is challenged by other values, such as innovation power (e.g., Vinnova), practical relevance (e.g., Knowledge Foundation), and economic growth. Another increasingly important value is that research should be good for sustainable development and internationalization (Swedish Government, 2020a).

4.3. Commercial Measurement Institutes

The commercial market research sector (see Table 1) has been well documented in studies of information regimes. In Sweden, several national research agencies (e.g., MMS, Kantar Sifo, and IRM Institute for Advertising and Media Statistics) populate the field of audience measurement. Tech companies such as Meta and Alphabet, are also monitoring bodies, as they provide data collection and analysis of for instance media usage patterns, website performance, and social media engagement. Other stakeholders take more of an auditing role, verifying the authenticity of reported digital traffic figures (e.g., KIA index) or physical newspaper circulation figures (e.g., Tidningsstatistik). Their monitoring data predominantly consist of statistical survey or panel data. Common data concern media usage—that is, newspaper readership, TV and radio program ratings, web page visitors, their duration, and levels of engagement. However, there are also other types of studies of media usage, including more long-term analyses of transitions between media forms and willingness to pay for news media products.

Concerning accessibility, as these are commercial enterprises, data on media performance are their products, and access to data detailed statistics and analyses is predominately restricted to paying clients. However, to some extent, some of these companies disseminate results in overview to the public primarily as a form of PR. One concrete example is Kantar Sifo's quarterly review of its measurement of Swedish politicians' social media activities (i.e., Mediemätaren).

The primary motive for commercial agencies to produce data on media performance is the demand from advertisers for unbiased and verified audience figures. This information determines the value of the news

media product to advertisers. However, this does not exclude other motives of commercial agencies, which are more about contributing to society in a broader sense.

Commercial values dominate media auditors and measurement institutes, who primarily produce the type of information for which they believe there is a sufficiently large and profitable demand. While these institutes have no specific aim to monitor the media's democratic performance, the demand for their services will always, to some degree, overlap with the media's role as the fourth estate. Measurement institutes generally trade in trustworthiness—that is, the information they produce is reliable, accurate, and accepted by media industry stakeholders. Commercial institutes can also evolve media monitoring by their innovation in data collection methods, or the type of reports and analyses offered to buyers.

4.4. Media Firms

Media firms include companies and/or media houses active on the Swedish media market. Media organizations produce a myriad of information about themselves. To function and run their own operations, they need to know how production and sales plans are followed; how the media products are appreciated, viewed, clicked, and commented on; who is working and when; how costs of operation are amounting; and how budgets are met and profits (or losses) compounding. Some of this eventually reaches the market as financial information that all stock-listed firms need to deliver. Media firms are a bit peculiar, as they also conduct substantial journalistic monitoring and information production about themselves and their industry peers. News producers regularly publish news and commentary about their achievements (e.g., economic results, audience development, industry awards, and other recognition) and reflect on leaked information about their shortcomings (e.g., organizational issues and adherence to ethical standards). Furthermore, they monitor the performance of their industry peers by producing cultural critiques and information about their products and ethical conduct. In addition, a whole industry segment—the trade press—has made its business idea to monitor and comment on media industry developments and performance.

While some data (e.g., annual reports) are publicly accessible, a great deal of monitoring data is not public but is used privately among media houses. In some cases, researchers could access these data, but the media actors decide what data could be accessible, how, and the cost. Yet, to some extent, the rules differ for public service companies.

The motives behind some of these information-producing activities are linked to participation in financial markets (e.g., annual reports) and adherence to accreditation standards (e.g., sustainability reports). The primary audience for this information is the *financial market*, which requires information that enables the assessment of financial performance, value, and risk. Financial reporting is required by law.

Moreover, media firms participate in the markets for audiences. Consequently, audience numbers, characteristics, and actions are continuously gathered and registered via analytics interfaces (e.g., Google or other systems depending on the media channel). The users of this information are advertisers (if audiences are sold directly), authorities (if the media receives subsidies), tech firms like Google, or advertising networks that may resell the audiences to advertisers. A traffic auditor (here, Kantar Sifo) may be assigned as an external party to verify the accuracy of the audience figures.

Information may also target readers or viewers through a media firm's editorial work. Op-eds and cultural analyses have the ambition to exercise critique—that is, to assess other publishers' quality (or lack thereof) in reporting, political arguments, and cultural productions. Investigative journalism may scrutinize the ethical standards of other organizations and expose moral/ethical transgressions (often related to professional codes of conduct) or legal convictions (in all industries, but particularly in the media industry). However, while the media conducts self-monitoring within the industry, it is also criticized for what it omits to report. Repeated failures by news organizations to show transparency and hold themselves and their peers accountable to the same ethical standards they demand from others have been named as a possible explanation for why public trust in journalists is relatively weak compared to other vocational categories (Huitfeldt, 2023). As discussed, the information production by media firms is guided by a mix of the commercial logic of the financial markets, advertising markets, and the professional ideals of investigative journalism and commentary.

4.5. Industry Associations, Interest Groups, and Non-Governmental Organizations

NGOs and industry associations are institutions closely connected to the news media industry that sustain some degree of independence and autonomy. Some are well organized—such as institutes (e.g., Institute for Media Studies [IMS]), unions (e.g., Swedish Union of Journalists), trade organizations (e.g., Swedish National Association of Advertisers), NGOs (e.g., Swedish Internet Foundation), and think tanks (e.g., Timbro, Arena Group)—while others primarily operate as networks and social media groups.

The data produced could be diverse, involving reports/report series (e.g., unions, institutes, NGOs, and think tanks), books (e.g., think tanks and NGOs), journalistic material (e.g., unions), and awards for journalistic excellence (e.g., NGOs). Some of these have a broad remit, including studying how media acts, works, and functions, and stimulating a fact-based debate about media's role in society (e.g., IMS). Other institutions produce information to draw attention to their particular sphere of interest, such as labor market issues and journalists' working conditions (e.g., Swedish Union of Journalists), or promoting and facilitating certain practices, including investigative reporting (e.g., FSJ). In this category of media monitoring, a rather broad interpretation of the concept of "research" can be found, guaranteeing that the actions uphold acceptable quality.

In the context of accessibility, for most actors, the production of data and making it publicly accessible is part of their own objectives, promoting certain perspectives, or setting their interests on the public agenda. The motive for producing data about media transformation is commonly to promote and protect the interests of a particular group within the media system, to influence policymakers, or to shape public opinion on an issue. Altogether, this makes the monitoring-focus of these stakeholders often selective or ideologically driven.

5. Discussion: Scope, Interaction, and Power in Media Monitoring

Through this article, we set out to understand how knowledge about media development is formed in society using Sweden as an illustrative example. More specifically, we sought to explore the media monitoring institutions and their motives and focus when making news media performance visible. Our overview of the main monitoring actors shows the width of current information production and assessment, indicating that there are many parallel objectives and cognitions regarding what constitutes quality in media conduct.

With our broad mapping of Swedish monitoring institutions as a point of departure, we now discuss the implications regarding how information producers and the information produced structure our cognition of the media system. Previous studies (e.g., Kosterich & Napoli, 2016; Taneja & Mamoria, 2012) have made deep dives into narrowly defined, quantified, data-rich, and closely standardized media monitoring verticals that represent interactions between closely interconnected groups of stakeholders for certain defined purposes. However, our overview depicts a much more eclectic, unstandardized, and uncoordinated execution of monitoring exercises. Using the Swedish case, in the subsections that follow, we point out three areas of importance in the monitoring of media systems.

5.1. The Scope of Information

Illustrated by our empirical outlook on the case of Sweden, we see the collective monitoring capability not as being the output of a deliberate and coherent design, but rather as a patchwork of overlapping or complementary interest areas, along with monitoring practices that emerge and evolve along with the industry. Some actors' motives are to guard the state's/society's interests, whereas others are to target the commercial markets, although collectively they set the cognitive boundaries for what aspects of media's performance will be made visible to stakeholders within the media system.

According to previous research, the audience measurement industry is well developed. Yet, from a societal view, where media is tasked to inform, educate, investigate, and stimulate democratic debate, it is highly relevant to ask what we know or should know regarding media's performance. Despite the Swedish case's richness of information, the available scope of information does not provide a clear answer.

Besides the commercial audience market, authorities are traditionally concerned with monitoring the market functioning as well as ensuring the economic conditions for media to be published, for media to be accessed by the public, and risks associated with, for instance, disinformation. Nevertheless, authorities are reluctant to monitor or grade the quality of journalistic performance and academic institutions have not shown an extensive interest in trying to assess journalistic quality in Sweden. Qualitative aspects of news content and journalistic conduct instead rely to a large extent on the publications, debates, and awards of NGOs (e.g., IMS, Association of Investigative Journalists, the Swedish Union of journalists, and the Media Ombudsman). The critique raised on news media's reluctance to report and reflect on negative aspects of its social performance and the consequences of its journalistic reporting (Huitfeldt, 2023) is not unique to Sweden (see, e.g., Loit et al., 2017) and has been named a weakness in the accountability infrastructure of the media (Eberwein et al., 2017).

5.2. The Coexistence of Parallel Logic and the Level of Interaction Between Monitoring Bodies

Our mapping of the Swedish case also illuminates the coexistence of parallel logics in the media system (Berglez et al., 2022). We use this term to illustrate that varying monitoring tasks are conducted with different users in mind and serving different purposes—some information may target advertising markets, while other information could target financial markets, regulators, politicians, audiences, or journalists. This may include input for the design and evaluation of regulatory measures, for the functioning of commercial media markets, for the objectives of news organizations, and for the values and ideals of journalists. These logics may not necessarily be conflicting, but do not align and may serve different functions within the

media system. This means that the overall information regime of the media system does not align to a single standard and does not have a dominant owner or coordinating body.

Previous studies have taken an interest in specific types of media information (Kosterich & Napoli, 2016; Taneja & Mamoria, 2012), illustrating a high division of labor between information producers. Therefore, it is relevant to discuss the interaction across monitoring bodies and the triangulation of information.

Within media monitoring categories, we identified relations between different media and communication or journalism research departments across Sweden in terms of joint research projects, seminars, conferences, etc. For example, the TRAIN collaboration for young researchers involves most media and communication departments in Sweden. In the category "industry associations, interest groups, and NGOs" (Table 1), there is interaction between the political think tanks (Timbro, Arena) in terms of ongoing debates.

Across media monitoring categories, we identified established relations between academic institutions, consortia, and public authorities. A natural reason is that some of the public authorities (e.g., MSB) fund academic research. Another form of interaction is the recruitment of academics as experts in public authorities' projects. Public authorities with the purpose of funding research and innovation have a mission to strengthen cross-sector collaboration, communication, and activities between academics and industry.

Furthermore, there is a temporal dimension of interaction. While some audience metrics may cause immediate and direct effects on the actions of media firms (e.g., whether a particular news article is moved to the top page of a website or not), others (e.g., certain academic studies) may shape the media system indirectly and in the long term by incrementally adjusting the academic discourse or influencing legislators. Viewing the entire media system as a meta-level information regime allows us to detect how different logic evolves over time and influences stakeholders' actions.

5.3. The Power and Influence of Monitoring Bodies and Their Information

Our final reflection concerns the links between (a) the production of information and associated analyses; and (b) institutions that exercise governance in the sense that they have the authority to control, guide, or, in other ways, hold media and journalists accountable for their performance. From a governance perspective—many information producers in the media system have no jurisdictional power—they are merely information providers to, for example, legislators, authorities, media firms, and advertisers. In fact, academics, polling institutes, market research agencies, consultants, and other information producers often base their trustworthiness on a position independent from the exercise of power and from the commercial interests or legal consequences of their analyses. Nevertheless, when put into the hands of others, the information exerts various degrees of pressure on news media performance.

The media monitoring field, in terms of a field of power relations, could be understood metaphorically as a front and backstage space. On the front stage, actors are clearly visible, transparent, and willing to share their information with society as this is part of their mission. These actors are mainly public authorities and academic institutions. Backstage, we find organizations and individuals who may desire to be part of front stage activities but remain unsuccessful due to a lack of strategic skills, communication resources, or relevant

monitoring data. Moreover, backstage, we find actors who deliberately seek to operate in the "shadows" and who contribute to what Pasquale (2015) referred to as "black box society."

6. Concluding Remarks

While media *governance* is traditionally portrayed as a deliberate, rational, and planned process driven by media policy objectives and studied from policymakers' perspectives (e.g., Puppis, 2010), this article used the case of Sweden to illustrate that *monitoring* adheres to a diverse and less deliberate set of actors and practices. The article thereby aligns with the notion that governance work is conducted by a wider set of actors (Ali & Duemmel, 2019; Ali & Puppis, 2018), some of whom may not even consider their work as "monitoring." It thereby broadens the idea of an accountability infrastructure (Eberwein et al., 2017) beyond functions designed solely to hold media accountable to all the information production that contributes to making media performance transparent. It asks comparative media monitoring efforts (e.g., Tomaz & Trappel, 2022) for additional critical reflection on how cross-country differences in monitoring capability and data availability shape the results. To grasp the totality of monitoring capabilities, we need to reflect on how the information regime shapes our cognition of the news media industry and our ability to monitor and understand its complex societal role from multiple perspectives.

Consequently, this study contributes to the governance discussion with two important illustrations. First, information production is sometimes dictated by the specific information needs of institutions assigned to govern the public interest (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2004). At other times, governing bodies design their tasks based on the secondary sources available. By making certain aspects of media performance observable, the media information regime sets the cognitive focus and attention of governing institutions. Regarding media governance, our study highlights the need not only to study what information is made visible, but also to critically assess the assumptions, purposes, and values underlying the data and blind spots that may be overshadowed by existing data sources and methods.

Second, if broadly accepted, measurement, monitoring, and evaluation have a performative impact (Anand & Peterson, 2000; Kosterich & Napoli, 2016). This means that even if certain data are not directly used by those who govern the news media industry, they may still affect the democratic performance of the media, for instance, if the standards for defining internet browsing sessions make news media favor and encourage certain types of audience behaviors. Finally, the Swedish case may be relevant from an international perspective, as it explains the challenges posed by extensive media monitoring regimes in mature democracies. The Swedish media model is grounded in a mixture of commercially based liberal ideals of a free and independent press, and at the same time accepting state policy interventions. This model allows diverse stakeholders to partake in media monitoring activities based on their own interests. The Swedish media monitoring landscape, with its rich data produced by numerous actors, could be perceived as a role model of sorts for other countries. However, as this study indicates, the massive and varied data production is no guarantee for effective examinations of media and journalism quality. Lessons learned from the Swedish case are that it is not enough with extensive monitoring executed by different stakeholders, but that the monitoring system also needs to focus more on filling existing gaps of knowledge and on activities related to the democratic functions of media.

According to our preliminary results, Sweden could be seen as a data-rich country with strong actors and robust infrastructures (inside and outside academia) contributing to data on a long-term basis. This makes Sweden a relevant case to study from an international perspective, in terms of a potential best practice example. Nevertheless, this might also generate certain challenges, such as information/knowledge overload and data duplication.

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Conflict of Interests

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About the Authors

Mart Ots is an associate professor of business administration at Jönköping International Business School, Sweden, and at the Media, Management and Transformation Centre (MMTC). His research covers the digital and sustainable transformation of media and marketing industries with a particular interest in emerging or shifting logics and practices and implications for media policy.

Peter Berglez is a professor of media and communications at Örebro University, Sweden. He is the director of research at the Media and Communications Department at Örebro University. His primary research areas are journalism studies, environmental communication, and cooperative/collaborative communication. He is the author of the book *Global Journalism* (2013) and co-editor of *Sustainable Journalism* (2017). His research has been published in journals, such as *Journalism Studies*, *Media Culture & Society*, *Journalism*, *International Journal of Communication*, and *Organization*.

Lars Nord (PhD) is professor and chair of political communication at Mid Sweden University in Sundsvall and an affiliated associate professor in political science and political communication at Åbo Akademi University, Finland. His research interests include political communication and democracy, election campaigns, media policy, and crisis communication. Nord has published widely in international peer-reviewed journals and his list of publications includes more than 250 research-related works.