

Measuring Freedom of Information: Issues and Opportunities from an Expert Survey

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This study describes some relevant but neglected issues in measuring freedom of information. A questionnaire was administered to 36 international experts. Then we conducted 18 in-depth interviews with some experts to evaluate relevant issues that emerged from the questionnaire. We find that ideological, theoretical, and financial issues affect the three most important instruments for measuring freedom of information: the Freedom of the Press Index by Freedom House, the World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders, and the Media Sustainability Index by the International Research and Exchange Board. The study constitutes a preliminary step for future research to address these issues and improve the instruments.

Keywords: freedom of information, Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders, IREX, indicators, measurement, media

Introduction

Throughout history, the observation of media practices and their consequences in society, in order to reflect upon them and gain understanding from different perspectives, has been one of the main focal points of social researchers and, in particular, of communication specialists (Casey, Gardner, Rayner, & Wall, 2013; Stevenson, 2002) and political scientists (Baker, 2004; Gunther & Mughan, 2000; Voltmer, 2013).

The relationship between media and political systems; the legislative framework that regulates the right and freedom of communication; the structure of media industries; the contents made public by

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means of press, radio, television, and, most recently, the Internet; and the work conditions of information professionals are some of the areas that have been explored by communication studies to date. However, there is a lack of academic and professional literature about an aspect that is crucial for understanding the media in depth: media indicators. In certain spheres of global governance, the production and use of indicators has the potential to alter the forms, the exercise, and perhaps even the distribution of power. Despite this, little attention has been paid to the social processes surrounding the creation and use of indicators, the conditions of production influencing the kinds of knowledge that indicators provide, and how the use of indicators changes the nature of standard setting and decision making and affects the distribution of power between and among those who govern and those who are governed (Davis, Kingsbury, & Merry, 2012).² This is also true for media indicators, whose literature is scarce and limited in approach; most studies focus on existing instruments, which, in turn, analyze only one aspect of media environment—for example, freedom of speech, transparency, or gender. Furthermore, critical analytical research about the application of these measuring tools to media systems is still in its early days, and no definitive conclusions have been reached.

The first studies on media-system indicators date from the 1960s. Nixon (1960) supported the classifications of the International Press Institute, which evaluated the different media systems in the world, the per capita income of the different countries, the proportion of literate adults, and daily newspaper circulation. Gilmore (1962) used the International Press Institute classification to draw a relationship between these items and religious tradition in a certain country. In 1970, Lowenstein applied 23 separate indicators, including media aspects, in his Press Independence and Critical Ability Index. The results were similar to those obtained by Nixon 10 years earlier. These studies were a reference point for subsequent analyses (Kent, 1972; Nam & Oh, 1973; Weaver, 1977). In 1985, Weaver, Buddenbaum, and Fair demonstrated the nonapplicability of a single model to different countries due to the specific economic environments.

Most of the recent initiatives in this line of research have been developed by organizations such as Freedom House (FH), Reporters Without Borders (RWB), and the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX), which are implicitly or explicitly concerned with freedom of information and the sustainability of the media system. However, these evaluation initiatives are not comprehensive; rather, they tackle only one aspect of the media environment. As Jacobson, Lingling, and Seung Joon (2011) point out, observing the role of the media as actors in the development of democracy is not the exclusive aim of these three tools, but examining them can deepen our understanding of the virtues of media indicators and the difficulties they encounter.

The evaluations carried out by Freedom House, published since the 1970s under the title Freedom of the Press Index, have played a crucial role in the design of new tools to measure freedom of information and its relationship with other phenomena, such as corruption (Brunetti & Weder, 2003), concentration in the media market (Jacobsson & Jacobsson, 2004), governability (Norris & Zinnbauer, 2002), poverty (UNESCO-CPHS, 2006), and the effects of global media upon cultural convergence (Norris

² Partial exceptions are the work by Puddephatt for UNESCO (2007, 2008), the project Mapping Digital Media, funded by the Open Society Foundation, and the book by Price, Abbott, and Morgan (2011).

& Inglehart, 2009). Likewise, the evaluations carried out by FH have been used in the World Bank studies of 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, and 2004; the United Nations Development Programme (2002, 2007), and USAID to assess the impact of their programs (Gao, 2011; LaMay, 2011).³

The second index of freedom of information, created by the nongovernmental organization Reporters Without Borders, appeared in 2002. It measures the freedom of information enjoyed by journalists and media by means of a questionnaire that examines each country according to 50 criteria. The index also considers how journalists' freedom of information is violated, attacks on their physical or mental integrity, and censorship. Academics, media professionals, and experts all over the world, as well as organizations cooperating with RWB, participate in compiling the questionnaire. Unlike the FH or IREX indicators, RWB pays special attention to the initiatives deployed by governments to protect journalists from murder, torture, threats, and direct or indirect forms of censorship.

Another internationally relevant instrument is the index created by the nongovernmental organization the International Research and Exchange Board with the cooperation of USAID. This index was designed to evaluate the independence and sustainability of the media by means of five basic criteria: legal and social protection through the regulation of freedom of speech and access to information, quality and professionalism of journalism, plurality and credibility of information sources, media independence, and institutional support to media independence. Information is gathered via a questionnaire in which each of the criteria is addressed by seven to nine indicators, which are evaluated on a scale between 0 and 4. The score for each of criterion is the arithmetic mean of the results for the indicators.

Aims, Hypotheses, and Method

According to McCurdy, Power, and Godfrey (2011), evaluation of media environments must take into account the ideological, theoretical, and methodological features of the tools used. The present study carries out an expert survey of theoretical, ideological, and financial aspects of three instruments for measuring freedom of information. The decision to substitute the methodological part with a section on financing rests on several previous studies that address methodological issues (Banda, 2011; Becker & Vlad, 2011; Puddephatt, 2011; Whitten-Woodring & Van Belle, 2014) as well as the influence of funding on the nature of indexes. This study is based on the assumption that the indexes of freedom of information are influenced by their ideological, theoretical, and financial frameworks, and that this may distort their very aim as they present biased information about the media in the world (Giannone, 2014a; Scoble & Wiseberg, 1981).

Based on previous studies that demonstrated empirically the link between the ideological aspects of the indicators' methodology and the indicators themselves (Amoretti & Giannone, 2015; de Frutos, 2014; Giannone, 2014b, 2015), we maintain that there is not a clear coherence between the values

³ Freedom House results have been used by the U.S. government to determine eligible countries for the assistance program run by the Millennium Challenge Corporation. This agency was created by the U.S. Congress in 2004 with the aim of combating global poverty. The list of indicators is available at www.mcc.gov/pages/selection/indicators.

advocated by the organizations that promote such measures and the values that their indexes actually measure and legitimize. For instance, the analysis of the indicators used by FH revealed that it measures a neoliberal conception of freedom of information, while FH states that it measures a liberal one. Such a shift could have an impact on countries' rankings and ratings as well as on citizens' perceptions of freedom of information in a given country, because the index ends up measuring a model of freedom of information that is presented as "ideologically neutral" or "value free" while it is not. The survey should highlight the experts' awareness of such issues as well as their recommendations for improving the instruments.

In line with the perspective of the "social construction" of indicators (Innes, 1990), the present study focuses on the social processes surrounding the creation and use of indicators, because the perception of reality by means of indicators can favor a new understanding of a topic involving different actors. Hence,

Indicators can be seen as highly compressed summaries of information, meanings and values. They combine explicit empirical information with implicit assumptions about the meaning of that information. Furthermore, in selecting some categories of information over others, indicators also embody certain values about the kind of information that "counts" in capturing the phenomenon being measured. (Kabeer, 1999, p. 2)

Indicators represent an assertion of power to produce knowledge and to define or shape the way the world is understood. Therefore, it is essential to know who is behind this shared view of reality, because the conditions of production can influence the kinds of knowledge that indicators provide. Indicators can be produced by local, national, or international bodies with different cultures and different aims, including lobbying, propaganda, and the creation of public communication policies. The selection of indicators is a value-laden and controversial process that involves methodological, theoretical, and ideological aspects, because the values and standards of the measuring instrument are set through an essentially political process, and the responses to the results of measurement are, at their core, a matter of political judgment (Giannone, 2014b).

International rankings are a critical tool of global governance that always carry value judgements, methodological choices, and implicit political agendas (Cooley & Snyder, 2015). By assessing state practices and performance, they affect our perception of state, signal virtuous and nonvirtuous actors, and legitimize certain policies at the expense of others. Hence, they "are not only informational devices that grease the wheels of commerce, but profoundly disciplining ones as well" (Fourcade & Healy, 2007, p. 304).

Given the lack of research about this subject, our approach is based on mix methods (Creswell, 2014). The methodology applied had to be capable of evaluating the complex nature of the indicators in a structured way, and, to this end, both quantitative and qualitative tools have been used, combining methods, philosophies, and orientations from different methodological perspectives (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This research brings together the characteristics of Creswell's exploratory sequential design and the complementarity that Green, Caracelli, and Graham (1989) referred to at different stages of the empirical study, which are detailed below. A preliminary phase of the study is the bibliographic review of

primary and secondary sources that articulate a discourse about the indicators, with the aim of defining the topics concerning media indicators that refer most directly to the hypotheses and aims of the study and that should be included in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was then administered to a panel of 36 international experts, including leading international specialists capable of collaborating toward the preliminary results (see Appendices A and B).⁴ The qualitative analysis of the 36 questionnaires, together with the statistical analysis of the quantitative questions, generated the second round of questions to be presented to the informants as in-depth qualitative interviews. To critically investigate those aspects that had not been clearly defined by the first questionnaire and to examine indicator categories that had been outlined in the previous stage of the study, we carried out 18 in-depth interviews with experts (see Appendix B).

Results

The study presents some paradigmatic examples of the ideological, theoretical, and financial issues affecting measuring instruments. As to the ideological aspect, the study aims to discover what role these instruments assign to the state in regulating media system as well as whether private or commercial media are evaluated per se as freer and more independent than the state's controlled or regulated media. The theoretical aspect addresses the definition of freedom of information and the semantic field covered by the three instruments. The financial aspect focuses on the sources and nature of funding and their possible influence on the instruments.

Ideological Features

A first criticism of the ideological aspect of measuring instruments relates to the positive attitude that their promoters have on the media, as if, by themselves, the latter could naturally encourage citizens to take responsibility for their social actions, an expectation in line with Western stereotypes. However, some of the experts identified risks in this position. For instance, Antoine Héry, in charge of the World Press Freedom Index at Reporters Without Borders, pointed out:

The flow of information is now known by governments as the key to control their people. Media-cultural indicators have to play a role in raising awareness and pointing the countries that are restricting media development, since the latter grows with freedom of

⁴ The questionnaire was administrated as a pretest to three participants: a professor of economics of the University of Malaga, a professor of journalism of the University of Malaga, and a member of the Brazilian Observatory on Communication. In line with Wimmer and Dominick (2010), the sample of participants was nonprobabilistic, representing a subgroup of the population of specialists who have defined or applied indicators. It is considered representative because these experts fulfill the participation requirements and have shown interest in the study. Of the 36 participants, 19 have been involved with the definition, application, or critical analysis of UNESCO's Media Development Indicators, the first tool of this kind generated by an organization such as the United Nations, in which freedom of information plays an essential role. Other experts were selected from among those who have designed, applied, or critically analyzed freedom-of-information indicators or instruments other than those of Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders, and the International Research and Exchange Board.

speech. In Western democracies, new indicators have to be created to measure phenomena such as economic concentrations and violations against media workers. In the end, media-cultural indicators are the only way to measure pluralism, a key notion for implementing democracy. (Questionnaire No. 7)

The second ideological issue involves the well-established conventional wisdom against state intervention in regulating media systems, which is irrespective of the political regime. For instance, Christophe Deloire, general secretary of Reporters Without Borders, pointed out:

The index published by Reporters Without Borders does not directly take into account the nature of political regimes. Yet it is clear that, in general, democracies are better at protecting the freedom of production and dissemination of factual information than countries where human rights are violated. (quoted in "Belgium Drops," 2013, para. 1)

In fact, media may have a very different role in countries with different political regimes. Democracies, countries in transition, and totalitarian regimes have different degrees of state control on media systems, which cannot be always equated to a threat to media independence. Despite this, the three measuring instruments embrace such ideological bias and assess state intervention as more threatening than private intervention. For instance, Freedom House indicators give priority to state ownership of media (up to 6 of 100 points) over private ownership (up to 3 of 100 points) as a threat to freedom of information (de Frutos, 2014; Giannone, 2014b). This can be attributed to an ideological bias toward the state, which does not take into account the political regime concerned and presents the market as the maximum guarantee of media independence.

When asked about the ideological aspects that can condition the results of measurement, the experts in the panel offer some noteworthy responses. Antoine Héry stated that the instruments "come mainly from NGOs and UNESCO, I would say there are ideological interests" (Questionnaire No. 7). This response sparks off an interesting reflection about the ideological features of the indicators under study, as these can have a direct effect on the results of the indicators. Senior researcher and senior lecturer in Political Science and International Relations at the Department of Politics, Law and International Studies (SPGI) of the University of Padova (Italy) Claudia Padovani states:

Indicators always respond to some kind of ideological interest. In some cases, it is carried out by civic organizations promoting a critical investigation of media realities; in others, it is based on state's effort to comply with international normative standards. (Questionnaire No. 12)

Dan Hallin, coauthor of *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* (2004), is sure about the ideological aspects of the indicators:

Of course. All enterprises are motivated by certain values, by the promotion of press freedom in the case of Freedom House, for example; by neoliberal concerns with governance and trade in the case of transparency indicators, etc. (Questionnaire No. 13)

As to the influence of the ideological interests in modifying the rankings, an example was the so-called Obama effect, which allowed the United States to climb 16 positions in the RWB ranking between 2008 and 2009, simply as a result of the democratic president coming into office.

Another ideological aspect refers to the choice of terminology used by the indicators. There is an assumption that the state interferes with freedom of information, which reflects a clear bias in favor of the market. For example, the IREX Media Sustainability Index describes the media that are not owned by the state as "independent," "commercial," and "private," not taking into account the relevant theoretical difference between being independent and being commercial or private. International communications and media assessment researcher Sean O'Siochru thinks that terminology mirrors the ideological position of the measuring organization:

Indices that are produced by associations of private media organizations are generally biased toward commercial media and against public or community. Some NGOs and public indices also exhibit either biases or limited understanding of the domain (or sometimes political interference). However, let me also add that all indices have an agenda—it is just a question of whether it is explicit or implicit. (Questionnaire No. 35)

The last point, about the ideological bias of indicators, raises the question of what motivates organizations to develop and apply them. Kalathil (2011), the expert from the Communication for Governance and Accountability Programme of the World Bank, pointed out that promoting organizations are especially uninclined to publish the results of their studies when the evaluation does not favor their interests.

As a result, considerable differences can be found between the scores obtained by countries that are considered free. The scores are sometimes lower than those of states that are not even considered to have a democratic system. It is necessary to ask why this is so. The comments of María Soledad Segura, a member of the research team Civil Society and Democratization of Communication and Culture of the University of Córdoba–Argentina, refer to this:

I can answer based on what I know about certain organizations. In my opinion, and that is the ideological line of my work too, ideological positions are always related to material conditions. It is no coincidence that those with a certain ideological stance receive certain funding. I would not look at them separately, but that is just my opinion. (Personal interview, June 6, 2014)

One of the shortcomings affecting some of the indicators might be the fact that they are financed by political authorities devoid of accountability mechanisms—for example, national, regional, or local bodies. In this sense, the indexes can, and often do, become propaganda tools for the political force in power.

Theoretical Features

Becker, Vlad, and Nusser (2007) observe that, despite the indicators proposed by FH, RWB, and IREX measuring different concepts, such as sustainable media or press freedom, they have a compact inner structure. Likewise, they measure freedom of information from the same ideological stance, even though, in methodological terms, the Freedom House index offers the best evaluation of changes in media systems over time, because its first survey was conducted in 1973.

Because RWB has measured freedom of information in the world since 2002, it is possible to compare it with FH index since then. First, RWB does not organize countries by categories, as FH does, but rather ranks them according to their scores after analyzing the results of the questionnaire administered to experts and 150 correspondents, and after the documentary analysis carried out by RWB staff (Reporters Without Borders, 2013). According to LaMay (2011), the aim of this classification is for readers to reach their own conclusions about freedom of information in the analyzed countries in view of their position in the ranking.⁵

The second difference relates to the fact that, whereas FH clearly defines freedom of information, RWB does not. A comparison of FH and IREX shows that these instruments do not analyze the same characteristics of the media environment. IREX's Media Sustainability Index considers freedom of information as an item within a set of indicators rather than the final aim of this set, as is the case with FH. However, despite the fact that, from a conceptual point of view, they are not analyzing the same phenomenon, it has been empirically proven that there is a correlation between media development as evaluated by IREX and media independence as evaluated by FH (Becker & Vlad, 2011). Moreover, IREX is more correlated to FH than to RWB.

Freedom of information traditionally has been considered a bastion of democratic systems (Dahl, 1971). The organizations that produce the indexes display a commitment to democratization and even to modernization. For instance, Freedom House states that freedom of information is "a pillar of democracy," and "threats to media freedom . . . present a stark challenge to democratic values" (2015, p. 21). RWB maintains that media freedom correlates positively with per capita gross domestic product, economic stability, and economic development (Reporters Without Borders, 2015). Such a positive attitude toward rich and democratic countries is not backed by a clear definition of the model of democracy (Held, 2006) the organizations promote. But assessing freedom of information and its services to democracy requires a theory of democracy, because different conceptions of democracy assign a different function to media freedom (Baker, 2004). As Price and colleagues have pointed out, "The architecture of the press, the role of new technology, ownership patterns, and, of course, the demand patterns and behavior of readers also are significant factors that respond to different versions of democracy" (2011, p. 7). Previous studies on the FH and RWB indicators demonstrated their inclination to measure a liberal or neoliberal conception of

⁵ Since 2013, the Reporters Without Borders index includes a press freedom map, which offers a visual overview of all the countries. Five color categories are assigned as follows: (1) white: good situation; (2) yellow: satisfactory situation; (3) orange: noticeable problems; (4) red: difficult situation; and (5) black: very serious situation.

freedom of information and democracy (Amoretti & Giannone, 2015), with scarce consideration for the audience's point of view as well as for the social and public functions of information.

In fact, Stremlau (2011) states that, until now, whenever freedom of information has been measured, all subjects in the investigation have been treated uniformly, regardless of which social actors play an important role by making use of the spaces for information and regulating them.

Another element that should be taken into account when analyzing the theoretical features of the indicators is the role played by new information technologies in enhancing or threatening media freedom. In this regard, IREX specifies the types of media that have been analyzed, whereas in the FH and RWB instruments, all media are considered together to form an aggregate index. For example, the questionnaire that RWB administered to experts in 2008 included the following yes/no question: "Do the media report about the negative consequences of government policies?" However, the most recent questionnaire includes more detail about which type of media the question refers to. Question D1 asks: "Are there independent media, whose editorial departments are absolutely free to choose their stance in the public arena without pressure from the owners or from political power?" The expert could reply yes or no.

The appearance of new media, platforms, and control systems derived from the development of ICTs in wealthy countries has challenged the monopoly on information that traditional media have held, and media indicators should reflect this. However, any analysis of media contribution to democratic development must be contextualized through the rapid changes that information platforms have experienced (Puddephatt, 2011; UNESCO, 2008). Freedom-of-information indicators are including more questions about this topic all the time. The fifth section of the RWB questionnaire refers to Internet and technical resources.

Another issue related to ICTs refers to how citizens use ICTs to carry out transnational activism initiatives online (Yang, 2011). Many states score very low in the FH, IREX, and RWB ratings, even though they have an active diaspora and a strong Internet presence that generate a large flow of information (Borge-Holthoefer et al., 2011).

Finally, one of the greatest challenges for the evaluation of freedom of information in the Internet age is the difficulty of evaluating flows, dynamics, and contents in the practices taking place in the Web. The announcement of new Internet regulations can create immediate contradictory effects in the spaces for public communication or, on the contrary, can generate new spaces for freedom of information (MacKinnon, 2012).

Financing

The critical analysis of the indicators would be incomplete without an evaluation of how the organizations promoting them are financed, because this likely influences the ideological, theoretical, and methodological aspects of the indexes.

Freedom House is a nongovernmental organization financed by individuals, private foundations, the U.S. government, other states, and the European Commission (Holtz-Bacha, 2011). Likewise, Reporters Without Borders is an NGO financed by the French Prime Minister's Office, the French Foreign Affairs Minister, and the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie. RWB also receives funds from "private partners," the French companies Sanofi Aventis and CFAO and Center for a Free Cuba. Myles Smith, assistant managing editor of the IREX Media Sustainability Index, states that:

Our media indicators are less useful, because we only receive money from the U.S. government to apply it in some less developed countries, not to apply it globally, as would be ideal, which has a direct influence on the organization's position. Assumptions about economic systems lead to some skewing of the results, i.e., Americans are unlikely to support subsidies, but Europeans and former Soviets are. (Questionnaire No. 31).

The strong influence of other interests, mainly market interests (Sierra, 2013), makes economic determinants a crucial factor to be taken into account according to the experts involved in our study. Thus, 62.16% of the respondents are of the opinion that it is easy to identify economic interests in the way media indicators are developed.

Furthermore, 72.97% of the specialists believe that the quality and usefulness of the indicators is directly related to the nature of the organizations (public, private, or nonprofit) behind them and that 81.08% of respondents mentioned political interests as relevant in financing such organizations. Among the most striking responses, Myles G. Smith refers to the specific pressure in countries that were part of the Arab Spring:

The government of Morocco confiscated the reports that had been compiled because the (media) map showed Western Sahara as separate from Morocco. USAID held its position until the publication of the review report, but did not change the content. (Questionnaire No. 31)

Among those specialists who trust in indicators produced by public and nonprofit agencies, it is worth highlighting the response of Héry, head of the World Press Freedom Index with Reporters Without Borders:

I feel that public researchers will always be more credible. I think it is difficult for an organization with commercial interests to produce objective data. (Questionnaire No. 7)

To guarantee the reliability of its rankings, RWB accepts data only from official or governmental sources and not from commercial organizations. However, such a decision risks to conflate "public" (as public visible, public engaged, and derived from noncommercial sources) and "governmental" data, the latter being also provided by nondemocratic governments.

Defenders of private bodies underline these issues. Binod Bhattarai, who led the evaluation of the media environment in Nepal by means of media development indicators in 2011, stated:

I think that private implementation could help make such practices more professional, because public institutions could manipulate the results. For the private sector, I think the incentive would be to carry on being professional if they have to remain in business. (Questionnaire No. 9)

Elsa Cecilia Piña, in charge of the implementation of Medianálisis in Venezuela, maintained that:

I can give no examples, but I have the impression that if the Ministry of Communication and Information was the promoter of media development indicators, it would obviously focus on what it does well while minimizing those aspects that have hardly developed, thus compromising the quality and usefulness of the results. (Questionnaire No. 16)

The reasons behind these responses are obviously radically different, given that the degree of trust that specialists have in government data depends, among other things, on the level of democracy enjoyed by the country. Bhattarai has applied different media indicators in the country, mainly for international organizations such as UNESCO, the United Nations Development Programme, and the International Media Support Organisation; on the other hand, Piña has worked for years in an NGO that has been subjected to pressure from opponents and members of the Chavez government.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to uncover some relevant but neglected issues in measuring freedom of information. Based on an expert survey, some ideological, theoretical, and financial aspects of the three most important instruments for measuring freedom of information were scrutinized. The results demonstrate that most of the experts are aware of the issues.

The ideological biases of the instruments can be summarized in a pro-market and pro-liberal democracy inclination, coupled with a predatory vision of the state, which is irrespective of the political regime concerned. Hence, the terminology used to define indicators often reveals some ideological bias, in that commercial media is characterized as more independent than public media. Paradoxically, such a vision of the state and the market is at odds with the reliability that most experts assign to governmental data and sources, rather than to commercial and private organizations, for the construction of the indexes.

As to the theoretical aspects, the three instruments cover different semantic fields of freedom of information, with Reporters Without Borders even lacking a clear definition of it. This notwithstanding, Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders, and IREX are often used interchangeably both in political and media debate and in academic research.

As to financial aspects of the three instruments, the experts consider both public and private funding as possibly undermining organizations' independence and the reliability of the measurements. What is astonishing is that the most of these experts have been involved in the elaboration and diffusion of such instruments. In fact, the most of the experts defined and applied the indicators, thus being well aware of the instruments' strengths and weaknesses. Despite this awareness, a social desirability bias in the experts' answers about the influence of economic interests in the construction of the indexes and their criticism of private or governmental sources cannot be excluded. This is an issue that the present study tried to partly address by using a multimethod approach.

The three organizations examined here believe that the measurement of freedom of information is one of the most important tasks to be accomplished for the improvement of democratic societies as well as for the evaluation of countries in transition. Therefore, the role of measuring instruments is crucial. However, "what we measure affects what we do; and if our measurements are flawed, decisions may be distorted" (Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2009, p. 7). The diffusion of biased indexes could affect political decision making, have a negative impact on scientific research, and influence international relations and financial aid to eligible countries. The present study is a preliminary analysis that aims to map the state of the art of measuring instruments by considering the point of view of the experts involved in the instruments' elaboration and diffusion. The relevant issues raised by the experts are the starting point for future research about how to improve the existing measuring instruments or the creation of new ones. Because it is almost impossible (and perhaps not even useful) to eliminate the most relevant biases in the elaboration of measuring instruments, the first step for future work on this issue should focus on the implementation of more transparency of the methodological, financial, political, and ideological aspects of both the instruments and the organizations so that each end user can be aware of the various implications of using one instrument rather than another.

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Appendix A

MEDIA-CULTURAL INDICATORS RESEARCH SURVEY

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this survey is to collect data about the essential aspects of media-cultural indicators with the idea to generate relevant indicators for public policies of communication. The survey should be completed in about **15 minutes**.

SECTION A: ABOUT MEDIA-CULTURAL INDICATORS

A.1. In order for us to know your profile regarding media-cultural indicators, please complete the following field (or fields) appropriate to your personal experience:

Please write the name of the indicators or index you have worked on, the promoter organization and mark with an X the characteristics of those indicators or index:

Name of indicator with which you have worked		Promoter organization		
Experience within	Definition of indicators	Application	Critical analysis of the indicators	
			Formal: in a research project/paper	Informal: having a critical opinion about the indicators
A.1.1. international project	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
A.1.2. national project	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
A.1.3. public project	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
A.1.4. private project	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
A.1.5. nonprofit project (NGO, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
A.1.6. academic project	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

If you participated in other initiatives, please complete the following fields:

Name of indicator with which you have worked		Promoter organization		
Experience within	Definition of indicators	Application of indicators	Critical analysis of the indicators	
			Formal: in a research project/paper	Informal: having a critical opinion about the indicators
A.1.1. international initiative				
A.1.2. national initiative				
A.1.3. public initiative				
A.1.4. private initiative				
A.1.5. nonprofit initiative (NGO, etc.)				
A.1.6. academic initiative				

If you have participated in more than three initiatives related to media-cultural indicators, please briefly describe the experience:

A.2. What aspects of media-cultural indicators have you studied in your work, and what has your level of specialization been?

Please complete the field (fields) appropriate for your level of media-indicators participation from 1 to 5, with 1 being little or no specialization on this topic increasing to 5 as a maximum:

	1	2	3	4	5
A.2.1. Media development indicators					
A.2.2. Free expression index or indicators					
A.2.3. Media literacy indicators					
A.2.4. Gender-sensitive indicators for media					
A.2.5. Transparency indicators					
A.2.6. Indicators of audience interaction in the media					

If you have worked on other aspects of media-cultural indicators, please explain them briefly:

--

A.3. What is the structure of the group of researchers that worked on the design of media-cultural indicators?

	Number of people occupying that position	Name of the person
A.3.1. Principal investigator	[]	[]
A.3.2. Senior researcher	[]	[]
A.3.3. Research assistants	[]	[]
A.3.4. External specialists	[]	[]
A.3.5. Collaborators	[]	[]
A.3.6. Others []	[]	[]

A.4. Please indicate the method used to implement media-cultural indicators in which you have participated.

Please mark with an X:

A.4.1. Focus group discussions	[]
A.4.2. Key informant interviews	[]
A.4.3. Quantitative survey	[]
A.4.4. Data statistics	[]
A.4.5. Others []	[]

A.5 Assess the effectiveness, from your point of view, of the following media-cultural indicators.

Please omit those you haven't heard of:

	Very ineffective	Ineffective	Neutral	Effective	Very effective	Don't know/no opinion
A.5.1. UNESCO [Media Development Indicators]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
A.5.2. Freedom House [Freedom of the Press Index]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
A.5.3. Reporters Without Borders [Press Freedom Index]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
A.5.4. European Commission [media literacy indicators]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
A.5.5. UNESCO [Gender-sensitive indicators for media]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
A.5.6. Social Watch [Gender Equity Index]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
A.5.7. International Women's Media Foundation [gender indicators in media]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
A.5.8. Transparency International [transparency indicators]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
A.5.9. Indicators of audience interaction in the media promoters	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

If you have worked on media-cultural indicators related to audience interaction in media, please name them below:

SECTION B: MEDIA-CULTURAL INDICATORS CHARACTERIZATION

B.1. Indicate the degree of importance that, from your point of view, the following elements should have in the media-cultural indicators:

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being very important and 1 being of little or no importance.

B.1.1. To be a transversal tool for analyzing media systems in all aspects (for example, transparency, genre, freedom of expression, media literacy, audience interaction)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

B.1.2. To measure the democratic development of communication

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

B.1.3. To allow the analytical differentiation of eco-cultural systems

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

B.1.4. To allow the comparative analysis of different media-cultural systems

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

B.1.5. To observe professional difficulties for careers in journalism

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

B.1.6. To analyze real access to information in populations around the world

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

B.1.7. To evaluate the freedom of expression in different media systems

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

B.1.8. To examine the transparency of different media systems

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

B.1.9. To promote comparative studies at a local, national, and international level or context

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

B.1.10. To observe aspects of professional activity (training, employment, etc.)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

B.1.11. To measure systems and self-regulation of the media

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

B.1.12. To measure the differences clearly between public and private media

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

If media-cultural indicators should fulfill another function (or other functions), please specify which one(s) below:

[]
--

B.2. From your point of view, media-cultural indicators should . . .

Please mark/tick the appropriate box.

	Maximum priority	High priority	Half priority	Low priority	No priority
B.2.1. Be the result of an international convention so that the test results are valid	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
B.2.2. Follow basic standards of approval that allows comparative studies	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
B.2.3. Avoid standardization to escape of the homologation of results	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
B.2.4. Show a particular media system in a historical context without comparative studies	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

If you think media-cultural indicators should have (an) other characteristic (s), explain which ones:

[]

B.3. From your point of view, media-cultural indicators should be . . .

Please check the box (or boxes) proper for definition.

- B.3.1. predominantly qualitative []
- B.3.2. predominantly quantitative []
- B.3.3. quantitative and qualitative []

Why?

[]

B.4. What do you think about the following?

	Yes	No	Why?
B.4.1. The media-cultural indicators would serve to make historical series.	[]	[]	[]
B.4.2. The media-cultural indicators would serve to make comparative studies.	[]	[]	[]
B.4.3. Other	[]	[]	[]

B.5. How do you value media-cultural indicators as a whole?

Ineffective

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Effective

Specific

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

General

B.6. Do you think the existence of an applicable indicator system that integrates various aspects of media-cultural reality to be necessary, or do you believe that every indicator's body should analyze the different aspects of a media environment independently? [Such as transparency, gender, media literacy, audience interaction, and freedom of expression]

- B.6.1. A body of media-cultural indicators that unites various aspects of media-cultural reality []
- B.6.2. Different media systems and cultural indicators specialized into topics []

Why have you chosen that answer?

- a) It would make more analyzable the media system. []
- b) It would give a framework and context to the indicators. []
- c) It would allow segmented/partial visions. []
- d) It would modulate the scope and usefulness of the indicators according to the needs of comparative analysis. []
- e) It would allow for the homogenization of supranational policies. []
- f) It would allow for the implementation of national policies of improvement. []

If you think there is another reason (or are other reasons), please describe it (or them):

B.7. Are there differences in the quality and utility of media-cultural indicators according to the public or private nature of the institutions that promote them?

Yes No Please give an example:

B.8. From your point of view, what is the degree of influence of the media and cultural indicators on public policy communication?

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being very important and 1 being not important at all:

B.8.1. Media development indicators

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

B.8.2. Freedom of Expression Index or indicators

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

B.8.3. Media literacy indicators

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

B.8.4. Gender-sensitive indicators for media

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

B.8.5. Transparency indicators

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

B.8.6. Indicators of audience interaction in the media

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

SECTION C: FINANCING

C.1. How was the media-cultural indicators project that you have participated in funded?

You can mark multiple answers:

C.1. Public funding:

Yes No Which organization? []

C.2. Private funding:

Yes No Which organization? []

C.3. Other:

Yes No Which organization? []

C.2. What was the total funding for the media-cultural indicators project in which you have participated?

<input type="text"/>

SECTION D: INTERESTS AND PRESSURES

D.1. From your point of view, do you believe that there are media-cultural indicators that have been created by organizations or institutions with clear political, economic, social, or religious interests?

Yes No

D.2. What kinds of interests do you believe to predominate in all media-cultural indicators?

You can enter multiple answers. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being very important and 1 being of no importance

- | | |
|------------------|-----|
| D.2.1. Economic | [] |
| D.2.2. Politic | [] |
| D.2.3. Social | [] |
| D.2.4. Religious | [] |
| D.2.5. Others [| [] |

D.3. Do you think that these influences could affect the results derived from the application of media-cultural indicators?

Yes [] No [] Why?

D.4. If so, at what point might they influence the media-cultural indicators?

- | | |
|--|-----|
| D.4.1. During the definition of the media-cultural indicators | [] |
| D.4.2. During the application of the media-cultural indicators | [] |
| D.4.3. In the publication of the results | [] |

D.5. Have you received any pressure during the application of media-cultural indicators?

Yes No If yes, what type?

- | | |
|--|-----|
| D.5.1. Public (state administrations) | [] |
| D.5.2. Private sector (pressure groups, private companies) | [] |
| D.5.3. Civil sector (organized through NGOs, trade unions, etc.) | [] |

D.6. If there is pressure on international institutions by the governments of member states, to what extent is it affected by the political position?

Please answer briefly:

D.7. Do you think that the process of globalization promotes and, at the same time, increases the need for media-cultural indicators of a wide range?

Yes No Please explain briefly:

--

D.8. Finally, if you had to justify the usefulness of media-cultural indicators, what arguments would you use in its defense?

Please answer briefly:

--

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Appendix B
Experts Involved in the Survey

No Questionnaire	Experts	Country	Organization
1	Aimeé Vega	Mexico	Universidad Nacional de México
2	Alexander Fedorov	Russia	Russian Association for Film & Media Education
3	Alexandra Ayala	Ecuador	CIESPAL
4	Alfred Fernández	Switzerland	Collège Universitaire Henry Dunant
5	Anatole Mulindwa	Rwanda	Research and Statistics, MHC
6	Anita Simis	Brazil	Universidade Estadual Paulista
7	Antoine Héry	France	RWB
8	Bia Barbosa	Brazil	Intervezes - Coletivo Brasil de Comunicação Social
9	Binod Bhattarai	Nepal	No institutional affiliation
10	Brian Semujju	Uganda	Makerere University
11	Chiranjibi Knanal	Nepal	Director of the Nepal Press Institute
12	Claudia Padovani	Italy	Univesità di Padova
13	Dan Hallin	USA	University of California
14	Diego Giannone	Italy	Seconda Università di Napoli
15	Douglas Griffin	France	Albsny Associates Director
16	Elsa Cecilia Piña	Venezuela	Medianálisis
17	Erick Torrico	Bolivia	Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar
18	Evadro Viera Ouriques	Brazil	Universidad Federal de Río de Janeiro
19	Fernando Paulino Oliveira	Brazil	Universidade de Brasilia
20	Francisco Campos	Spain	Universidad de Santiago de Compostela

21	Gabriel Kaplún	Uruguay	Universidad de la República
22	Gopal Gurung	Nepal	Radio Nepal
23	Helge Ronning	Mozambique	Institutt for medier og kommunikasjon
24	Jean Pierre Myjyambere	Rwanda	Media High Council
25	João Brant	Brazil	Intervozes - Coletivo Brasil de Comunicação Social
26	Lavinia Mohr	Canada	WACC
27	Lydia Medland	Spain	Access Info Europe
28	Manuel Villoria	Spain	Universidad Rey Juan Carlos
29	Marta Molina	Spain	RWB
30	Martín Becerra	Argentina	Universidad Nacional de Quilmes
31	Myles G. Smith	U.S.	IREX
32	Nibal Thawabteh	Palestine	Media Development Center
33	Saorla McCabe	France	UNESCO
34	Sawsen Chaabi	Tunisia	No institutional affiliation
35	Sean O'Siochru	Ireland	No institutional affiliation
36	Toby Mendel	Australia	Centre for Law and Democracy

Experts Interviewed

Face-to-face interviews

Paolo Mancini: September 10, 2013, Turin (Italy); September 13, 2013, Florence (Italy)

Diego Giannone: September 13, 2013, Florence

Francisco Campos Freire: January 23, 2013, Bilbao (Spain)

Alejandra Arena: August 20, 2014, Montevideo (Uruguay)

Álvaro Pérez: August 27, 2014, Montevideo

Victoria Gómez: August 27, 2014, Montevideo

Patricia Schroeder: August 27, 2014, Montevideo

Rosario Radakovich: August 28, 2014, Montevideo

Guilherme Canela: August 28, 2014, Montevideo

Mónica Arzuaga: September 2, 2014, Montevideo

Gabriel Kaplún: September 2, 2014, Montevideo

Matías Ponce: September 3, 2014, Montevideo

Gonzalo Vázquez: September 10, 2014, Montevideo

María José Fernández: September 10, 2014, Montevideo

Video conference interviews

Claudia Padovani: September 26, 2013

María Rosario Lacalle Zalduendo: September 13, 2013

César Ricardo Siqueira Bolaño: June 10, 2014

María Soledad Segura: June 13, 2014