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## MEASURING THE REPUTATION OF MEDIA

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**Abstract.** *The goal of this article is to apply a general reputation model to the media. Putting reputation into the centre of media analysis allows one to concentrate on publishers' and broadcasters' corporate identities and their situation in the aggressive market. Reputation analysis contributes to the understanding of the specifics of the media business. The Media Reputation Quotient, developed by the author for the measurement of media reputation, consists of four dimensions: (1) a public or 'external' dimension, showing how society and the state understand fundamental values of freedom, equality and solidarity; (2) an 'invisible' market dimension that evaluates media concentration, prices, and circulation; (3) an organizational dimension that consists of slightly modified dimensions from the classical Reputation Quotient; and (4) a journalistic dimension based on the media products' quality and creativity. The Media Reputation Quotient is an attempt to use the classical Reputation Quotient (designed primarily for commercial purposes) for the analysis of a mixed (commercial and public) business. Modifications of the Reputation Quotient demonstrate that a comparison of reputation between different sectors is very limited.*

**Keywords:** *reputation, media, reputation quotient, public interest, trust in the media.*

## Introduction

The accelerating and globalizing world of communication gives new value and an alternative meaning to image and reputation. The exchange of information is dramatically speeding up and this acceleration increases the burden of communication that falls on every member of the modern society. Indifference becomes an individual's natural defence mechanism; crowds of advertisers and propagandists, spin-doctors and PR specialists use different technologies and tricks to fight for the attention of the public as a whole and for that of every individual. In such an over-crowded market reputation becomes nearly a sole authentic sign that helps to attract exhausted attention and provides landmarks for travel across the global market.

The media is one of the most important and influential means of reputation building, the principal driver of visibility. By measuring media presence one can make significant conclusions about reputation. Meanwhile, the reputation of the media itself is usually discussed only in the context of public trust in the media or journalism ethics, forgetting that the media could be regarded as some sort of a 'reputation sale' business. A message disseminated by a reputable channel will certainly attract a wider audience. Such a message will reappear in a variety of secondary channels and, most likely, the audience will accept the news or their interpretation without greater reservations. An individual's decision to watch a program or read an article is highly influenced by the reputation of the television channel or the newspaper. The quantity and quality of the audience lay the foundations for the media's financial success. The competitive atmosphere in the market forces media channels to exploit their reputation, yet the lifespan of a favourable image is not infinite. Of course, one can advocate a different and highly critical attitude towards the understanding of the media as a marketplace or a free trade of ideas and insist that 'the very structure of the media is designed to induce conformity to established doctrine'<sup>1</sup>.

The goal of this article is to apply a general reputation model to the media. This is not only an exercise of reputation measurement; putting reputation into the centre of media analysis allows us to concentrate on publishers' and broadcasters' corporate identity and their situation in the aggressive market. Reputation analysis contributes to the understanding of the specifics of the media business.

### 1. Criteria of the Reputation Institute

It is difficult to overlook the contribution of the Reputation Institute and its founders, Drs. Charles J. Fombrun and Cees B. M. van Riel, to the development of the concept of reputation and their attempts to use different quantitative and qualitative criteria for reputation measurement. In 1999 the Reputation Institute, in collaboration with Harris Interactive, created and systematically tested the Reputation Quotient (RQ), which

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1 Chomsky, N. *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies*. Toronto: Anansi, 2003, p. 10.

became a valuable instrument for the measurement and comparison of reputation. In 2006, after a multinational study, a new RepTrak™ Model was introduced and quickly won recognition within the professional community.

Neither the RQ, nor its successor RepTrak™ claim to be the final and universal formula for reputation measurement; they are flexible indicators and one of the ways of improving the reputation theory lies in the adaptation of the methodology for specific geographic, social or activity areas. At first glance such a way of development appears like disillusionment in the universal range of tools of reputation measurement. However, as the development of such theories progresses, it is valuable to take the tools to a new dimension, for such an investigation uncovers the advantages as well as limitations of the model. In the end, the results of explorations in different areas of reputation measurement only strengthen the initial theory.

The classical RQ tracks 20 attributes (RepTrak™ uses 23 indicators) that are grouped around 6 (in RepTrak™ - 7) dimensions: (1) Emotional Appeal, (2) Products and Services, (3) Financial Performance, (4) Vision and Leadership, (5) Workplace Environment, and (6) Social Responsibility<sup>2</sup>. An adaptation of the RQ to the evaluation of the reputation of the media shows that all of these attributes and dimensions can receive very different values and, in some cases, even different meanings.

The user of the product discussed in this article is the media customer—a reader, listener, viewer, or blogger. The audience usually sees only the external side of the media environment; the ‘kitchen’ of journalism comes to the foreground only in very rare occasions, less often than the kitchen in a local restaurant. Therefore the **Workplace Environment Dimension** (in RQ it means (a) a good place to work, (b) good employees, (c) fair rewards to employees) is of low importance to the reader or the listener. The public tends to idealize the most complicated and unfavourable journalistic work conditions (e.g. reporting from war battlegrounds or an earthquake zone). Various difficulties that could interfere with reporting, either physical (e.g. technical interferences) or ideological (e.g. censorship) usually only increase the trust in a certain media channel and contribute to the reputation building. From the RQ dimension of Workplace Environment it is important to stress the attribute of good employees. Extraordinary personalities on the television screen or their articles in the press can become real magnets in the public eye; they possess the power to personalize the media channel and contribute to the fundamentals for its reputation. Such a situation flourishes not only in the media world. As Manuel Castells notices, ‘high bonuses for employees sometimes have more to do with image making than with substance’<sup>3</sup>. However, sad stories of media personalities such as Jayson Blair or Rick Bragg from *The New York Times* dating back to 2003 remind us how quickly media stars can fall from the information heights and what danger that could create for the media organization. Reputation that took decades to build can be destroyed in just a few moments.

2 Fombrun, Ch. J.; Van Riel, C. B. M. *Fame and Fortune: How Successful Companies Build Winning Reputations*. New York: Financial Times Prentice Hall, 2004, p. 52.

3 Castells, M. *End of Millennium*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000, p. 138.

The cult of media stars easily endangers the principle of employee rewards; many real talents are denied opportunities for self-expression. In certain Central and Eastern European countries where the local media still undergoes a transitional period, the migration of stars from one media channel to another can become a serious risk factor. Usually the public links its emotions to a person, so an abstract name of a show or a channel can lose its reputation when the star leaves the production cast. As William Hachten notes, ‘the public must understand that there is a real difference between a journalist carefully reporting and explaining an important and complex story, and a well-paid television celebrity interviewing a rock star or entertainment personality on a television news magazine show. One is a public servant and the other is a quasi-entertainer’<sup>4</sup>.

From the point of view of the media audience, the RQ’s **Financial Performance Dimension** (which includes these indicators: (a) record of profitability, (b) low risk investment, (c) growth prospects, (d) outperforming competitors) is also controversial. There is an inverse relationship between good reputation and profitability of the media organization. *The New York Times* publishers or *CNN* broadcasters are better known for their prestige, not for their profits. Wishes of media corporation owners to receive solid revenues from the media business are usually jealously perceived by the public, as profitability is compatible neither with independence nor with high prestige. An excellent example is *The Wall Street Journal*. When Rupert Murdoch decided to purchase the newspaper in 2007, his *News Corporation* was asked to guarantee that the news and opinion sections would preserve their editorial independence. It is unlikely that Murdoch’s offer to pay nearly the double price for a share of *The Wall Street Journal* is proof of a sharp increase in the reputation value of this newspaper.

The public’s perception of the media as a civic value and as a special community service justifies the sceptical attitude towards attempts to make highly profitable business out of misinforming people or from wishes to get vitally important information. Society often views political and public influence as a sufficient reward for media figures, and the need to receive financial compensation is viewed as superfluous. Many countries have special laws that require the media to publish and broadcast governmental reports in extreme situations. Such a position is a permanent reminder that the community must look for the harmony between public interest and the freedom of expression.

The Financial Performance Dimension of the RQ is useful when looking for differences between the ‘quality’ and ‘yellow’ media. Essentially these are very different businesses. When profit becomes the media channel’s principal driver, news organizations change into junior players in the communication game where the rules are dictated by financial power. The newspaper could be still read, the broadcast could be still watched or listened to, but the trust of the media channel diminishes and its reputation is ruined. On the other hand, a prestigious media channel’s withdrawal into a narrow world of intellectual, political or business also poses some dangers. Yet the escape from elite or prestigious media temptations is a far less complicated process than the breaking free

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4 Hachten, W. A. *The Troubles of Journalism: A Critical Look at What’s Right and Wrong with the Press*. Mahwah-London: LEA Publishers, 2005, p. 173–174.

from a broadcaster's 'yellow journalism' image. This is due to the fact that the reputation of elite media is based not on the broadness of the audience, but on its influence on other media channels, the quantity of quotations, and other factors.

At first glance the importance of the **Vision and Leadership Dimension** of the RQ (which includes (a) market opportunities, (b) excellent leadership, and (c) a clear vision for the future) for media looks no more important than the Workplace Environment and Financial Performance dimensions. This is true when speaking about market opportunities and excellent leadership indicators, but the third indicator (a clear vision for the future) crosses the boundaries of ordinary business and requires special attention.

The media market and the potential of different channels in this market should be evaluated on two different levels. There is a market of media content, which consists of news and advertisement segments, and a market of publishers and broadcasters. The media content market is governed by the importance of the news or by the profitability of advertisement criteria, which in many cases differs from the criteria common in the market of publishers and broadcasters. Despite the differences in criteria, the inter-influence between these markets is extremely strong and, to some extent, could be paradoxical. The size of the media channel market is often inversely proportional to its reputation. This could be called a communicational paradox of trust, which is very clearly observed in Great Britain where the contrast between the readership and trust in newspapers is the highest.

Globalization processes have not fatally hurt small local newspapers, regional TV and radio stations or websites. Their reputation combined with popularity is based on authenticity and a close relationship between content producers and users. In closed regions reputation and trust in the local media enables it to compete with global media giants and often the small players end up celebrating victory. Transitions from the local to the global market (and vice versa) often appear to be a very complicated business, especially if they encounter local language, cultural or other barriers.

Going back to the excellent leadership indicator, unique and sometimes unconventional organizational behaviour of creative individuals (i.e. journalists or editors) should be taken into account. This journalistic unconventionality can become the basis for the success of an individual or the entire media channel. In the media sector this 'excellence' in leadership should not be confused with the concept and nature of leadership in the corporate business world.

As previously mentioned, the third (clear vision for the future) indicator of the RQ's Vision and Leadership dimension should be discussed beyond the boundaries of ordinary business. The vision of the future presented by the media channel cannot be based only on narrow pragmatic interests of the journalists, editors or owners. A vision of the future acquires real value only through integration into a society's needs and reflection of the attitudes and visions of different social and political groups. Of course, every media channel is tempted to stand in the society spotlight. A strong aversion to political party press traditions is a well-established trait in many post-communist countries, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. It is no surprise that such visions of the media in these countries are met with a certain dose of scepticism; any attempts to remind the

media of its educational mission are regarded as invasions into the sacred territory of media freedom.

In the media context, attributes of the **Products and Services Dimension** ((a) high quality, (b) innovative, (c) value for money, and (d) stands behind) should be evaluated on two levels: the material or formal level, and the ideal or content level. Reports of high journalistic quality can be published in journals or newspapers of poor typographic quality, or valuable broadcasts aired at an inconvenient time. These practical examples of paradoxical contradictions between content and dispersion of messages show how the understanding of media quality is interrelated with technical accessibility. Additionally, technical accessibility is often dependent on the level of the development of the community. It can be complicated to trace a boundary between the 'quality' and 'yellow' media without having thorough understanding of local factors and local language. A decision based predominantly on typographic quality or signal accessibility cannot be seriously considered. Meaningful and valuable political comments can cast 'yellow' shadow or be dressed in attire suitable for entertainment, so it becomes complicated to speak about the 'value for money' principle. When interests (or instincts) of the audience are put above all, the media channel, its products and services become ordinary commodities and the community risks to lose the real value of information. When the information content of the broadcast or publication is sought only for its entertainment potential, not paying attention to its actuality, the media quality criteria are distorted and the 'value for money' principle becomes fabricated.

Today there are no languages or geographical boundaries for technical innovations; new ideas spread rapidly all over the world. In the media sector, companies with greater investment potential bring innovations into existence. As a rule, these companies are profitable media giants whose primary interests originate from outer sources that do not have serious or public service interests. Technical innovations often serve as a cover for civic disability.

The 'value for money' attribute is extremely problematic in the evaluation of good-quality media. Poor circulation influences the quantity and profitability of advertising; quality press becomes more expensive as work in this media is rewarded less generously. The purchasing power of the users of quality media in some countries (e.g. Central and Eastern Europe) is much lower than those of the popular media.

The **Emotional Appeal Dimension** and its attributes ((a) feel good about, (b) admire and respect, and (c) trust) is the best characterization of those real commodities that are produced and traded by the media. In today's globalized world nearly all competing media channels report the same news or provide the same entertainment. Under these circumstances subjective factors such as the emotional appeal of the magazine or the broadcast become very important package material, seen from a distance and creating a subjective illusion of trust. There is a certain connection between a media channel's appeal and the loyalty of the audience. A small provincial media channel will be able to find its audience in a natural way; certain geographic, social or professional environments will determine this audience. Yet even such a channel with a natural niche could be obliged to compete with local or global challenges. To some extent, the appeal of the media channel is related to the style of its presentation.

Trust in the media is the backbone of its success. The decision to buy a newspaper or devote time to a broadcast is based on the trust that the editors were able to provide the news which is essential for this specific audience. As long as there are so many media channels and information provided by them tries to overshadow each other, and as long as the speed of information from the point of view of the ordinary user is nearly equal, the importance of trust in the editorial policy and editors will continue to increase.

The **Social Responsibility Dimension** should preserve its essence in the media context but its attributes ((a) supports good causes, (b) environmental responsibility, and (c) community responsibility) could be explained in a slightly different way. As media itself is one of the most important social instruments and its existence is based on social and civic responsibility, there is little use to examine media commitments to environment and community. The idea of media support for good causes should also be judged with reservation. The organizational function is not an element of the media functioning under democratic conditions. The media office and its staff could support one or another action; in many cases the media becomes an important sponsor of charity events. However, along with such activities comes the practice of self-advertising, reducing the media's abilities to report on other charity events that may be sponsored by competing media channels. The temptation to present 'your own' charity action as the most important one discredits media objectivity; the privilege of unbiased opinion becomes in danger of extinction.

When evaluating the media's social responsibility, special attention should be paid to the media's commitment to the audience. These commitments can conflict with obligations to advertisers, media channel owners, or other interest groups. In this case the media's social responsibility is directly interconnected with media freedom.

This analysis of the RQ dimensions and its attributes shows that the use of the Workplace Environment and Financial Performance dimensions for the measurement of media reputation are highly debatable; the Vision and Leadership as well as Products and Services dimensions are only partially applicable. The dimensions of Emotional Appeal and Social Responsibility could be most useful. Such differentiation of dimensions and attributes does not contradict the scheme proposed by the RQ or RepTrak™ Model. Although one could simply append a 'coefficient of efficiency' and use this scheme for measuring the reputation of the media as if it were an ordinary business, such a method would overlook the specifics of the media. As the media is often used as a tool for reputation measurement (especially for visibility), the emphasis on media specifics would be very valuable. The evaluation of the reputation of different media channels, publications and broadcasts should bring qualitative and not only quantitative dimensions into the measurements of visibility.

## 2. Dimensions and Attributes of Media Reputation

The nature of the media often resembles that of a non-profit organization, for the duty to provide news to society should be understood as a public service. The process of the evaluation of profit and non-profit organizations requires one to use different

criteria; therefore, the specifications used for the assessment of a corporate business' reputation cannot be applied to the evaluation of media reputation. The principal internal contradiction of the media lies between the society's demand to get information and the wishes of the news provider to receive the highest possible return for the service. The price of the service should at least cover the expenses of gathering, processing and delivering information. As Denis McQuail notes, 'the "public interest" does not necessarily coincide with the organization's own interest as a business firm'<sup>5</sup>. When making an attempt to measure the media's reputation, one of the greatest challenges is to find a balance between public interest and business aspirations. Any effort to measure the media's reputation must be interconnected with a specific context, determined by an exact time period, location, national and social context. After careful consideration of the terminology of the Reputation Institute and using the methodology of the RQ and the RepTrak™ Model, four dimensions were developed for the measurement of media reputation: (1) a public or 'external' dimension, showing how society and the state understand fundamental values of freedom, equality and solidarity; (2) an 'invisible' market dimension that evaluates media concentration, prices, and circulation; (3) an organizational or 'channel' dimension that consists of slightly modified dimensions from the classical RQ and RepTrak™ Model; (4) a journalistic or 'creative' dimension based on the media product's quality and creativity.

The **Public Dimension** of the mediaRQ is based on the public trust in the media. Often media researchers give into temptation not to differentiate between trust in the media and its reputation or see trust in the media as the essential indicator of media reputation. This can be true in the context of one country or a certain community, but after evaluating the data compiled by the BBC/Reuters/Media Center Poll in their paper *Trust in the Media*<sup>6</sup> one comes to the conclusion that this issue is much more complicated. The public opinion poll shows that on average 61% of the society trusts the media, while 52% trusts the government. One should take into account that trust in the media is the highest in countries that are considered less democratic, less developed and most needy. Nigeria had the highest trust in the media (88%), as well as the largest difference between trust in the media and trust in the government (34%). In Indonesia 88% trust the media and 71% the government; the same trends can be seen in India (82% versus 66%) and Russia (58% versus 54%). In wealthy, mature democracies the situation is reverse: trust in the government is higher than trust in the media (in the U.S. trust in the media is 59% and in the government 67%; in the UK 47% and 51%, respectively; in Germany 43% and 48%).

It would be rather irresponsible to make definite conclusions from such comparisons. However, it is possible that in wealthy and mature democracies the respect and trust of citizens given to any institution (in this case to the government) by the means of elections is more stable and consistent than the popularity of the media which is based on the laws of free market and influenced by a certain dose of populism. This allows

5 McQuail, D. *Media Performance*. London: Sage, 1995, p. 90.

6 BBC/Reuters/Media Center Poll, *Trust in the Media* [interactive]. [accessed 03-03-2009]. <[http://www.globescan.com/news\\_archives/Trust\\_in\\_Media.pdf](http://www.globescan.com/news_archives/Trust_in_Media.pdf)>.

one to postulate that not only trust in the media, but also the proportion between trust in the media and trust in the government is more important for the measurement of the reputation of the media—especially if one considers the media to be a specific public service. Going further, one should recall a popular trend of the journalistic world to call the media the ‘Fourth Estate’. Perhaps the ultimate goal of a mature democratic society would be the harmony of all four estates, when the citizens trust all branches of the authority nearly equally.

The public opinion poll by the BBC/Reuters/Media Center Poll allows one to presume that trust in the media should be inversely proportional to the friendliness of the media conditions. The better and more democratic the environment created for the media in the state is, the higher requirements arise for the media; all the means of public information are evaluated more critically.

Other attributes of the Public Dimension of the mediaRQ are formulated on the basis of theoretical analysis provided by professor Denis McQuail and summarized in his book *Media Performance*. The functioning of the media in society can be estimated only after an assessment of freedom, equality of the media conditions as well as media attempts to nourish the order as cohesion of the civic community.

The attribute of freedom, according to McQuail, should be based on the independence of media channels and its employees from the owner (of the media chain), independence from the government, internal constraints, advertisers, sources, and different pressure groups. Independence from information sources is extremely important in the countries of developing democracy and in communities where investigative journalism is going through a crisis. Sources that expect to get influence in exchange for confidential information are one of the most complicated threats for the freedom of expression. The problem is that recognition of such threats is very tricky, and possibilities of influential sources to manipulate public opinion become nearly infinite. Independence of the media should have not only negative connotation (independence from) but also positive connotation (independence for). One must emphasize the independence of the media for artistic creativity, advocacy, critical role, and diversity.

When discussing problems of media freedom and independence McQuail notes that ‘media freedom cannot be established by constitutional or legal decree, but has to be constantly developed and re-affirmed in daily practice’<sup>7</sup>. Such a remark is addressed not only to the governments that draw the boundaries of media freedom or to the media that can fight for implementation of freedom laws as well as misuse the freedoms. This observation is important for those who try to measure the reputation of the media and in this evaluation process assess the conditions under which the media operates. The simplest method to assess the media environment is to analyze the laws and examine how they are implemented. The most complicated aspect in this process is the evaluation of everyday practice.

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7 *Ibid.*, p. 111.

The attribute of media freedom is closely interconnected with categories such as accessibility, diversity and objectivity; these categories are uniformly important to the attribute of equality and should therefore be discussed simultaneously in both contexts.

It is possible to preserve the freedom of the media only under certain guarantees of information accessibility. On the whole, accessibility is a double problem that has social as well as technical aspects. Social accessibility often intertwines with subtle forms of censorship; a publication in a newspaper dedicated for the dissemination of oppositional ideas could pass without disturbances, but such a newspaper could be denied a broader audience. The accessibility of television channels is a much more complex problem. Severe competition among different media channels under free market conditions transforms accessibility into an even more complicated and nearly irresolvable problem. It is complicated to speak about equality in the business world; competing publications or broadcasts are interested solely in their own accessibility. The solution to the pre-programmed conflict between business and social service of information channels creates a basis for media reputation and shows the maturity of democracy.

Like accessibility, media diversity belongs to the categories of freedom and equality. Media channels, sources, content, and the audiences represent diversity on a variety of levels—political, gender, racial, national, and others. According to McQuail, the ‘diversity of supply cannot secure diversity of reception, but it is a necessary condition for this’<sup>8</sup>. Any attempts to measure diversity must be very cautious, since diversity is a simultaneously quantitative as well as qualitative criterion. In many cases diversity is skilfully used to cover the problem of power: ‘[w]ho has the power to decide which contents are spread through the media?’<sup>9</sup>.

Objectivity is a tremendously broad category that must be presented not only inside two attributes (freedom and equality) of the public dimension but also inside the fourth, journalistic, dimension. Such a threefold attribution is to be understood as a background of one of the paradoxes of the media, the affirmation that there is nothing more subjective as the objectivity of the journalist. Concurrently, we must remember that some neutral criteria could be used for judging media objectivity: factuality (which includes truth, informativeness and relevance) and impartiality (which is based on balance and neutral presentation)

The fourth category of equality (which shares categories of accessibility, diversity and objectivity with the attribute of freedom) is solidarity and is simultaneously used in the context of ‘order as cohesion’. The journalistic community and media complex can be expected to become real executors of the civic mission only after acquiring professional solidarity. Both multi-circulation newspapers and bulletins distributed in a few hundred copies are united by the same purpose—to inform the public. Only a community of journalists united by this common aspiration can pursue ethic norms and create a mechanism of obedience to the rules. An effective system of journalistic self-control is

8 *Ibid.*, p. 157.

9 Huber, S. *Media markets in Central and Eastern Europe: an Analysis on Media Ownership in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia*. Wien, 2006, p. 14.

the only way to seek harmony between freedom of expression, respect of human dignity, and responsibility.

The attribute of order as cohesion also includes social control, social solidarity, cultural quality and cultural identity. All categories of order as cohesion mentioned above are united by the idea of media responsibility. Reputation of the media is based not only on horizontal transmission of the information from geographical or social environment to another. Some information oversteps news borders, turns into a value and is passed on from one generation to another (vertically, that is). The creation and maintenance of social, geographical or generation links transforms a group or groups of people into a community. The measurement of the influence of the media in this process is exceedingly complicated. All conscious attempts of media channels to become instruments of social control and national solidarity can only discredit the idea of free, independent, and impartial information of community. A good example of such discredit is the media of totalitarian states where news channels become agitators, propagandists, and organizers. Because of this, an evaluation of social and cultural factors of media activities should be implemented according to long-lasting values and not as specified by the declarations of propagandist trends.

The **Market Dimension** of mediaRQ is the ‘invisible’ dimension because it is usually unnoticed by the reader, listener or viewer. However, for the media, marketing or public relations specialists the Market Dimension is the only one that can be precisely measured. This dimension already takes into account the data of every periodical, broadcast or media channel separately and concurrently evaluates the media market as a whole.

Every publication, TV or radio channel, website and its place in the market is evaluated according to the quantity and quality of the audience, size, price, availability, profitability and (in part) its dependency on a certain media chain.

The audience of the published media could be mistakenly equated to its circulation. The measurement of the size of circulation is not as simple as it looks at first sight. For example, in Lithuania the counting of a newspaper’s real circulation and nuances of its distribution is a very complicated process almost resembling audit. When the editorial process, printing and distribution are in the hands of one company, the real circulation becomes almost a business secret. Fortunately, for the measurement of media reputation, the data about audience is more informative than circulation. Yet the proportion between the quantity of published copies and the readers is even more important. Unfortunately this ratio is only provisional; its real merit is intertwined with the conditions in the country, habits and practices of the readers. The analysis of the audience should address the following issues: what part of the readers (listeners or viewers) is permanent, how do they obtain the copy (there are very different patterns of distribution of newspapers and magazines in different countries) and where are they listening to or watching the broadcast. Demographical, social, professional, gender, and national analysis of the audience is also of great importance for the measurement of media reputation.

For the purposes of the mediaRQ model, the size of the media channel is defined as the quantity of information that is delivered to the user. For the research of media

reputation together with the quantity one must analyze the structure of information. The first step is the analysis of the proportion of journalistic and advertising material; further on, one must investigate the proportions of factual news and commentaries, entertainment and 'hard news', local and international information. This analysis will influence the final decision to attribute the channel to either the 'yellow' or 'quality' media. Of course the size of the media channel is closely related to its technical quality. In every media market there are some special minimal requirements that need to be met in order to pass into the group of reviewed media channels. In undemocratic societies, the technical quality of opposition or underground media is often inversely proportional to its authority and reputation.

The price of subscription is not only a business question. Often the low price is the fastest way to reach high circulation, but it might encourage the audience to buy the product for wrong reasons. In Lithuania, for example, readers often modestly admit that the main reason for buying a newspaper is either a long-time habit, or the periodical's price and the inclusion of a TV program published as a supplement.<sup>10</sup> A relatively new phenomenon of free newspapers in the largest cities only confirms the trend: these free newspapers are rarely regarded as prestigious. The price of subscription as well as circulation is a very comparative indicator, which is important for the profitability, availability, but is not directly related to the reputation. Recalling the equality attribute of the Public Dimension, it is apparent how complicated the relationships among different dimensions and attributes of mediaRQ are.

If media owners do not want to demonstrate the dependence of their channel on one or another group or chain, readers, listeners or viewers usually do not notice the fact. Yet dependence on the group can be crucial to reputation: subsidiaries are hardly influenced by the image of the primary company.

The **Organizational** or 'channel' **Dimension** of the mediaRQ is based on the attributes of a slightly modified 'classical' RQ. Their usefulness was discussed in the first part of this article. Here it would be appropriate to recapitulate these attributes: Emotional Appeal (feel good about, admire and respect, trust), Social Responsibility (community responsibility), Vision and Leadership (excellent leadership, clear vision for the future), and Products and Services (high quality, innovative, value for money). Some attributes of the 'classical' RQ are partially present in other dimensions. As it was already mentioned, there are some doubts about the usefulness of the Financial Performance and Workplace Environment dimensions for the evaluation of media reputation.

The fourth and the last dimension of the mediaRQ is the **Journalistic** or 'creative' **Dimension**. The purpose of this dimension is to measure the most subjective elements of the media. Usually journalistic creativity and originality are the domains in which the application of quantitative criteria is impossible.

The personality of a journalist provides authenticity for the media channel. Often a popular host of a show can become a substitute for a family friend; the distinctive style

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10 Nevinskaitė, L. Žiniasklaidos kokybė: nepatenkinti publikos lūkesčiai [The Quality of the Media: Unfulfilled Expectations of the Audience]. In *Neatrasta galia: Lietuvos pilietinės visuomenės žemėlapis*. Žiliukaitė, R. (ed.). Vilnius: Versus aureus, 2006, p. 196.

of the author could become not only the centre of attraction, but the basis of trust as well. Few magazines or newspapers have enough courage not to declare the names of the authors and nourishes unique integral style (e.g. *The Economist*). Such attempts to push the position of the newspaper beyond the interests of the author could come into being only in the media channels with deep and longstanding traditions.

There are certain connections of the journalistic dimension of the mediaRQ to different phenomena such as fashion or dependence on a political party. Fashion of the media is the same social phenomena as the fashion of clothes, houses, or furniture. The attribution of fashion to the journalistic dimension is based on the subjectivity of the latter. On the other hand, the very audience (especially on web-based media channels) can become the source of attraction. A fashionable newspaper or broadcast can become the sign of fashion and thus create an illusion of high reputation. As we know, fashion could be very short lasting, dependent on the habits of media usage.

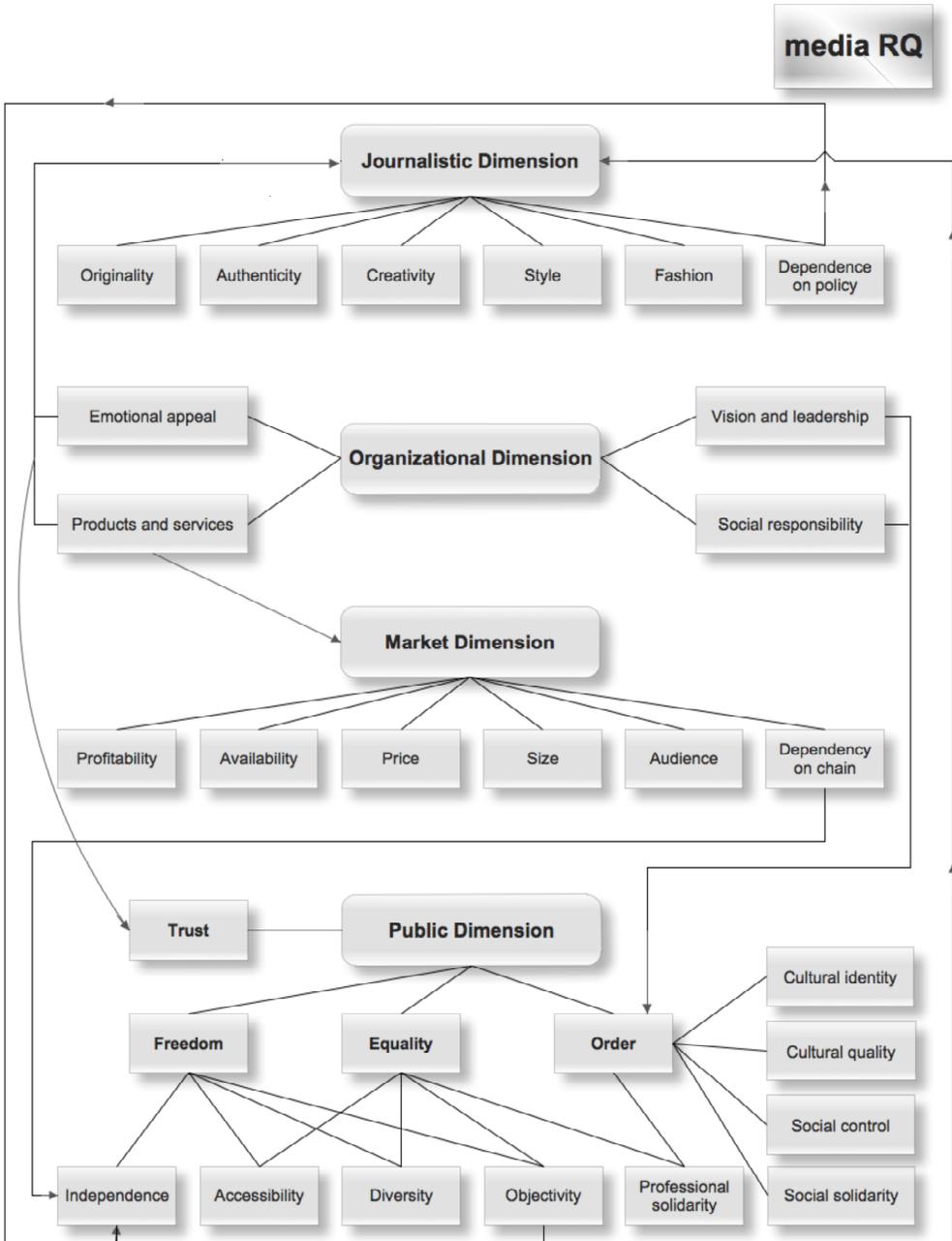
Today the dependence of the media channel on a political party, as well as state-subsidized media looks like a relic of the past. Nowadays in democratic societies political parties are more interested in media channels or authors who sympathize with their political stands. These so-called ‘party organs’ are ‘unfashionable’ and less effective than consistent public relations policies. Here the European tradition of public broadcasters must be mentioned. Since these radio and television channels are (in different forms) publicly funded, such broadcasters receive certain obligations and simultaneously gain special positions in the market. Theoretically such broadcasters must be immune to the commercial pressure of the market and be obliged to implement public mission, to leave less space for advertising and simultaneously gain a good name and clean reputation. Long-lasting traditions of public broadcasters increase their chances of gaining a better reputation.

## Conclusions

Reputation measurement is not a trend, for in today’s fast-moving society a good and popular name of a company is no less important than modern technologies used in production processes or services. The need to create a universal methodology for reputation measurement is confronted with the differences of various areas of activity. Just as in various sectors diverse laws and different scales of measurement should be used, the desire to have universal indicators sometimes looks only partly reasonable. All such comparisons meet the problem of apples and oranges—ranking processes can lose any credibility if one puts totally different measurements on the same scale. What are the limits for useful and meaningful comparisons? Only defining clear boundaries can help bypass the mistakes and misunderstandings when putting a university and a petrol station on the same reputation scale.

This article demonstrates that even universal methodologies such as the Reputation Quotient or RepTrak™ have certain limitations when applying them for different sectors and these boundaries are still not fixed. The next step in improving the methodology is

the creation of a specific RQ for various areas of activities. Including specific geographical, national, branch, and other dimensions and attributes for the very beginning could damage the precise nature of the system, but further measurement should lead to more accurate and later partly universal RQ.



There is a specific hierarchy among the dimensions of the mediaRQ. The Public Dimension is the broadest one, generalizing public attitude towards the entire sector (in this case towards all of the media). The Market Dimension concentrates on the media specifics, the Organizational Dimension evaluates the channel, and the Journalistic Dimension finishes the pyramid of reputation with the most subjective and personal attributes. After testing in other fields, this hierarchical structure of the RQ could be valuable and suggest a combination between universalism and explicitness.

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## BANDYMAI MATUOTI ŽINIASKLAIDOS REPUTACIJĄ

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**Santrauka.** Straipsnyje bandoma bendrąjį teorinį reputacijos modelį taikyti žiniasklaidos reputacijai matuoti. Analizuojant žiniasklaidą per reputacijos prizmę, galima išryškinti leidėjų ir transliuotojų tapatybės bruožus bei jų raišką agresyvioje žinių rinkoje. Reputacijos analizė leidžia geriau suprasti žiniasklaidos verslo ypatumus.

Autoriaus siūlomą Žiniasklaidos reputacijos koeficientą sudaro keturios dimensijos: 1) visuomeninė arba išorinė, leidžianti įvertinti, kaip visuomenė ir valstybė supranta esmines laisvės, lygybės ir solidarumo vertybes; 2) ‚nematoma‘ rinkos dimensija, apibūdinanti žiniasklaidos koncentraciją, kainas, tiražus, auditoriją; 3) organizacinė dimensija remiasi šiek tiek modifikuota klasikinio Reputacijos koeficiento samprata; 4) žurnalistinė dimensija apibūdina žiniasklaidos produkto kokybę ir kūrybiškumą.

*Žiniasklaidos reputacijos koeficiento koncepcija bandoma klasikinę, pirmiausia komerciniams tikslams sukurtą, Reputacijos koeficientą pritaikyti mišraus (komercinio ir visuomeninio) verslo matavimams. Toks Reputacijos koeficiento modifikavimas liudija labai ribotas jo taikymo skirtinguose sektoriuose galimybes.*

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** *reputacija, žiniasklaida, Reputacijos koeficientas, visuomenės interesas, pasitikėjimas žiniasklaida.*

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