Media monitoring in crisis and issues management: identifying emerging challenges in the age of mediatization

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Amsterdam University Press

TIJDSCHRIFT VOOR COMMUNICATIEWETENSCHAP 54.2 (2026) 156-174
HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.5117/TCW2026.2.002.WINK

Media Monitoring in Crisis and Issues Management: Identifying Emerging Challenges in the Age of Mediatization

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Samenvatting

Communicatieprofessionals in publieke instellingen maken veelvuldig gebruik van burgeropinie op sociale media tijdens omgevingsanalyses en crisiscommunicatie. Het SiPR-onderzoeksproject genaamd 'Goed Gere(a)geerd' probeert de omgevingsanalyse te verrijken met het discursief psychologische perspectief. In dit artikel presenteren wij praktijkgerichte inzichten van eindgebruikers van monitoringsoftware en beschouwen wij deze door de lens van de concepten mediatisering, datafıcatie en platformisering.

Abstract

Before the emergence of social media, monitoring public perceptions relied primarily on newspaper articles and online news. Nowadays, communications professionals consider it crucial to engage with users and discussions on social media platforms, which accommodates a significant part of the public debate. Public institutions utilize online platforms as a means to communicate directly with citizens, which is particularly vital in times of crisis. Despite equipping their communications departments with media monitoring software, communications professionals still experience a difficulty to act, due to the cacophonic nature of social media. In this article, we report on a Dutch research project named *Goed Gere*(*a*)*geerd*, which studies the digitalization of communication work through discursive psychology, presenting initial practice-informed insights by end-users in relation to the framework of mediatization, datafication, and platformization. We argue that the rise of social media has not necessarily simplified the understanding of public perceptions within the broader public debate, yet has introduced both new opportunities and challenges. In light of these challenges, we propose that it could be beneficial to shift away from attempts to monitor every citizen's expression through increasingly expansive data systems, and instead focus on social interactions that carry a higher risk of escalation. To help prevent the escalation of issues online, or even offline, the communications professional could turn to the discursive psychological framework, which focuses on linguistic patterns indicative of a larger social context.

Keywords: crisis communication, media monitoring, datafication, platformization, issue management

Introduction

Before the era of social media, monitoring public perceptions relied primarily on newspaper articles and online news. Nowadays, communications professionals consider it essential to engage in discussions on social media platforms, as the public debate has partly shifted to the digital spaces of these platforms. This means that the daily practice of communications professionals working in public institutions, and specifically media monitoring specialists, has largely moved online, as these institutions utilize social media as a means to engage with citizens and provide information, particularly in times of crisis.

During crisis it becomes crucial to quickly identify residents' concerns and analyze whether the public is reacting with anxiety or approaching the situation more rationally (Van der Meer, 2016; Vogler & Meissner, 2022). By rapidly gathering this information, authorities can not only provide accurate updates but also issue appropriate instructions to ensure public safety and manage the crisis effectively. Public organizations and corporations alike have adopted monitoring tools as monitoring social media has enabled communications professionals to track patterns, perceptions, and themes in real time at significantly lower costs (Kavenaugh et al., 2011). The online engagement between public institutions and citizens, as well as the monitoring process and methodologies the communications professionals deploy to understand and analyze public discourse and opinion, are – what we call – 'datafied'[1] (Southerton, 2022). Web monitoring tools generate data on potential emotional impact, trending topics and other social media metrics. By generating such a series of data points, the media monitoring specialists, who work in communications departments, are able to evaluate the potential impact of the discourse on the organization's reputation and image. This monitoring process allows communication departments to detect when the legitimacy of their organization is at risk, enabling them to respond more swiftly and directly.

We argue that the rise of social media has not necessarily simplified the overall understanding of public perceptions in the broader public debate. Even though it has led to new opportunities, it has also generated new challenges. The new possibilities are well advertised, although authors warn of information overload and argue that manually conducted research

1 Datafication refers to the process by which subjects, objects, and practices are transformed into digital data, based on a logic that views the world as sources of data to be gathered, and from which insights into human behavior and social issues can be drawn (Southerton, 2022).

remains crucial for providing the necessary depth to thoroughly understand communications processes during crises (Vogler & Meissner, 2022). Advancements in media monitoring have introduced more sophisticated tools that enable the social media analysis to be fine-tuned with greater depth and an unprecedented number of data points, offering enhanced insights into public discourse. The new challenges, however, sometimes get lost in the mist that technological imaginaries[2] – of media monitoring tools and social media – unescapably evoke.

As communications professionals may struggle with the challenges social media monitoring pose, the research group 'Social Interaction in Public Spaces' (SIPS)[3] at the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht has initiated several interdisciplinary research projects to further explore such contemporary challenges in the field. The projects specifically highlight the importance of the role of communications professionals within public institutions, as they are central to the interactions between these institutions and the public. Communications departments monitor public sentiments and perceptions, analyze their findings, and advise public entities on their communication strategies. In doing so, monitoring plays a key role in assessing and shaping public perceptions among constituents and clients. To evaluate how professionals use monitoring tools to enhance their understanding of public perceptions in broader debates, the SIPS research group initiated a series of research projects. For each of these projects, SIPS built a consortium of public organizations, giving them access to practical insights and problems from practitioners within communications departments, as well as real-world case studies of emerging issues online.

The first research project was launched in 2014 and was called *The Next Level* project. Here, monitoring during crises was identified as a key research priority, as the urgency to swiftly assess public discourse is heightened in such situations. In 2021, the research project *Goed Gere(a)geerd*[4] commenced, in which four case studies of online issues were analyzed using the discursive psychological perspective (Potter, 1996; Potter & Edwards, 2001). In 2023, this project resulted in a tool designed for communications professionals to identify patterns in online discussions. The tool, referred to as BEP (Bird's Eye Perspective), allows users to analyze interactions within the public

2 A key term in media studies literature, that refers to collective imaginations – both utopic and dystopic – of how the future is shaped by a certain technology.

3 The English translation of 'Sociale Interactie in de Publieke Ruimte' , so in Dutch we go by the acronym SIPR.

4 Dutch utterance best translated as 'well responded' or 'an adequate response'. The parentheses express a link between the Dutch words 'reageren' (to respond) and 'regeren' (to govern).

sphere from a distanced perspective. The tool is further developed through new initiatives, such as the research projects *360° Newsroom* and *BEP27*. BEP uses algorithms in the analysis of issues. As such, every project has a distinct focus on important elements within online and offline monitoring.

In this article, we report on the proceedings and findings from *The Next Level* and *Goed Gere(a)geerd* projects, based on experiences shared by end users and network partners during practical sessions in which the methods were used and discussed. We discuss how these relate to current developments in media monitoring related to mediatization, datafication and platformization. We highlight the everyday practices of communications professionals in public institutions and governmental bodies, and discuss how their work has evolved due to various types of mediatization. We will do this in the following order. First, we give a theoretical overview of the manner in which processes of mediatization, datafication and platformization influence our society, as well as the use of media monitoring in the context of issue and crisis management. Then we discuss our observations on the challenges of social media monitoring as encountered in our research projects, as well as our observations with regard to the application of discursive psychological approach to the monitoring of online emerging issues. Finally, in the conclusion, we reflect on the datafication of crisis communication and monitoring, and the role of discursive psychology in meeting its challenges.

In order to support public organizations in their efforts to become aware of their role in mediatization through monitoring, the goals of this article are: (1) to report on the practical insights into issue formation of the 'Social Interaction in Public Spaces' research group and theorize these findings through the lens of mediatized crisis management and the online public debate, (2) to discuss the mediatization of social media platforms and its implications for the role of the communications professional who is responsible for media monitoring, and (3) to reflect on what this means for the communicative relationship between public institutions and citizens. By addressing these topics, we aim to contribute to the understanding of the epistemological foundations of the datafication of online and offline media monitoring efforts. This approach encourages communications practitioners to use the perspective of discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Wiggins, 2017) to give meaning to online social media messages and their interactional effects.

Theory

Mediatization, Datafication, and Platformization

Our media is about environments and infrastructures as much as it is about messages and content (Peters 2015). Contemporary society is permeated by media to the extent that the media sphere can no longer be seen as separate from other spheres (Bentivegna & Boccia Artieri, 2020; Palau-Sampio & López-García 2025). The term used to describe how media influences broader concepts like political communication, gaming culture, and society itself is 'mediatization'. Mediatization is best defined as a dual process in which 'media emerges as an independent institution with a logic of its own that other social institutions must adapt to,' while simultaneously becoming an essential and 'integrated part of other institutions' (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 105). Media is therefore not merely an independent institution carrying out its own roles, tasks, and activities; its also fundamentally and permanently transforms other major institutions and areas of our lives – such as politics, warfare, and leisure. In a McLuhanesque fashion, this perspective on media does not grant the user – or society – full agency over the medium. Instead, it assumes that the medium itself exerts significant agency (Hjarvard, 2008). An uncritical view of media use, where media is seen purely as a tool for communication, would refer to this process as 'mediation'. Aligning with Hjarvard's (2008) perspective, we argue that media – and technology in general – fundamentally transforms every sphere it is present in, with long-term structural changes in culture and society and creating new conditions for human communication and interaction (Hjarvard, 2017).

One contemporary form of mediatization is called 'datafication', which generally refers to the process by which people's choices and actions on the internet are quantified, collected, aggregated, and analyzed, and then often used for advertising purposes (Mejias & Couldry 2019). However, scholars such as José van Dijck, Thomas Poell, and Martijn de Waal (2018) argue that this definition does not fully capture how the 'logics of datafication' have reshaped the online world and profoundly impacted entire sectors – both online and offline. Datafication is best defined as:

> 'the process by which subjects, objects, and practices are transformed into digital data' and 'a logic that sees things in the world as sources of data to be "mined" for correlations or sold, and from which insights can be gained about human behavior and social issues' (Southerton 2022, pp. 358–360).

Datafication should not be viewed merely as another way of formatting information, but as the quantification of human life through digital information, driven by economic interests (Mejias & Couldry, 2019). Datafication is thus a form of mediatization, as it is a manner in which the medium – of data – changes society and culture. To understand and analyze the process of datafication one should always center 'the intersection of power and knowledge' (Mejias & Couldry 2019, p. 1). This intersection becomes apparent in case studies that deal with the datafication of citizens, for example when subjects are datafied into racialized categories (Van Schie, 2022), political objects (Van Schie et al., 2020), digital patient or health populations (Siffels 2021), or happiness and wellness of citizens (Smit et al., 2024).

In their article named 'datafication' Mejias and Couldry (2019) refer to two other works on datafication, namely Richard Kitchin's book *The data revolution* (2014) and José van Dijck's article 'Datafication, Dataism and Dataveillance' (2014). While Kitchin (2014) emphasizes how data presents us with new epistemologies, which will radically reconfigure how we make sense of things (culture, history, economy, society) and what will count as knowledge, Van Dijck (2014) goes one step further and stipulates datafication as the new paradigm in science and society. According to van Dijck (2014), based on the mirages of trust and goodwill as put forward by governments, big business and academics alike, datafication becomes the legitimization of life mining and surveillance capitalism. The many problematic ontological and epistemological claims on which the paradigm of data – for example as normal and neutral – obfuscate the ideological underpinnings of the praxis and logic of datafication. Without such claims, it is doubtful if the public would allow the sharing of all their personal information with corporate platforms.

Another contemporary form of mediatization besides datafication is 'platformization'. Platformization – also dubbed 'the rise of the platform as the dominant infrastructural and economic model of the social web' (Helmond 2015, p. 1) – refers to the manner in which platforms have become dominant access points to entire spheres of life. Platformization changes entire sectors to its own logic, including monopolization of infrastructures (Nayaran, 2023) and 'surveillance capitalism', a phrase coined by Zuboff (2015). Platformization theory argues that platforms have the tendency to go beyond the boundaries of their own services (Nieborg et al., 2022) and become infrastructures themselves (Plantin et al., 2018) in order to maximize their access to data streams, thereby transforming the sectors they now provide infrastructural services for.

A pressing example of the manner in which platformization and datafication change sectors and professions is the transformation of social media monitoring and crisis management. Social media has become a vital part of the platformized public sphere (de Winkel, 2023), as they are the dominant infrastructure of our online public spaces of information and deliberation. The assumptions that a user is 'a citizen', that an online audience is 'a public', that a significant part of the public is present online and engaged, and that posting counts as communication are seemingly self-evident. Yet these assumptions should have been critically considered prior to the decision of governmental bodies and public institutions to follow citizens to the social media platforms. Communications professionals are subjected to the logics of datafication and platformization, not only because their analyses now focus on comment sections and feeds, but also because they now use media monitors that also abide to the logics of datafication as well as platformization. While issue and crisis management have definitely benefitted from social media and media monitoring, it is important to realize that this has consequences for how they would alter the nature of work and its epistemologies due to mediatization.

Monitoring crises

In crisis communication research, crises are often understood not simply as objective events, but as situations defined by how they are perceived – particularly by stakeholders whose expectations are disrupted. Rather than being limited to sudden disruptions, crises emerge when an organization's actions or inactions are seen as violating social norms, ethical standards, or institutional responsibilities. As Coombs (2009) argues, crises are inherently perceptual: if stakeholders perceive a situation as a crisis, it becomes one – unless the organization can effectively reframe that perception. In this article, we use the term 'crisis' to refer specifically to situations that trigger public debate, controversy, or political pressure, often arising from deeper societal issues or value conflicts.

When an organization encounters a crisis, understanding the situation is challenging. Answering the question 'What is going on?' becomes essential to grasp public needs, set communication objectives, and help customers and other stakeholders feel more prepared for what lies ahead. *The Next Level* project put the focus on the way in which social media are used by citizens to find and exchange information, express concerns, coordinate relief efforts, and eventually memorialize those affected in times of crisis (Takahashi et al., 2015). This requires communications professionals to tap into these message exchanges and generate insights based on sentiment

analysis, key influencers, and stakeholder positions. Based on a review of crisis communications during pandemics, Jong (2021) concludes that communications professionals should implement ongoing (social) media monitoring across multiple platforms (e.g., X, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok) to identify public needs, emotions, rumors, and the credibility of spokespersons. When the scope of crisis management is broadened to encompass safety, monitoring typically extends beyond communication efforts to include providing information for police and law enforcement agencies as well. A recent report on how Dutch municipalities use monitoring tools (Bantema et al., 2021) shows that, in addition to monitoring reputational issues, citizen inquiries, and webcare, it is employed for risk assessments during live events and in response to potential social unrest as well. Generally, media monitoring can be utilized as a feedback loop to measure the effectiveness of communication efforts. According to Avery (2017) and Cheng and Lee (2019), monitoring gives professionals a head start in understanding what people believe, including how they value communicating with stakeholders, such as science or technological authorities (Garcia, 2014).

While media monitoring in the early 2010s was considered a reliable method for gauging public sentiment, recent academic discourse has increasingly focused on the limitations and caveats of online monitoring. Monitoring during crises can be so overwhelming (Spence et al., 2016) that not all data can be analyzed immediately. The volume of input is simply too large, leaving data analysts with no choice but to rely on samples and summaries, often leaving the monitoring process in a black box (Zhang & Vos, 2014). Webcare tools perform sentiment analyses using algorithms, aiming to reflect sentiment as accurately as possible. However, these methods are subject to debates about relevance and representativeness (Hargittai, 2018). Additionally, during crises, media analysts often encounter platforms that are not always easily accessible. For instance, in situations such as public order disturbances, much information is exchanged among demonstrators via private platforms like Signal or WhatsApp. Relying solely on public sources for strategic decisions can, therefore, provide a distorted view of reality. As communications professionals are typically located within communications departments, their tasks often extend beyond the realm of communication itself. As such, the monitoring process by communication departments emerges as an independent institution with a logic of its own that others outside that department adapt to.

While social media are perceived to be a portal to citizen opinion, discussions on social media can also play a role in escalating issues into crisis events (Breuer, 2016; Enjolras et al., 2012; Van Dijk et al., 2013). Increasingly there is

an academic focus on addressing misinformation and disinformation during crises, spread through social media (Hadlington et al., 2023; Pool et al., 2021). Marres (2021) argues that in recent years, online platforms have been deliberately adapted to amplify such controversies and draw greater attention to them, meaning that the moral outrage observed online may not always represent the true sentiments within society. All this to say that there are growing doubts and criticisms about the performance and representativeness of social media and monitoring tools in relation to crises and crisis management.

Results

Challenges of social media monitoring

We have identified three challenges of the adoption of social media monitoring tools for the analysis of public opinion. First, digitalization has led to an increase in messages about and/or directed at organizations. Due to this growth, it is impossible to monitor everything, and communication increasingly relies on summaries and screening mechanisms with potential biases in data representativeness (Hargittai, 2018). Second, social media is perceived as having a tendency to escalate conversations, develop issues in a more unpredictable manner and polarize debates (Fletcher et al., 2019). As a consequence of the surge in data and the flow of public opinion on social media, online discourse is often experienced as overwhelming, unpredictable, and chaotic. Research shows that communications professionals in public institutions are hesitant when it comes to (re)acting to the formation of online issues (Marres, 2021) and online mobilization (Harmelink et al., 2018; Sneijder et al., 2018; 2021). Clearly, the technological solutionist view of this technology – encompassing both social media platforms and media monitoring tools – has overpromised and underdelivered. An additional third challenge of social media monitoring is how it changes our perception of what interaction is. Bouvier (2018) argues that the way we engage with online platforms – through activities like 'searching online', 'sharing', 'following the latest updates', 'liking', 'friending', 'community building', and prioritizing 'most popular' content – we shape how we approach and think about everyday actions, including our relationships with others and broader social interactions. These platform-driven practices influence both our behaviors and perceptions in social contexts. This suggests that media monitoring not only identifies the opinions and perceptions shared online, but also captures the dynamics caused by platforms themselves, while influencing how we perceive social interactions between citizens.

Monitoring issues through discursive psychology

The research project *Goed Gere(a)geerd* focused on the monitoring of issues, or 'issue management'. Compared to crisis communication, issue management has a longer lead time, allowing for more strategic planning and proactive measures to address potential challenges before they escalate into crises. The project aimed to address the concerns of several organizational bodies within the Dutch government, regarding their experienced incapability to proactively recognize the emergence of issues, and their consecutive hesitance to act. In cooperation with several public partners and Dutch municipalities, the SIPS research group selected five case studies, exemplary of the online issues the partnering organizations dealt with. The online public debate was assessed in order to find issues that created communicative dilemmas for organizations by applying a discursive psychological analytical approach (Potter, 1996; Potter & Edwards, 2001).

Discursive psychology is an empirical, qualitative approach to interaction and language (Potter, 1996, Wiggins, 2017), treating these as action-oriented, sequentially organized and constructed and constructive of certain versions of reality. It focuses on how communicators use language, and to what interactional effect. For example, discursive psychology studies how communicators present and construct reality, identity, and emotions. Rather than checking whether utterances are true or false, discursive psychology inspects how they are sequentially organized and rhetorically built. Put differently: rather than trying to identify intentions that are not accessible for academics, media analysts, and other social media users alike, discursive psychology observes publicly available aspects of language and communication with a focus on the effects of utterances on the course of interaction. In the table below the analytic rules of thumb are presented.

The following example from X, taken from one of the cases in the *Goed Gere(a)geerd* project, illustrates the way language use is treated from the discursive psychological perspective. The case involved cracks in the foundation of a large bridge that is crossed by thousands of cars every day. Once the cracks were discovered, the bridge was closed to ensure safety and for construction work, which resulted in the escalation of this issue.

> *'Ik heb hier letterlijk buikpijn van. Niet voor te stellen wat er had kunnen gebeuren.'* ('I'm literally feeling sick to my stomach over this. Unimaginable what could have happened.')

Table 1. An overview of the analytic principles from a discursive psychological perspective

#	Principle	Question
1.	The meaning a next speaker or respondent attributes to the utterance, or the so-called *next turn proof procedure,* is important.	*How do receivers treat each other's utterances? (applicable if responses are available)*
2.	When the receiver does not attribute a meaning to the previous utterance, the formulation is compared to alternatives. In this way, it can be established which potential alternative versions are countered by the chosen formulation.	*What is the effect of the chosen formulation in comparison to other potential alternative versions?*
3.	Variety in formulations are indicative for their different interactional functions.	*What is the effect of the chosen formulations if you compare them to other ways of saying?*

Based on Bouwman et al. (2009) and Potter and Edwards (2001).

We included an example of a message on X that was posted during this issue. The first sentence of this post could be inspected on how the author constructs his feelings and emotions, and alludes to the hypothetical alternative reality of a disaster. Such an approach would take the language as a reflection of what happens inside the authors' head, including emotions and thoughts. Discursive psychology, on the other hand, inspects the language that is used in this post, and to what effect. For example: 'feeling sick to my stomach' presents the author of the post as being physically affected by the news about the bridge. This could have been taken as a matter of speaking, yet the 'literally' presents the stomach ache as real. The term allows the author of the post to present themselves as genuine and as truly shocked. By looking at the details of posts through a discursive psychology lens, it is possible to identify language devices in the X posts and anticipate interactional effects. We argue that there is great relevance and potential of this perspective for the daily practice of media analysts.

Another reason why discursive psychology is a helpful approach to better understand online issue formation, is that it emphasizes the *social actions* performed with language. For example, 'telling a story' can accomplish actions such as agreeing, disagreeing, lecturing, challenging, teasing, defending someone, criticizing, and more. In our example of the cracks in the bridge, the sentence 'Unimaginable what could have happened' could be taken literally: as a statement that the author cannot imagine how terrible the potential consequences might have been, or that these consequences are

unimaginable in general. Discursive psychology, however, analyzes this sentence to gain insight into the actions that it performs. First, it justifies, or explains, the claim of 'literally feeling sick to my stomach'. Second, the phrase further contributes to the portrayal of the author as being worried, which makes relevant reassurance. By implicating an emotion such as 'being worried', the author emphasizes 'inner feelings rather than the events in the external world they are directed at' (Edwards 1999, p. 281). Third, the phrase 'could have happened' has a double bearing. On the one hand, it emphasizes that terrible consequences did *not* actually occur; on the other, the phrase constructs an assessment of the situation as dangerous. This assessment, in turn, invites the reader to agree with the point of view of this author that 'what could have happened' is indeed terrible or even 'unimaginable' (Pomerantz, 1984).

Despite the rich insights a discursive psychological perspective delivers, there is still a lack of attention for the discursive aspects of everyday communication during crises and issue formation (Klarenbeek, 2012; Stinesen et al., 2016). As an exception, Stinesen et al. (2016) studied the way language use constructed and maintained rumors. They showed for instance how particular discursive strategies such as the use of objective language, 'on-the-spot' reporting and 'emotional' statements constructed certain scenarios as realities. A study by Sneijder et al. (2018) demonstrated discursive psychology as a useful perspective for recognizing mobilizing strategies on social media, by depicting strategies such as creating togetherness and constructing decisiveness rather than passivity. Importantly, both studies showed that participants in the discussions displayed a concern for constructing particular identities. Sneijder et al. (2018) demonstrated how participants deploying mobilizing strategies displayed a concern for presenting themselves as members of a genuinely damaged group (rather than, say, activist), while Stinesen et al. (2016) showed that people displayed a concern for presenting themselves as involved and critical citizens rather than merely participants in the discourse. These implicit concerns are constructed in an implicit way, through language use.

Such insights from discursive psychology can assist media analysts in understanding the actions of social media users, why certain responses may occur, and what suitable responses could be for connecting to the public and starting a dialog. Referring back to the earlier example, stating that the author has been misinformed would ignore the rhetorical work that has been done to portray the author as genuinely worried and shocked, as well as the agreement that was invited. Learning to recognize these linguistic cues helps identify the practical tensions and dilemmas that arise

in language use. This understanding enables governments to respond more appropriately and effectively to public concerns.

Conclusion

Once social media was acknowledged as a source for citizen opinion, the use of monitoring tools to comprehend the datafied discourse followed logically. As said, it changed the everyday work of media analysts and the functioning of communications departments of – for example – a municipality, as the media logics shaped the praxis around its products. These changes not only affect how monitoring is conducted but also emphasize the need for monitoring to focus on different aspects in order to accurately capture the conversations happening in society. Quoting mediatization scholar Stig Hjarvard:

> 'The logic of the media refers to the institutional and technological modus operandi of the media, including the ways in which media distribute material and symbolic resources and make use of formal and informal rules.' (Hjarvard 2008, p. 106)

As the perception of data driven technologies is that of the highest objectivity (Boyd & Crawford 2012; Kitchin, 2014), there is growing, yet slow, attention to the 'made' nature of data and the social norms in data systems (Van Dijck 2014; van Schie 2022), the political economy behind these datafication logics (Caliandro et al., 2024; Van Dijck et al. 2018), and the increasing 'entanglement' (Scott & Orlikowski 2014) of media and our social world. Social media and media monitoring have not provided a technological solution for communications professionals, as their problems were not technological to begin with. It has, as discussed previously, led to both opportunities and challenges.

However, while we acknowledge the challenges, and recognize that the environment in which interactions occur is undergoing significant shifts due to mediatization, digitization, and platformization, we must avoid a deterministic view when describing the effects of media on professional practices, institutional operations, and human culture. Such media-centrism and causal explanations of transformations in various sectors and spheres are empirically shaky, and according to Deacon and Stanyer (2015), 'a bad job' of being a media and communication scholar. For that reason, we aim not only to criticize the datafication of the communication departments, but to look for tools to overcome the arising challenges, and develop some

new strategies. We believe that the insights from the field of discursive psychology may be a valuable part in developing such strategies, as these support media analysts in recognizing an escalating tone of voice, and actions performed through language such as group formation, scenario formation and self-presentations.

In the *Goed Gere(a)geerd* project the SIPS research group used the methodological approach of discursive psychology, and confirmed that discursive patterns offer valuable insights into how specific discursive tools contribute to issue formation on social media. Results revealed how certain language devices contribute to the constructions of certain scenarios as realities, the formation of groups (for instance by the use of contrastive pronouns or accusing/blaming groups) and self-presentations (displaying a concern for coming across as critical, involved or rational, for instance). As these activities are theorized to be contributors to issue formation (Sneijder et al., 2018), and eventually are predictive of crisis events, we argue that developing language sensitivity for certain patterns in online public discourse is vital for identifying potential issues on social media at an early stage. Both *The Next Level* and *Goed Gere(a)geerd* projects, and the approach of discursive psychology specifically, provide new strategies. First, knowing how people interact in times of issues and crises increases our understanding of the effects of social media posts and the broader public discourse by refocusing language as the devices that need to be analyzed, without losing the broader social context of an (online) interaction. Second, the focus on linguistic interactions provides us with an opportunity of both human expertise and language-centered algorithms to perform, in junction, analyses that are based on an understanding of their epistemological qualities instead of their technological imaginary. It shows the importance of appropriate tools to enable communications professionals to make sense of the online debate in order to better map that debate and respond to it in everyday media monitoring activities.

At the same time, a shift towards a more overall assessment of the public discourse could foster a healthier dynamic between public institutions and citizens. That includes a shift from trying to monitor every citizen expression to focusing on situations in which there is a risk of escalating discussions. Ultimately, the cases in which online polarization transcending into the real world require governmental intervention to maintain public safety. To help prevent such situations, discursive psychology offers valuable insights. Knowledge of patterns, such as creating scenarios, constructing identities, and forming groups, allows for better insight into the overwhelming data. By placing words in their proper context, we can better discern what is

truly threatening from what may only appear threatening but is intended ironically or in another non-hostile manner. Media analysts who are able to interpret such subtleties with the use of discursive psychology tools will continue to be relevant, even in the era of mediatization.

Declaration of conflicting interests and funding

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article. The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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