

## **Opportunities and challenges for journalism and citizen deliberation in the Mediaverse. Lessons learned from the DemDialogue project**

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### **Abstract**

The panel presentation will discuss how lessons learned in the ongoing DemDialogue research project about journalism and citizen deliberation can be applied to journalistic work and interaction with users in the future Mediaverse. DemDialogue focuses on small- and midsized media organizations and looks at how deliberative norms may support user participation and democratically sustainable discussions in interactions in online news outlet discussion threads.

According to normative deliberative theory, participants in a democratically sustainable discussion should adhere to certain norms, such as inclusion, quality, reciprocity argumentation, sincerity, and respect (Fiskhin, 2011). Studies linking deliberative theory to journalism have shown that such approaches may be beneficial in for instance online moderation of user-generated comments. For instance, Masullo et al. (2020) and Ziegele and Jost (2020) showed that discussion thread quality may be improved if journalists outspokenly aim to engage with incivil commenters or choose specific response styles when approaching them.

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In the presentation, we draw conclusions from two DemDialogue studies conducted in the Finnish media ecosystem in 2020-21: semi-structured interviews with 18 news journalists and a content analysis of deliberative quality in 560 user-generated online comments in public service news stories. Findings show that online discussion fora can be useful tools for promoting citizen democracy due to their participatory features, but that there are several current challenges that seem to outweigh benefits. Challenges include for instance incivil user-generated content, limited citizen representativeness among active users, and lacking resources to handle content in smaller media organizations.

We will in the presentation discuss what found challenges mean for journalist-user interaction in the future Mediaverse, and what to do to potentially overcome these and to better promote citizen deliberation and democratically sustainable discussions in changing media ecosystems.

## **References**

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## **Keywords**

deliberative democracy, incivility, interactive moderation, participatory journalism, online commenting systems

## **Bio**

**Klas Backholm** is Senior University Lecturer at Åbo Akademi University. Research areas include usage of online technology for promoting citizen participation in journalism/crisis communication, and journalists' psychological wellbeing after crisis exposure. Recent publications include studies on how journalists experienced the corona pandemic, and how young audiences define trust in journalism.

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