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Conceptualizing the dialogical structure of mass communication: A comparison of the dialogical networks and mediated social communication approaches

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ABSTRACT

Theoretical contributions conceptualizing dialogical processes and structures of mass communication are scattered, hence different disciplines work on the same issues without uniting their potentials. The *mediated social communication* (MSC) approach developed by German communication scholars and the *dialogical network* (DN) approach informed by ethnomethodology and conversation analysis share important characteristics. This paper contributes to interdisciplinary research by comparing the approaches, analyzing their similarities and differences, and discussing their integration. The MSC approach offers additional theoretical considerations; the DN approach provides pointers to the empirical analysis of dialogical structures in mass communication. Essentially, both approaches conceptualize journalists as mediators of the exchange between diverse (individual or collective) actors speaking for social groups. This journalistic mediation of various statements enables a shared society-wide discourse essential for the existence of any society. However, the actual performance of this mediation varies between countries and depends on editorial practices, norms, and resources, which differ across media types and outlets. Future research could use the theoretical conceptualizations of these approaches to investigate communicative actor relations more thoroughly and focus on how they develop in the context of journalistic mediation.

1. Introduction

Since spring 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a dominant issue in international news coverage (EJO, 2020, March 19). Early on, journalists mainly reported statements from virologists, epidemiologists, medical staff, politicians, and company representatives and largely neglected the perspectives of scientists from various other disciplines, such as law, psychology, or sociology. The same is true for the voices of many societal groups particularly affected by the crisis and its far-reaching policy measures, such as elderly people, women, students, creative artists, and religious communities (Eisenegger et al., 2020; MaLisa Stiftung, 2020; Wormer, 2020). Thus, it is plausible that certain groups, at least early in the pandemic, did not see their perspectives and interests represented in the news. In Germany, for example, news users who sought critical voices and a discussion of potential negative side effects of lockdown measures did not feel sufficiently informed and represented in media discourse (e.g., Post et al., 2021). This reflects people's general need for a shared public discourse that discusses and represents diverse positions and interests (Bodó et al., 2019; Hess and Gutsche, 2018; Kösters and Jandura, 2019). However, many studies have focused on how often certain groups are represented in the media; less attention is paid to how the positions of various social groups are represented, their different statements refer to one another, and such debates evolve over time and across various news channels. This gap results from various developments: research is increasingly data driven and oriented toward "quick-hit studies" (Lewis and Molyneux, 2018, p. 18) and often focused on one media channel (Pearce et al., 2020), while theory development, interdisciplinary work, and analyses of broader developments and communication processes across various media are relatively neglected (Fuchs and Qiu, 2018; Pearce et al., 2020). In recent decades, a vast body of research has equated "the social" with communication on social media (Hess and Gutsche, 2018; Lewis and Molyneux, 2018; Peters and Witschge, 2015, pp. 29–30). In contrast, social discourses enabled by news media—despite their widespread use and social significance (e.g., Nelson, 2020)—are often overlooked.

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Therefore, this paper offers an interdisciplinary perspective on the social function of journalism and aims to contribute theoretical considerations for the analysis of dialogical structures in mass communication. The notion of mass communication as a network (i.e., an interactive process with interwoven structures) is not new; it emerged long before the Internet was invented. Albert Schäffle (1875–1878) was the first scholar to describe society as a communicative network (Hardt, 2001, p. 47; Pietilä, 2005, p. 17). His work influenced the *mediated social communication* (MSC) approach which German mass communication scholars have developed since the first half of the twentieth century (Fürst et al., 2015; Wagner, 1977). From the 1990s onward, research grounded in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis developed the *dialogical network* (DN) approach (Leudar et al., 2004; Leudar and Nekvapil, 1998, 2004). This paper focuses on the two approaches, which share some remarkable parallels. Both analyze the dialogical structure of mass communication and journalists' mediating role, and scholars from both observed a neglect in studying the 'dialogicity' of mass communication in their respective disciplines. Despite a growing body of work on deliberation and the public sphere (e.g., Ferree et al., 2002; Gerhards, 1997; Rinke, 2016), mass communication is still predominantly viewed as a one-way transmission of information from communicators to a widespread audience with limited feedback options (e.g., Bruns, 2005, pp. 214, 281, 314; Greenberg and Salwen, 2009; Holt and Karlsson, 2011; for more references see Fürst et al., 2015, pp. 328, 330). Current textbooks in media and communication research still reflect this idea (e.g., Franklin and Canter, 2019, pp. 20–21, 204–205; Hanson, 2016, pp. 6–25; McQuail and Deuze, 2020, pp. 7, 76, 110; Pürer, 2014, pp. 77–83).

No analysis has combined the DN and MSC approaches and examined their similarities and differences, although they could enable further theoretical developments and strengthen interdisciplinary research. In our view, the MSC approach offers additional theoretical potential to describe the dialogicity of mass communication. Empirical work based on the MSC approach, however, is rather scarce (see, e.g., Bosshart, 2016; Schröter, 1995), while the authors of the DN approach widely demonstrated how it can be used to empirically analyze and describe media dialogical networks. The DN approach has been applied to political (Leudar and Nekvapil, 1998, 2000, 2004, 2007; Nekvapil and Leudar, 2006) and economic contexts (Kaderka et al., 2018). This article aims to enrich theoretical considerations of mass communication and its dialogical structure and provide concepts for further empirical research across disciplines. The focus is on journalists' mediating role, since this is a crucial notion and common thread of both approaches.[1]

2. Comparison

To illustrate how the two approaches can enrich theoretical development and empirical work in the interdisciplinary field of media, communication, and discourse studies, this section compares them, encompassing the dialogical structure of mass communication, the actors in a network, the role of media and journalists, and the concept of communicative representation.

Such a comparison and (partial) integration is reasonable because the MSC and DN approaches share basic epistemological positions (see Dupret et al., 2007; Fürst et al., 2015; Fürst and Schönhagen, 2020; Kaderka et al., 2018; Leudar and Nekvapil, 2007; Nekvapil and Leudar, 2006; Schönhagen, 1999). They consider communication central to the emergence of social reality, focus on the communicative practices of social actors across different media, times, and spaces, and regard not media technology itself as decisive but rather communication disseminated via various channels, including journalistic media. Both approaches are concerned with reconstructing communicative processes and practices (how actors construct and negotiate social reality and relate to each other). The underlying assumption is that contexts and meanings of the practices and processes are crucial, with social actors' roles varying by context. Such scientific reconstructions are not understood as objective approaches to reality. Instead, they are theoretically informed observations and interpretations, open to empirical verification and following scientific criteria of plausibility and intersubjective comprehensibility. Thus, both approaches adhere to the basic assumptions of social constructivism coined by Berger, Luckmann, and Schütz (Knoblauch and Wilke, 2016; Lindlof, 2008; Schönhagen, 1999).

2.1. Dialogical structure of mass communication

The MSC approach is founded on early works in sociology, economics, and history that described social communication mediated by mass media in terms of exchange and communicative networks (Riepl, 1913; Schäffle, 1875–1878). It conceives mass communication as an interactive exchange of various communicative partners' messages, mediated by journalism (Fürst and Schönhagen, 2020). Different communicative partners ($CP_{a,\ b,\ \ldots,\ n}$) with different degrees of authority to represent social groups or organizations in society engaged in a discourse (cf. Fig. 1). A communicative partner's (e.g., CP_a) message is mediated to reach a rather broad audience (receivers), which contains other potential partners (e.g., CP_b). Those partners can create their own messages that may then, in turn, be mediated by journalists and reach the audience (receivers), including CP_a. The roles of speakers (sources) and addressees are not fixed to a specific individual or group; they are interchangeable and depend on the communicative situation (Bosshart, 2016, pp. 74–77; Fürst and Schönhagen, 2020; Fürst et al., 2015; Wagner, 1977).

Hence, the MSC approach distinguishes two related processes: first, mediation (i.e., journalists gathering, selecting, and transforming messages to disseminate them to receivers), which is largely unidirectional, as indicated by the dotted arrows from journalists to receivers; second, the many-to-many communication process between various communicative partners (as representatives of groups or collectives), illustrated by the dashed arrows.

The MSC approach focuses on the *journalistic* mediation of discourses in society and mainly theorizes the role of journalists and news media. In contrast, the DN approach more generally analyzes sequential structures (adjacency pairs) in dialogical networks that are drawn from different sources, such as newspaper articles, television debates, press conferences, or political speeches (e.g., Kaderka et al., 2018; Leudar et al., 2004; Leudar and Nekvapil, 2004). Such sequences represent a crucial element for network cohesion. They consist of, for example, a demand (first part of the sequence) followed by a rejection (second part) or summons by one actor answered by another. The DN approach distinguishes between a multitude of possible adjacency pairs; in addition to the types mentioned, these are claim–denouncement/dismay, appeal–response/no response, or repairs (Nekvapil and Leudar, 2006). This could contribute to the MSC approach, and media and communication studies in general, because extant analyses are usually based on claims analysis and distinguish only between criticism, support, and demand (e.g., Adam, 2008). Importantly, both approaches share the idea that parts of sequential structures may be contributed at different times and in different locations or contexts, but journalism aims to make them visible by publishing and repro-

[1] However, journalists and journalism have multiple roles and functions (Heise et al., 2014; Weischenberg et al., 2012).

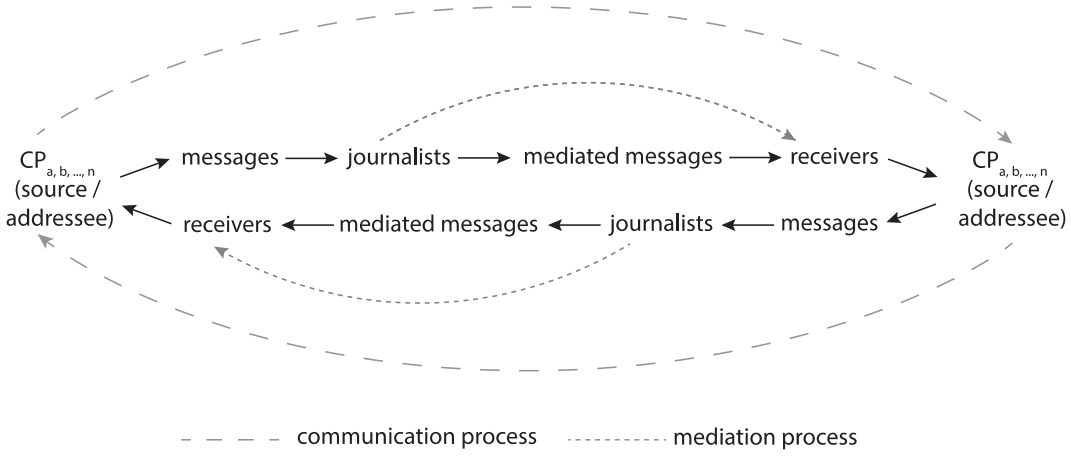

Fig. 1. MSC model of mass communication.

ducing them. Like the MSC approach, the DN approach assumes, or at least implies, the interchangeability of the roles of speakers and addressees: since the members of a dialogical network are in a dialogue, they must be able to take both roles. However, the actors may not have the same rights and power. Such power imbalances between actors may limit the interchangeability of roles, which is discussed in both the DN approach (Leudar and Nekvapil, 2004) and the MSC approach (Bosshart, 2016, pp. 79–81; Fürst et al., 2015; Schönhagen, 2004, pp. 124–126; Wagner, 1978, p. 85). Both approaches, thus, show a striking parallel: they describe mass communication as an interactive process in which the roles of source and addressee are in principle interchangeable and not strictly attributed to a specific individual or social group. Describing mass communication as a process that follows dialogical structures, regardless of the type of media channel, contrasts with common conceptions in media and communication research (see Introduction). The idea of mediated interactivity and a many-to-many flow of communication is generally only associated with the Internet (Bruns, 2005; Franklin and Canter, 2019; Hanson, 2016; Hess and Gutsche, 2018; Lewis and Molyneux, 2018; McQuail and Deuze, 2020; Pürer, 2014), where users are conceived as contributors and labeled "prosumers" or "produsers" (Bruns, 2005, p. 23). Research on interactive processes in public communication is therefore usually reduced to online communication, particularly social media (e.g., Hess and Gutsche, 2018; Larsson, 2018; Lorenzo-Dus and Di Cristofaro, 2016; Smith, 2020) and online comment sections (e.g., Marmorstein and Sclafani, 2017). This research usually assesses interactivity through features of digital platforms' technological and commercial infrastructure, such as shares, likes, or retweets (Maireder and Schlögl, 2014; van Dijck, 2013; Williams et al., 2015). Some studies also examine dialogues in talk shows and television debates (e.g., Hutchby, 2006; Leudar and Nekvapil, 2000) or interviews (e.g., Clayman and Heritage, 2002). In contrast, the MSC and DN approaches focus on neither technological features nor online communication in particular. The MSC approach rather analyzes dialogical structures of journalistically mediated communication while the DN approach has further incorporated press conferences or political speeches, including examining the statements of various social actors and means of dissemination.

2.2. The role of media and journalists

To understand the processes of interactive mass communication, it is essential to analyze not only the flow of communication but also journalists' role. Both the MSC and DN approaches stress the importance of journalistic mediation.

Based on Groth (1960, p. 584), the MSC approach distinguishes two roles in journalism: the mediating and the "productive" role[2]. Following Groth (1960, pp. 543–620), mediation—which he considers crucial—has historically grown as the central function of journalism: enabling and developing a constant public discourse by mediating the statements of various (collective or individual) actors (Fürst et al., 2015; Schönhagen, 2004; Schönhagen and Meißner, 2016). Journalists act as 'hosts,' developing and 'organizing' the discourse and introducing new sources. This mediation is more than merely transmitting information: it means actively and deliberately gathering, selecting, and transforming sources' statements (Wagner, 1977). Journalists can also participate with their own voices. This 'productive' role is realized, for example, through commentary or reviews. In general interest news media it represents an addition to the mediating role. This is supported by current research showing that both journalists and media users consider the dissemination of the journalists' points of view a matter of secondary importance (Heise et al., 2014; Neuberger, 2014a; Weischenberg et al., 2012). Instead, for general interest news outlets, mediating arguments from diverse actors represents journalists' main role. It is deduced historically through the successive evolution from communication in assemblies (e.g., the Athenian Ecclesia, see Schönhagen, 2004, pp. 133–140) to communication over distance and based on the insight that the existence of every society depends on a constant public discourse (Dewey, 1927; Hardt, 2001; Schäffle, 1875–1878). With growing societies and their increasing differentiation, multi-step rationalization processes[3] started in which the message was detached from its source (Schönhagen, 2004, pp. 133–169). First, messengers delivered the communicators' news to various addressees. Later, messages from different sources were gathered and delivered. The availability of affordable writing material (paper) and functioning public mail services enabled a constant in- and output of news and thus the emergence of periodical news collections. Handwritten and at first destined for a rather limited audience, those

[2] We use "productive role," from Groth (1960, p. 584). However, the term is somewhat misleading because journalists also exhibit a 'productive' and active role when investigating and mediating voices of social groups. Selecting and mediating voices should ideally follow the journalistic impartiality norm, including diversity and balance of sources, but are also influenced by journalists' and news organizations' viewpoints (Bosshart, 2016; Haapanen, 2020; Hagen, 1993; Wagner, 1977, pp. 50–51). Studies have shown that "journalists published more arguments from those individuals and groups whose general viewpoint was in accordance with the editorial stance of the newspaper" (Hagen, 1993, p. 334), although this varies considerably between media outlets (Adam et al., 2019).

[3] Rationalization processes are continuous changes that render communication more efficient in fulfilling the need for a permanent social discourse under the conditions of broader social, economic, and technical developments (Schönhagen, 2004; Wagner, 1980, 1995).

collections began to reach a broader public in the sixteenth century. The new possibilities of printing were an important step in producing and widely disseminating newspapers and their role as a forum for public discourse (Bauer, 2011; Conboy, 2004; Nerone, 2013).

The DN approach, too, focuses on journalists' mediating role, considering mass communication a process in which the message is separated from its source (Leudar and Nekvapil, 2004). The communication instances that build the network do not originate at the same time or in the same place or context. As a network develops, a statement that first appeared on TV may be referenced in a newspaper article the next day. Similarly, journalists embed or quote tweets (Haapanen and Perrin, 2018; von Nordheim et al., 2018) and cover reactions on tweets on social media and beyond, including statements by various organizations and social groups (e.g., Conger et al., 2020, September 10). This aspect is especially noteworthy, because Leudar and Nekvapil's empirical work comprises studies across diverse media and formats, including news reports, press conferences, and TV shows. This underlines the dialogicity of media communication across different types of media channels and outlets (e.g., Beck, 2019; Kaderka et al., 2018).

In accordance with the mediating role of journalism in the MSC approach (Wagner, 1995), the DN approach describes journalists' role as "active" (Leudar and Nekvapil, 2004, p. 252): journalists not only select, repeat, and summarize statements and reactions but also gather additional information, such as via interviews with implicated actors, and highlight relevancies. Usually, they do not voice their own opinions but mediate others' opinions and assessments. With reference to Austin's (1962) speech act theory, Leudar and Nekvapil (2004) describe journalists' role as also "performative" (p. 256). This perspective draws from the assumption that "descriptions are performatives like other speech acts" (Leudar and Nekvapil, 2004, p. 256). This underlines again that journalists do not merely describe events or reproduce statements but are key to creating a dialogical network. Without their active contribution, dialogical networks would not emerge in the complex and condensed way they do. Journalists constantly deal with the duplication (or multiplication) of the same arguments worded differently and contributed by different actors and in different contexts. By repeating, rearranging, and merging various statements, journalists amplify certain arguments while the discourse unfolds, thereby making them more visible to (potential) addressees. Those arguments are then more likely to receive a response and hence to further develop the network (Kaderka et al., 2018).

The MSC approach is also concerned with the amplification of some standpoints and the neglect of others (see Fürst et al., 2015, p. 333). Selecting and presenting sources and their positions is influenced by various factors. For instance, official sources are more likely to be included in media coverage (see Section 2.3). Certain standpoints or issues may be pushed to the background due to the limited carrying capacity of news media and, thus, the need for high selectivity (Haapanen and Perrin, 2018; Masini et al., 2018; Massey, 1998; Schönhagen, 2004; Wagner, 1978). Overall, the actual performance of journalistic mediation—including the selection and diversity of sources, positions, and topics—varies between countries and depends on editorial practices, norms, and resources, which differ across media types and outlets (Humprecht and Esser, 2018; Meier, 2019; Pickard, 2020; Van Leuven et al., 2013). Due to the financial crisis of journalism in many countries, a growing profit orientation of media corporations, and shrinking resources for journalistic research, many researchers observed a decreasing diversity of mediated voices in news coverage (for an overview, see Fürst et al., 2015, pp. 337–338; Franklin and Canter, 2019, pp. 60–62, 143; Pickard, 2020). According to the MSC approach, these developments not only weaken journalistic quality but could endanger the very functions of journalism: to mediate the perspectives, opinions, and statements of diverse groups in society and provide a forum for social debate (Fürst and Schönhagen, 2020).

According to the DN approach, journalists are the driving force in the development of dialogical networks. They not only gather representatives' statements but also engage new participants, who are consciously selected to expand the network and cover opposing or complementary viewpoints. Even for direct quotes as exemplars of 'public opinion,' the selection is not at all random (Gaskins et al., 2020; Haapanen and Perrin, 2018). The observation that journalists consciously arrange the communicative partners' voices (Wagner, 1977) helps to "clarify the way journalists compose their articles" (Leudar and Nekvapil, 2004, p. 248). According to the MSC approach, including diverse voices is part of the journalistic impartiality norm, which developed to ensure the provision of an open society-wide forum, the core function of journalism (Schönhagen, 1998). Historical studies showed that journalists considered this norm an important part of their role early on (Dicken-Garcia, 1989; Lundell, 2011; Schönhagen, 1998, 2001; Schröder, 1995). This norm was also described by the first authors interested in the press at the end of the seventeenth century (e.g., von Stieler, 1969 [1695]). It consists of four dimensions: pluralism (i.e., the coverage of diverse voices, standpoints, issues, etc.); separation of sources' messages and journalistic commentary/opinion; transparency of sources to enable the audience to assess the sources' interests and social relevance; and preservation of original sources' meaning to avoid contortion of their statements/arguments. These dimensions are still the core of today's concepts of journalistic quality (Meier, 2019; Neuberger, 2014a).

Essentially, the MSC and DN approaches understand journalists as mediators of messages and 'moderators' of a shared public discourse: they give groups' representatives a voice, make their diverse standpoints visible, and engage them and their represented groups in an ongoing debate. In contrast, conceptions of a unidirectional communication process from journalists to audiences are insufficient to understand the emergence and development of discourses.

2.3. The concept of communicative representation

The role of representatives of social groups is a key concept in the MSC approach. In general, representation arises from statements of members (representatives) of organizations or opinion-based groups, which are attributed to all other (represented) members. Typically, those represented perceive and accept these statements as uttered on their behalf (Wagner, 1978). Representation does not constitute a new phenomenon strictly tied to mass communication. It goes back to assemblies in oral societies, like in ancient Athens (Schönhagen, 2004); the emergence of a limited set of positions regarding an issue advocated by a limited number of representatives is characteristic of nearly every form of group communication (Atkinson, 1982; Schönhagen, 2004; Wagner, 1977, 1995). The carrying capacity of media coverage and audience attention are extremely limited, which constrains journalists to select a small number of speakers (Holt and Karlsson, 2011; Masini et al., 2018; Massey, 1998). Representation is a means of reducing social complexity and rendering possible society-wide communication over distance (Schönhagen, 2004). The DN approach also shows that only few actors are part of dialogical networks (Leudar and Nekvapil, 2004).

Wagner (1978, pp. 73–78) describes three main types of communicative representation (see also Fürst et al., 2015). *Statistical representation* assumes that a certain number of people shares the representative's view and position. Essentially, the actors do not possess specific characteristics, status, or formal legitimation that would formally allow them to represent others. Instead, the

represented identify with them based on a shared opinion on the issue. Statistical representation is common to most instances of group communication, since, typically, other actors are approving an articulated opinion. It occurs, for example, when a TV news segment features an interviewed cyclist complaining about a lack of bike lanes in a city. *Claimed representation* is similar to statistical representation; the difference is that the representative consciously claims to speak for the represented social group. However, the representative lacks formal legitimation, such as a worker professing to speak for all their colleagues. Finally, *legitimized representation* is when the representatives are assigned to speak through election or their position in an organization, such as a party leader explaining the party's position on same-sex marriage in a press release covered by the media. Legitimized representation is the most important and common type in mass media and includes statements from spokespeople and communication officers of parties, nongovernmental organizations, companies, associations, or unions. By their function, they are authorized to speak for a group or organization, thus allowing journalists and the audience to ascribe specific acts and statements to the larger group.

In the context of the DN approach, Leudar and Nekvapil (2004, pp. 251, 260–261) cite examples that illustrate the importance of representatives of social groups in journalistically mediated communication. However, the relation between a specific statement and its source (the representative) may be unclear, such as when journalists 'gloss' many similar arguments and present them as one position in common, creating alliances between the respective social groups (Leudar et al., 2018). This can lead to statements for which the representative is no longer identifiable, such as when different voices are summarized as "there are some concerns" (p. 23). According to the MSC approach, this poses a problem because it hinders social orientation (Wagner, 1995, pp. 33–34, 36). Although journalists often follow the idea of mediating diverse voices (see the above-mentioned impartiality norm), they tend to neglect certain social groups, such as minorities and marginalized or non-organized groups, particularly when they lack a visible (and formally legitimized) spokesperson or communication officer (Domingo and Le Cam, 2014; Haapanen and Perrin, 2018; Schönhagen and Meißner, 2016; Thorbjørnsrud and Ustad Figenschou, 2016; Van Leuven et al., 2013).

Many studies revealed journalists' preference for formally legitimized representatives in news media (Carpenter, 2008; Fairclough, 1988; Gerhards, 1997; Schröter, 1995; Sigal, 1973). Therefore, various scholars called for enhancing the visibility and participation of 'ordinary citizens' (individuals without specific roles) and actors with low resources or political power and criticized journalists for predominantly featuring well-known sources, such as politicians, government employees, or celebrities (De Keyser and Raeymaeckers, 2012; Holt and Karlsson, 2011; Massey, 1998). The concept of communicative representation nuances this criticism: in the MSC approach, participation and visibility are not to be confused with the actual number of people allowed to express themselves individually. Rather, the audience is conceived as speakers and members of (represented) social groups that are involved or can engage in the discourse at any time. Participation includes being and feeling represented as a member of groups (students, parents, employees, minority members, citizens, etc.) and does not depend on the public visibility of individuals' statements (cf. Peters and Witschge, 2015, who hold a similar view). When groups are not formally organized or the arguments and positions regarding an emerging issue are not yet defined along the lines of established social (interest) groups, statistical and claimed representation play a greater role and are an important addition to legitimized representation (Fürst et al., 2015; Wagner, 1978, p. 85). The MSC approach highlights the importance of including organizations and groups with low resources and power in the public discourse to represent the diverse standpoints in society. However, it does not support the view that including more statements from ordinary citizens is in and of itself an improvement (Fürst and Schönhagen, 2020). In fact, empirical findings indicate that neither journalists nor media users consider it journalists' core task to publish such statements (Heise et al., 2014; Weischenberg et al., 2012). Further, media users perceive official sources' statements to be more credible than those from non-official sources (e.g., Miller and Kurpius, 2010).

The MSC approach focuses on various aspects of communicative representation, such as in what capacity and for whom representatives speak, the relation between representatives and their groups, how it is mediated in media coverage, whom these representatives address, and what dialogues and debates between which groups might evolve. These representations underpin the emergence and consolidation of social groups (Wagner, 1978). The concept of communicative representation originated in the MSC approach. However, discourse analytical approaches have investigated related aspects of representation, such as how membership categorization (i.e., the distinction between 'us' and 'them') contributes to demarcating social groups (e.g., van Dijk, 1991; Leudar et al., 2004). Other contributions describe in what contexts certain social groups, such as ethnic minorities, are portrayed in media coverage, what belief systems and stereotypes these contexts evoke (e.g., van Dijk, 1991), or how journalists describe and quote actors' statements (e.g., Fairclough, 1988).

The concept of communicative representation as elaborated in the MSC approach could contribute to the DN approach's aim of explaining how journalists compose their articles (Leudar and Nekvapil, 2004) and shed light on the issue of "who could have joined the dialogical network, but did not" (p. 261). Regarding the first of these two issues, the concept of representation in the MSC approach and the norm of impartiality would suggest that journalists in news media gather and mediate representatives' statements to provide an overview of current events and debates. This overview ideally reflects various views and as many social groups as possible but at least includes the views of actors and groups that are involved or directly concerned, as shown in media-linguistic research on quotes in news media (Haapanen, 2020; Haapanen and Perrin, 2018). Since journalists mediate representatives' statements speaking for their social group, it is not necessary to cite the personal statement of every group member. Leudar and Nekvapil (2004) speculate about possible reasons someone who could have joined a dialogical network did not (p. 261) and suggest that addressees might refrain from answering an initial statement because they do not consider the source a worthy partner in negotiation. The MSC approach adds further reasons why individuals might not personally formulate a public response/statement: they see their interests and positions already represented, lack knowledge of how to deal with journalists or publicly respond to other actors' statements, or fear countering majority opinions (Fürst and Schönhagen, 2020; Wagner, 1978, pp. 58–59).

3. Discussion and conclusion

This paper aimed at contributing to interdisciplinary research by comparing and (partly) integrating two approaches to mass communication, one from ethnomethodology and conversation analysis and the other from media and communication studies. The approaches, developed independently, share the striking parallel of conceiving journalistically mediated communication as a dialogical and interactive process in which the roles of source and addressee are interchangeable. This conception contrasts the predominant view of mass communication as unidirectional (from communicators to the audience) with limited possibilities for

interaction and feedback (see Introduction). Many scholars understood traditional mass communication and online communication as having opposite characteristics and assumed that the Internet offered a 'revolutionary' potential for interactive participation that would lead to a much greater diversity of voices in the public sphere (e.g., Bruns, 2005; Franklin and Canter, 2019; Hanson, 2016; Holt and Karlsson, 2011; McQuail and Deuze, 2020; Pürer, 2014). Empirical studies in the last decade have invalidated these general assumptions (see, e.g., Fürst et al., 2015, pp. 328–330; Hess and Gutsche, 2018; Lewis and Molyneux, 2018; Van Leuven et al., 2013), whereas print media and public service broadcasters were shown to convey a multitude of voices (Fürst et al., 2015, p. 329; Humprecht and Esser, 2018; Masini et al., 2018). These findings illustrate the usefulness of the DN and MSC approaches, as they include analyzing offline and online channels and emphasize the importance of journalistic mediation of diverse voices. Given COVID-19, these approaches suggest analyzing how concerned social groups (e.g., politicians, workers' unions, health professionals, scientists of various disciplines, pupils, women) relate to each other as the discourse unfolds, considering that they may take the role of both speakers and addressees. Comparing the DN and MSC approaches revealed important explanatory potential and useful concepts for theoretical development and empirical research of such mediated discourses.

3.1. Journalistic mediation enables a shared public discourse

The DN approach focuses primarily on the communication process between communicative partners; it describes the mediation process between journalists and communicative partners rather briefly. In contrast, describing and analyzing journalistic mediation is crucial in the MSC approach. That model highlights the interplay of two basic processes in mass communication: the journalistic *mediation processes* enable interactive *communication processes* between the representatives of social groups, which act as communicative partners in public discourse. Importantly, mediating messages is much more complex than merely transmitting statements (verbatim), for it means actively collecting, selecting, transforming, and disseminating messages. This mediation enables a shared discourse between dispersed societal members and therefore is crucial for society (Schönhagen, 2004, 2006; Wagner, 1977).

The logic of mediation characterizes both offline and online journalism but differs widely from the logic of algorithmic news dissemination: big intermediaries do not create content themselves but perform a second-order, data-driven distribution of journalistic content that applies economic standards. Their aim is not to provide a forum for discussion in which different issues and opinions are represented but to gain and monetize users' attention and data (Beck, 2019; van Dijck, 2013). Despite their growing importance, they largely disseminate the content of legacy news media, so news organizations still provide the most widely perceived news content (Nelson, 2020; Nielsen, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2020). Users identify benefits of algorithmically curated news but are concerned about losing their grip on socially relevant topics and fear that personalized news might erode a shared public dialogue (Bodó et al., 2019; Monzer et al., 2020). This argument also highlights the importance of a *shared* society-wide public discourse in which journalists mediate diverse standpoints.

Two main observations proved essential to the way journalists compose their articles. 1) According to the DN approach, journalists introduce new participants to develop the network; these participants usually hold a different or complementary view to those views already represented in news coverage, which expands the network (Leudar and Nekvapil, 2004). The MSC approach suggests that in general interest media, selecting participants is nonrandom but follows the principle of presenting diverse views, opinions, and standpoints (i.e., ideally all (concerned) social groups). 2) Since space in mass media is limited, journalists have to be selective about whom they cover. They often turn to formally legitimized representatives to reduce complexity (Fürst et al., 2015; Schönhagen, 2004). This improves social orientation but might risk neglecting other actors, particularly unorganized or minority groups.

The MSC's considerations of communicative representation can provide important pointers on the question of who joins a dialogical network and who does not. Given that representatives speak for members of a group or organization, those members might not deem it necessary to add their own voices because they perceive themselves, their issues, and their opinions represented in public discourse (Fürst et al., 2015). However, communication mediated by journalists is not solely a dialogue between certain parties whose voices are represented. Instead, audience members participate as latent partners (in their capacity as members of social groups); they can join the discourse or, if their positions and interests are not represented over a longer period, form counterpublics via other communication channels that could then stimulate media coverage (Schönhagen, 2004, pp. 126, 172; Fürst et al., 2015; Fürst and Schönhagen, 2020; Wagner, 1978). These notions could be useful to develop the DN approach, since it does not address the media audience.

The question of who and what instances of communication belong to a dialogical network (or do not) implies a complex (and insufficiently resolved) issue in empirical research about dialogical mass communication: where a network starts and ends. Leudar et al. (2018, p. 4) opt for a rather practical way defining the starting point, arguing that "one has to start somewhere." Leudar and Nekvapil (2004, p. 260) suggest "local endings" that occur when the addressee refrains from responding. It remains unclear at what point such local endings become a 'definitive' ending. The MSC approach adopts a narrower perspective focusing on journalistically mediated dialogues in media coverage. However, it is also not completely straightforward in defining the boundaries. Generally, dialogue is understood as networked communication about an issue. A (new) dialogue starts when an actor (re)introduces a topic and others build upon it by contributing their own opinion and discussing others' opinions. Since it is often unclear exactly where a new issue emerged, the MSC approach might also be constrained to opt for a pragmatic, case-specific definition of the start of a dialogue. Based on the concept of communicative representation and the importance of viewpoint diversity (Fürst and Schönhagen, 2020; Wagner, 1977), we argue that the dialogue continues for as long as new sources are mediated or complementary arguments extend the issue. The DN approach's insights on sequential structures and their importance for network cohesion could solve the methodological issue of defining network boundaries (by including only actors and statements that are directly connected to other actors or statements). Opting for this actor- rather than topic-based definition might be advantageous because, arguably, unconnected actors and statements do not contribute to developing a specific network even if they discuss the same or a similar topic.

3.2. Future research

Since different disciplines contribute to the field of media and communication studies (Craig, 1999), future research should continue to strive for interdisciplinary integration of approaches describing mass communication. This will not only advance interdisciplinary research but also strengthen theoretical conceptions in different disciplines. More specifically, in terms of the DN and MSC approaches, more empirical research is needed, particularly

regarding different (not only political) issues. Journalistic practices and performances relate to not only political discourses but all relevant topics in society, including culture, science and education, lifestyle, law, economy, health, religion, or the environment (Bosshart and Schönhagen, 2013; Hess and Gutsche, 2018). Moreover, integrating new methods might be necessary. Communication research has often used quantitative content analysis to assess which official and non-official sources were represented in speakers' roles in how many news articles (e.g., Carpenter, 2008; De Keyser and Raeymaeckers, 2012; Ferree et al., 2002; Holt and Karlsson, 2011; Massey, 1998; von Nordheim et al., 2018; Van Leuven et al., 2013) and the existence of opposing viewpoints within singular news articles (e.g., Humprecht and Esser, 2018). Since this research design does not allow for analyzing dialogues and viewpoint diversity as they evolve from consecutive editions and across different channels (Masini et al., 2018), future research should strive to more thoroughly investigate the communicative relations on different levels: 1) how different representatives refer to each other (what kind of communicative 'edges' exist in a network and how they might change as an exchange develops), 2) the relation between representatives and represented, particularly whether members of social groups feel that their positions and interests are represented in public discourse, and 3) the emergence and development of arguments in the dialogue (Fürst et al., 2015; Kösters and Jandura, 2019; Manning, 2001).

Methodologically, social network analysis provides the means to represent connections between actors. Research has used this method mainly to investigate online communication (i.e., connections via hyperlinks, likes, followers, etc.; see, e.g., Maireder and Schlögl, 2014; Williams et al., 2015). The kind of network emerging from such connections cannot be considered a public discourse. The meaning of a follower, like, or retweet remains largely unclear (Freelon, 2014). However, network analysis can also be applied to data from relational content analysis (Neuberger, 2014b). Gathering such data from news items is time consuming but bears three major benefits: 1) the quality of the relation (the edge) can be defined during data collection, 2) it allows for including data from online and offline sources, and 3) it allows for assessing the emergence and development of arguments and issues. As the DN approach demonstrates, different (types of) media are intertwined and thus cannot be treated separately. Other examples of such interconnectedness are media references in interviews (Fetzer, 2006) or the relations between social networking sites and news outlets (McGregor, 2019; Neuberger et al., 2019; von Nordheim et al., 2018). If discourse is thought of as society-wide communication, it is central to include different outlets and channels in empirical research.

In an essay about the declining media trust and increasing polarization of society, Robinson (2019, p. 59) argues that "it is the press' job to remind citizens that *shared* [emphasis added] discourses must happen for the advancement of our country, localities, and ourselves." The idea of an open public discourse, meaning an exchange of viewpoints on various issues shaped by the voices of diverse actors, is therefore considered a vital aspect of the functioning of society. In complex societies, (individual or collective) actors contribute their messages in different times, locations, and contexts. These statements, taken separately, can hardly constitute a dialogue in the sense of negotiating current issues. Journalism, however, enables such a constant public discourse by gathering, selecting, and transforming the messages of various actors, mediating them and making them available to the audience. The MSC and DN approaches provide a basis that allows us to theorize and analyze the networked structures that emerge from this journalistic mediation.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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