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MEASURING WHAT MATTERS:
THE ECHO HOW-TO SERIES

How to commission successful media & social analysis

A practical guide for Corporate Communications leaders

Media and social analysis is one of the most valuable tools available to communications teams. When done well, it can demonstrate the value of communications, provide early warnings of reputational risk, and guide leadership decisions. When done poorly, it becomes a box-ticking exercise that generates more data than meaning. This guide explains how to prepare a clear, complete brief for your analysis partner, what information to provide, and how to avoid the most common pitfalls.

1) Before you begin: laying the groundwork

Successful analysis begins before any data is collected. The preparation stage ensures that what is measured is aligned with what matters. Too often, organisations rush into analysis without setting clear objectives or involving the right people. The result is reporting that counts activity but fails to explain impact.

Stakeholder alignment

Start by mapping internal audiences who will use the analysis. Beyond Comms, audiences such as Corporate Affairs, Sales and ExCom will often have an interest. Ask what each group needs to know, what questions they expect the analysis to answer, and how they prefer to see findings presented. Alignment at this stage avoids future disagreements and ensures the final reports are relevant and actionable.

Clarify objectives

Good analysis begins with good questions. Rather than listing deliverables, define the business questions that need to be answered: *Are our messages cutting through in key markets? Which outlets are driving inquiries or influencing stakeholders? What risks are emerging?* Framing analysis in this way gives agencies the freedom to apply their expertise and propose the best methods.

Prioritise relationships over transactions

You are not buying software or a dashboard - you are investing in interpretation, judgment, and experience. Insist on meeting the team who will work on your account. Their understanding of your organisation and ability to challenge assumptions will determine whether reports simply describe media activity or genuinely inform strategy.

2) What to provide your vendor

The more context and clarity you give, the better your partner can deliver relevant insights. A strong brief should include the following elements:

Context and purpose

Explain the organisational background and the role of communications in supporting broader business goals. Define the purpose of the analysis – whether it's to benchmark activity, track campaigns, measure agency performance, assess risks, or demonstrate ROI. Make clear what success looks like: what would change in how leadership perceives communications if this analysis worked perfectly?

Scope and coverage

Specify the regions, markets, and outlets to be included. Indicate priority markets and tier-one media, and list any paywalled or trade publications that must be covered. Define the **media types** required – for example, Online, Social, Print, and Broadcast (radio, TV, podcasts). Include your competitor or peer set, key spokespeople, and topics or messages to track. This ensures the dataset is representative of your real communication environment.
Be realistic about reach. Very few programmes are truly global. Prioritising markets that matter most produces higher quality insights than spreading analysis too thinly.

Cadence and timelines

Agree a regular reporting rhythm – monthly operational reports, quarterly strategic summaries, and ad-hoc issue alerts. Link deadlines to key internal cycles such as Board meetings, campaign reviews, or investor updates. Allow enough time for data validation and interpretation; rushed reports often compromise the quality of insights.

Metrics and definitions

Agree what you want measured, and how. Standard metrics should include:

- **Volume of coverage** (how much attention was generated)
- **Sentiment** (positive, neutral, negative)
- **Most impactful articles or posts**, explaining why they matter (reach, influence, alignment with goals)
- **Message analysis** – how effectively your key messages appear and resonate
- **Competitor benchmarking** – share of voice, tone, and message pull-through
- **Impact measures** – how coverage correlates with inquiries, engagement, web traffic, or reputation indicators
- **Tracking** – where stories appear, prominence, and target audience reach
- **Risks and emerging issues** – tone shifts, misinformation, or negative narratives.

Clear definitions prevent confusion later. Ensure everyone understands what 'reach', 'sentiment', or 'impact' actually mean in your context.

Practicalities and governance

Provide historical data if available – typical monthly volumes, campaign peaks, and past challenges. This helps the analyst distinguish trends from anomalies. Share brand guidelines, communications calendars, and message houses to give them a clear view of what success looks like.

Be aware of **social media restrictions**: X (Twitter) is mostly open, but Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and TikTok are partly closed environments from a listening perspective. Ask how your vendor lawfully accesses or samples these platforms. Confirm who will manage the relationship on both sides and how often you will meet for updates.

Finally, discuss budget expectations and priorities. A realistic range allows agencies to propose creative but achievable solutions. Be open about what is essential versus optional.

Ask how **AI** is used in their workflow. Many vendors employ AI for data gathering and sentiment tagging, but human validation is critical to ensure accuracy and contextual understanding. Confirm how results are reviewed, how data is stored, and how privacy is protected.

3) What to expect from good reporting

A strong analysis programme delivers clarity, not clutter. The most effective deliverables combine evidence with interpretation:

- **Executive summary** – a concise 1–2 page overview with trends, implications, and recommendations
- **KPI dashboard** – tracking volume, sentiment, and message pull-through
- **Annotations** – examples that illustrate the narrative
- **Issues heatmap** – emerging risks and opportunities
- **Narrative insights** – 'So what / Now what' commentary that connects findings to business priorities.

Reports should be concise, actionable, and visually clear. Use quarterly reviews to refresh message lists, competitor sets, and sentiment taxonomies. Treat the analysis as a living process that evolves with organisational needs.

4) Common pitfalls – and how to avoid them

Many analysis projects underperform because of avoidable mistakes. Watch out for these:

Unclear briefs
Without clear objectives, analysts are forced to guess what matters, leading to superficial reporting

Compressed timelines
Rushing data collection or skipping validation reduces accuracy and insight quality

Overemphasis on outputs
Counting clips or mentions doesn't show impact. Focus instead on interpretation and strategic value

Tool obsession
Technology is important, but human analysis adds meaning. Don't let dashboards replace judgment

Skipping onboarding
Implementation takes time: taxonomy setup, backfilling data, and refining search terms all matter

Poor communication
Regular check ins prevent small misunderstandings from snowballing into flawed analysis.

Good governance and steady collaboration turn a supplier into a true strategic partner.

5) Connecting analysis to the wider evaluation process

Media and social analysis is only one part of a comprehensive communications evaluation. To make the most of your investment, link it to broader performance frameworks such as AMEC's Integrated Evaluation Framework or your organisation's own measurement model.

1. Planning and design – Align analysis with organisational goals and agree methods upfront.

2. Outputs – Measure visibility, reach, tone, and message quality.

3. Out takes – Assess audience engagement and understanding.

4. Outcomes – Track how communications influence perceptions or behaviour.

5. Impact – Demonstrate the contribution to organisational value, reputation, or performance. Echo's "Reputation Dividend" model is perfect for this.

By connecting these stages, analysis moves beyond counting to explaining. It becomes a tool for learning, adapting, and demonstrating the tangible value of communications.

6) The bottom line

Commissioning effective media and social analysis is about clarity, preparation, and partnership. The more context, data, and direction you provide, the more meaningful the insights you will receive. A strong brief sets clear objectives, realistic expectations, and a shared understanding of success. When communications teams take the time to build this foundation, analysis shifts from being a retrospective report to a forward looking management tool that informs decisions, protects reputation, and proves impact.

About our media and social analysis services

CLEAR, INSIGHTFUL HUMAN-LED EVALUATION OF YOUR MEDIA COVERAGE

Echo Research provides clear and insightful analysis of your media coverage, tailored to your needs.

We help you measure your corporate reputation and demonstrate the effectiveness of your communications, narratives and stakeholder engagement. We offer actionable insights and practical advice on developing measurement frameworks and key performance indicators.

Our award-winning sentiment analysis identifies communication strengths and priorities for your reputation management.

We offer integrated analysis, combining media analysis and stakeholder research with wider business metrics for actionable insights on the impact and outcomes of your communications.

Our customisable solutions combine AI-powered analytics with human-led analysis by our highly experienced international analyst team.

- **PR measurement and analysis**
- **Competitor benchmarking**
- **Media monitoring (earned)**
- **Social listening (earned and owned)**
- **Reputation drivers**
- **Communications effectiveness**
- **Message evaluation**
- **Spokespeople performance**
- **Advocacy and stakeholder engagement**
- **Media analysis dashboards, reports and executive debriefing**
- **Framework development**
- **Integration with stakeholder analysis**

About Echo Research

For over 30 years, we have delivered research-led, board-ready insights to Business leaders working around the world.

Our award-winning, global research, analysis and insight gives our clients the confidence to make informed decisions to support communications strategies that protect and build corporate and brand reputation.

35-year track record

700+ clients

100+ industry awards

80 staff, analysts & associates

Global research in 50+ languages

STAKEHOLDER RESEARCH

Inform strategy and understand the perceptions of your target audiences through bespoke quantitative and qualitative research

REPUTATION ANALYSIS

Enhance your reputation and demonstrate communications effectiveness by integrating stakeholder research, media analysis and social listening

REPUTATION VALUATION

REPUTATION DIVIDEND

Quantify the financial value of your reputation through rigorous statistical modelling of financial and reputation data. Offering practical insights to guide strategic priorities

BRITAIN'S MOST ADMIRED COMPANIES STUDY

BRITAIN'S MOST ADMIRED COMPANIES

Unlock insights into the drivers of your reputation and benchmark them against peers, drawn from the UK's longest-running survey of C-Suite and analyst perceptions of FTSE companies

MEDIA & SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYSIS

Human-led, AI-enhanced news and social media analysis delivering tailored, actionable insights into reputation and communications effectiveness

RISK & ISSUES MONITORING

Reputational risk monitoring powered by AI and human-led expert analysis – delivering early warnings, risk radars, and strategic guidance to manage reputation

INFLUENCER MAPPING

Identify the most influential online and offline stakeholders, providing evidence to effectively prioritise and guide stakeholder engagement

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP RESEARCH

Authoritative, media-ready research designed to elevate brand visibility and thought leadership with robust and credible insights

Measuring what matters – the Echo how-to series

01 How to commission successful stakeholder research

02 **How to commission successful media & social analysis**

03 How to make the most of the Britain's Most Admired Companies study

04 How to conduct a reputation audit

05 How to value your company's reputation with Reputation Dividend

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