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Article

Media Accountability and Administrative Responsiveness in Public Management: An Institution–Communication Co-Construction Analysis

Zhiyao Li^{1,*}

¹ Hebei Institute of Communications, Shijiazhuang, China

* Correspondence: Zhiyao Li, Hebei Institute of Communications, Shijiazhuang, China

Abstract: This paper examines the relationship between media accountability and administrative responsiveness in public management through an institution–communication co-construction perspective. In mediated governance environments, administrative response is shaped not only by internal procedures and formal accountability rules, but also by media exposure, public opinion, open data infrastructures, and government communication. Using heat and hot water service interruptions in New York City public housing as a case, the study combines single-case analysis, process tracing, and descriptive open-data analysis. The case draws comprehensively on NYC 311 Service Requests, the NYCHA Service Interruptions Portal, GDELT news data, and selected media reports. The analysis shows that media reporting transforms dispersed resident complaints and service interruption records into visible public governance issues. It also compresses complex technical, budgetary, and organizational problems into clearer questions of administrative responsibility. Administrative responsiveness, in turn, includes complaint processing, public explanation, repair action, service-status disclosure, and institutional adjustment. The findings suggest that media accountability and administrative responsiveness are mutually shaped through institutional information, media framing, resident feedback, and administrative communication. Ultimately, responsiveness in public management functions as an administrative, communicative, data-supported, and institutionally mediated governance process. These insights provide valuable theoretical and practical implications for enhancing governmental transparency, improving citizen engagement, and optimizing digital governance frameworks in contemporary urban public administration.

Keywords: media accountability; administrative responsiveness; public management; open data; urban governance

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1. Introduction

Administrative responsiveness has long been regarded as a central criterion for evaluating public management. In conventional public administration research, responsiveness usually refers to the capacity of government agencies to react to citizens' needs, public complaints, and service failures in a timely and appropriate manner. Such a view emphasizes administrative procedures, service delivery capacity, and institutional accountability. However, in a highly mediated governance environment, government response is no longer produced only within the internal administrative system. It is also shaped by media exposure, public opinion, open data infrastructures, and governmental communication strategies [1]. Public service failures may first appear as dispersed individual complaints, but media coverage can transform them into visible public issues,

attach responsibility to specific agencies, and increase the political and reputational cost of administrative inaction.

This paper examines the relationship between media accountability and administrative responsiveness from an institution–communication co-construction perspective. Rather than treating media accountability as an external pressure and administrative responsiveness as a passive reaction, this study argues that the two are mutually constituted through institutional rules, information disclosure mechanisms, complaint-handling platforms, media framing, and public communication. Media organizations depend on complaint records, official data, resident narratives, and government statements to construct accountability claims. At the same time, administrative agencies use public statements, service updates, open data, and repair actions to shape how their responses are observed, evaluated, and further reported. Therefore, administrative responsiveness should not be understood only as the speed of solving a complaint, but also as the degree to which the response is substantive, transparent, publicly verifiable, and capable of producing institutional correction.

To develop this argument, the paper addresses two research questions [2]. First, how does media accountability influence administrative responsiveness in public service failure cases? Second, how are media accountability and administrative responsiveness co-constructed through institutional and communicative mechanisms? These questions are explored through a case study of heat and hot water service interruptions in New York City public housing. This case is analytically useful because it involves a basic public service, clearly identifiable administrative responsibility, extensive media coverage, resident complaints, official service data, and observable repair responses. The New York City 311 Service Requests dataset records information such as complaint type, responding agency, and geographic location, making it possible to observe complaint patterns and administrative processing in a public-facing data environment. In addition, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Service Interruptions portal reports heat, hot water, elevator, gas, and other service interruptions, including current interruptions, restored service within the last 24 hours, and upcoming planned outages.

This study makes three contributions [2]. First, it develops an institution–communication co-construction framework to move beyond the linear assumption that media exposure simply causes government response. Second, it disaggregates administrative responsiveness into response speed, response content, transparency, and institutional repair, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of responsiveness in mediated public management. Third, by combining open administrative data, public service interruption records, and concrete media-reported service failure cases, the paper shows how media reporting, complaint platforms, and administrative communication jointly form a governance feedback loop. The analysis suggests that in contemporary public management, responsiveness is not only an administrative capacity but also a communicative and institutionally mediated process through which public authority is continuously observed, questioned, and reconstructed.

2. Literature Review and Analytical Framework

2.1. Administrative Responsiveness in Public Management

Administrative responsiveness is a central concept in public management because it reflects how public agencies recognize and address citizens' needs, complaints, and service failures. It is often associated with timely reaction, but speed alone is insufficient. A rapid yet vague reply may satisfy procedural expectations without solving the underlying problem. Therefore, administrative responsiveness can be understood through five dimensions: timely response, substantive response, procedural transparency, corrective action, and institutional learning [3].

A timely response concerns whether an agency reacts within a reasonable period. A substantive response refers to whether the agency provides explanation, repair, compensation, or concrete action rather than symbolic acknowledgement. Procedural

transparency means that citizens can observe how a complaint is received, assigned, processed, and closed. Corrective action focuses on operational measures taken to restore services or reduce harm. Institutional learning asks whether repeated complaints lead to changes in rules, resources, monitoring systems, or service standards [4].

Existing studies usually explain responsiveness through bureaucratic capacity, administrative incentives, service delivery arrangements, and formal accountability mechanisms [1]. This perspective is useful, but it does not fully capture responsiveness in a mediated governance environment. Public agencies now respond not only to internal procedures and citizen complaints, but also to media visibility, public opinion, and the risk that delayed or inadequate action will become a broader accountability issue.

2.2. Media Accountability in Public Governance

Media accountability refers to the role of media in enhancing the visibility, answerability, and public scrutiny of public authorities. Accountability functions not only as a legal or administrative mechanism but also as a communicative process wherein public actors are expected to justify their conduct before relevant audiences. In this context, media serve as an informal accountability forum by selecting issues, framing responsibility, and prompting explanations from public agencies.

In cases of public service failure, media accountability fulfills four principal functions. First, it enhances problem visibility by synthesizing isolated individual complaints into coherent, recognizable public issues. Second, it performs agenda-setting by shaping which service failures attract sustained public and administrative attention; media coverage significantly influences perceived issue importance. Third, it supports responsibility attribution by reframing technical or organizational challenges into clear questions of administrative accountability [5]. Fourth, it intensifies public pressure through sustained reporting, inclusion of resident experiences, reference to empirical data, and systematic follow-up. Consequently, media accountability affects not only whether public agencies respond, but also the specificity, transparency, and verifiability required in those responses.

2.3. Institution–Communication Co-Construction Framework

This paper proposes an institution–communication co-construction framework to elucidate the relationship between media accountability and administrative responsiveness [6]. These two dimensions are not linked by a linear sequence in which media exposure directly triggers government response. Rather, they co-evolve through reciprocal influences between institutional arrangements and communicative practices. Institutional structures govern the availability of information, the recording of complaints, the assignment of responsible agencies, and the criteria applied for performance evaluation. Communicative processes shape how service failures are interpreted, how accountability is ascribed, and how official responses are understood by diverse stakeholders.

As shown in Figure 1, the framework comprises four interrelated layers: institutional context, media accountability, administrative responsiveness, and public feedback. The institutional context encompasses open data regulations, formal complaint mechanisms, accountability protocols, and service quality standards. Media accountability involves problem visibility, agenda setting, attribution of responsibility, and amplification of public pressure. Administrative responsiveness includes timeliness, explanatory clarity, corrective action, transparency of outcomes, and institutional adjustments [7]. Public feedback incorporates citizen complaints, collective attention, sustained media follow-up, and assessments of institutional trustworthiness.

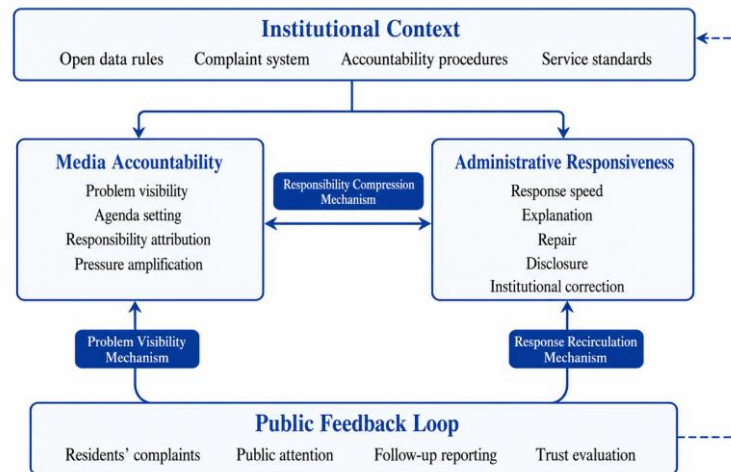


Figure 1. Institution-Communication Co-Construction Framework of Media Accountability and Administrative Responsiveness

Three interlocking mechanisms connect these layers. First, the problem visibility mechanism illustrates how citizen complaints, open data disclosures, and journalistic reporting collectively render service deficiencies observable to broader audiences [8]. Second, the responsibility compression mechanism reflects how media translate multifaceted technical, fiscal, and bureaucratic challenges into discrete questions of public accountability—for instance, whether essential services such as heating and hot water were restored within stipulated timeframes. Third, the response recirculation mechanism indicates that administrative replies themselves become subjects of subsequent media scrutiny; precise, evidence-based responses may alleviate public concern, whereas ambiguous or untimely replies may provoke renewed critical attention.

Consequently, administrative responsiveness in mediated public management is not solely an internal organizational outcome. It emerges as a publicly visible, communicatively mediated, and institutionally embedded process—continuously shaped by media framing, citizen input, and governmental transparency practices [9].

3. Research Design, Data and Case Selection

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a single-case study design, complemented by process tracing and descriptive open-data analysis [10]. The case centers on a specific public service failure to examine the interplay between media accountability and administrative responsiveness. Process tracing reconstructs the chronological sequence of resident complaints, media coverage, administrative responses, and subsequent public evaluation. Descriptive open-data analysis strengthens case interpretation using observable records on complaints, service disruptions, and media attention.

The analytical focus lies on the governance process through which a public service issue gains visibility, is attributed to responsible administrative entities, elicits institutional and communicative responses, and re-enters public discourse via media reporting and resident feedback [11]. This design aligns with the institution-communication co-construction framework, as it integrates administrative records, media texts, and official response materials within a unified case process.

3.2. Case Selection

The selected case examines interruptions to heat and hot water services in public housing in New York City. This case involves essential residential services, a clearly defined public authority, documented resident complaints, publicly accessible administrative data, sustained media coverage, and official records of service interruptions. Such interruptions directly impact residents' basic living conditions and

offer a well-defined context for analyzing administrative responsiveness in public service delivery [2].

The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) serves as the central public agency in this case. Its Service Interruptions Portal publishes real-time and historical information on service disruptions affecting heat, hot water, elevators, gas, electricity, and water systems. The portal specifies interruption type, affected developments, buildings, units, resident counts, report timestamps, and restoration status. These structured records render service failures and corresponding repair responses empirically observable within the administrative process.

The case also features a pronounced dimension of media-based accountability [12]. Reporting indicated that NYCHA developments experienced 3,605 utility outages during the heating season from October 1, 2021 to May 31, 2022, compared with 2,872 in the prior heating season. These outages primarily involved heat, hot water, and water services. The reported increase of approximately 25.5% was widely characterized in media coverage as a significant rise in critical service failures, illustrating how operational deficiencies were reframed as matters of public accountability.

3.3. Data Sources

The study uses four types of data and documents, as summarized in Table 1. The first source is the NYC 311 Service Requests dataset. Each record contains information about a service request, including complaint type, responding agency, geographic location, and created date. These fields are used to identify heat and hot water related complaints, examine complaint timing, and approximate response speed through the interval between created date and closed date.

Table 1. Data Sources and Analytical Use

Data source	Data type	Key variables / materials	Analytical use
NYC 311 Service Requests	Open administrative data	Complaint type, created date, closed date, agency, location	Measure complaint volume and response time
NYCHA Service Interruptions	Public service status data	Interruption type, affected buildings, affected residents, restoration status	Trace service failure and repair response
GDELT / selected news reports	Open media data and news texts	Media frequency, keywords, responsibility framing	Analyze media accountability and agenda setting
Official statements / reports	Public documents	Explanations, repair measures, reform commitments	Assess substantive administrative response

The second source is the NYCHA Service Interruptions Portal. It provides public-facing service status information for current interruptions, restored services within the last 24 hours, and upcoming planned outages. The portal is used to trace operational service failure and restoration response [13].

The third source is GDELT and selected media reports. GDELT monitors print, broadcast, and web news media in over 100 languages and updates every 15 minutes, making it suitable for identifying media attention and issue salience. Selected media reports are used to examine accountability framing, resident narratives, and attribution of responsibility.

The fourth source is official statements and public reports. These materials are used to assess whether administrative responses include explanation, repair measures, or public disclosure. Together, these sources connect public complaints, operational service records, media framing, and administrative response.

3.4. Analytical Indicators

Four observational indicators are employed. Media attention is measured by the number of relevant reports, temporal distribution of coverage, and frequency of keywords such as “NYCHA,” “heat,” “hot water,” and “outage.” Accountability framing assesses whether media reports identify responsible agencies, highlight administrative delays, link individual hardship to systemic service failures, or critically examine the adequacy of official responses.

Response speed is defined as the elapsed time between complaint creation and closure in 311 records. Response substance evaluates whether administrative action includes explanation, repair, service restoration, public disclosure, or institutional adjustment. Media attention and accountability framing capture the communicative dimension of the process, whereas response speed and response substance reflect the administrative dimension. Their interrelationship is examined through the chronological sequence of complaint accumulation, media visibility, administrative response, and follow-up evaluation [14].

4. Case Background and Descriptive Evidence

4.1. Case Background

Service interruptions affecting heat and hot water in public housing in New York City offer a concrete context for analyzing administrative responsiveness and media accountability. These services are fundamental to residents’ health, safety, and overall living conditions. When disruptions occur, the implications extend beyond technical maintenance failures to encompass questions of service reliability, institutional capacity, public trust, and governmental responsibility toward occupants of publicly managed housing.

The New York City Housing Authority serves as the central administrative entity in this context [15]. Its Service Interruptions Portal publishes real-time and recently resolved service disruptions—including those involving heat, hot water, water, elevators, gas, and electricity—organized by housing development, address, interruption type, planned or unplanned status, report date, restoration status, and the number of affected buildings, units, and residents. This platform enables public observation of both service failures and associated repair responses.

The city’s 311 complaint system provides an additional lens for assessing responsiveness. The publicly available 311 Service Requests dataset captures details such as complaint category, assigned agency, creation timestamp, closure timestamp, and geographic coordinates [13]. Heat- and hot water-related complaints can be isolated using topic, agency, temporal, and spatial filters. While the time elapsed between complaint submission and closure offers a proxy for administrative response speed, closure status reflects procedural completion rather than confirmation of physical resolution.

Media coverage contributes a dimension of public accountability. Reports have linked utility disruptions to resident hardship, institutional accountability, and systemic concerns regarding aging public housing infrastructure. One outlet documented 3,605 utility outages across New York City Housing Authority developments during the 2021–2022 heating season, compared with 2,872 during the prior season. A legal advocacy organization reported identical figures and specified that these outages involved heat, hot water, and water services. Collectively, administrative records, advocacy disclosures, and journalistic framing illustrate how service failures entered broader public discourse.

4.2. Descriptive Evidence on Complaints and Service Interruptions

The descriptive analysis focuses on the 2021–2022 heat season, from October 1, 2021 to May 31, 2022. This period serves as the case window, with documented utility outage figures reported by media and advocacy sources. During this heat season, NYCHA developments experienced 3,605 utility outages, compared with 2,872 in the previous heat season, an increase of approximately 25.5%. This reflects a rise in reported outages involving heating, hot water, and water supply, while media coverage emphasized failures in heating and hot water during cold months [16].

The 311 data capture resident complaints related to service conditions [13]. Records can be filtered using complaint type descriptors such as 'heat,' 'hot water,' or 'heat/hot water.' The analysis examines fields including creation date, closure date, responsible agency, borough, and location. Monthly complaint counts help assess temporal patterns, particularly whether reporting peaked during the coldest months. The interval between creation and closure offers a descriptive measure of administrative responsiveness, while location data support spatial analysis across boroughs and housing developments.

The NYCHA Service Interruptions Portal provides operational records of service disruptions. Relevant fields include interruption type, affected buildings, affected units, affected residents, report time, planned or unplanned status, and restoration status. These variables allow differentiation between resident-reported concerns and formally logged service events. A high volume of heat- and hot-water-related complaints may align with interruptions affecting large numbers of units or residents, while restoration status indicates when NYCHA publicly acknowledged resolution.

Figure 2 organizes the descriptive evidence into a process timeline. The horizontal axis represents the 2021–2022 heat season. The upper section documents media and public accountability milestones, including selected reports, advocacy disclosures, and follow-up coverage. The lower section presents administrative and service indicators, including 311 complaint volumes for heat and hot water, NYCHA interruption records, repair updates, restoration notices, and data release points. The figure integrates service failure, complaint trends, media visibility, administrative action, and subsequent evaluation.

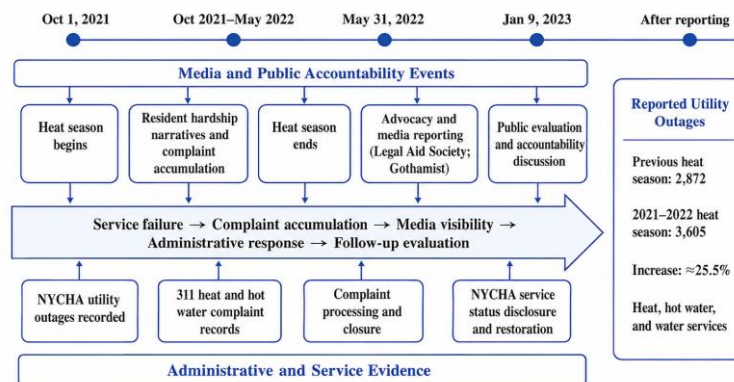


Figure 2. Media Attention, Complaints and Administrative Response Timeline

Figure 2 visualizes the governance sequence linking service interruptions, resident complaints, media coverage, administrative response, and follow-up evaluation. Service interruptions constitute the operational foundation of the issue. Resident complaints serve as an administrative input signal. Media reporting elevates the matter to a public accountability concern. Administrative response is reflected in complaint resolution, service restoration, repair communications, and official data releases. Follow-up reporting assesses the timeliness, specificity, and adequacy of the response [17].

This descriptive evidence supports the argument that institutional processes and communication practices jointly shape public management outcomes. Media accountability relies on institutional data—including complaints, service logs, and official disclosures—while administrative responsiveness is influenced by public attention and media assessment. Heating and hot water interruptions evolved into a public management issue through the interplay of service failure, resident reporting, administrative recordkeeping, media framing, and governmental action.

5. Findings: Media Accountability and Administrative Responsiveness

5.1. Media Makes Administrative Failure Publicly Visible

The case demonstrates that media reporting can transform isolated service complaints into a publicly recognized governance concern. Heat and hot water complaints

initially emerge as individual service requests or utility outage records. Within the 311 system, these records document complaint type, responsible agency, location, creation time, and closure time—providing an empirical foundation for analyzing service delivery patterns [5, 14].

Media reporting overlays a public narrative onto these administrative data points. In the referenced housing authority case, local news outlets and legal advocacy organizations linked aggregate utility outage statistics with residents' lived experiences during peak heat periods. Reporting indicated 3,605 utility outages across residential developments between October 1, 2021 and May 31, 2022—up from 2,872 in the prior corresponding period. This contextualization elevated discrete complaints into indicators of systemic service performance and institutional accountability [5, 13].

5.2. Media Accountability Compresses Complex Responsibility Chains

Heat and hot water interruptions may involve aging infrastructure, maintenance backlogs, repair capacity limitations, resource allocation considerations, and interdepartmental coordination. Media accountability simplifies this multifaceted chain into focused public inquiries: which entities bear responsibility, why the issue persisted, and what concrete steps will be implemented.

This mechanism is significant because technical service failures are often difficult for residents to evaluate directly. Media reporting reframes them as administrative accountability questions—specifically, whether housing authorities and relevant municipal agencies can reliably deliver essential services during periods of elevated temperature. One outlet characterized the rise in outages as a marked increase in heat and hot water failures, while another advocacy organization described utility disruptions as a persistent challenge for residents of publicly managed housing. Such framing intensifies expectations for transparent cause analysis and demonstrable remedial measures.

5.3. Administrative Responsiveness Includes Communication, Repair and Disclosure

Administrative responsiveness encompasses complaint handling, explanation, repair, service restoration, and public disclosure. While a closed 311 complaint record reflects administrative closure, true responsiveness also requires timely explanation, effective repair, full service restoration, and transparent information sharing. The 311 dataset enables measurement of complaint volume and the time interval between submission and closure, yet it does not capture repair quality or resident satisfaction levels [17].

Responsiveness operates across three interrelated dimensions. Communicative responsiveness involves acknowledgment, explanation, or commitment to action. Operational responsiveness includes dispatching repair crews, restoring essential services such as heat or hot water, and providing real-time service-status updates. Institutional responsiveness entails systematic data disclosure, ongoing service performance monitoring, and structured discussion of repair program effectiveness. For instance, NYCHA's Service Interruptions Portal enhances transparency by publishing current service interruptions, restorations completed within the past 24 hours, scheduled outages, affected developments and buildings, impacted units and residents, report dates, and current status details.

5.4. Media Accountability and Administrative Response Are Recursively Linked

Media accountability and administrative response are mutually reinforcing. Media reports draw upon complaint data, outage records, resident accounts, and official communications to formulate accountability claims. Administrative agencies operate within the same information ecosystem, issuing service updates, complaint resolutions, public clarifications, and infrastructure restoration notices.

A timely and specific administrative response can alleviate accountability pressure by demonstrating problem identification and corrective action. Conversely, delayed or imprecise responses may prompt additional media scrutiny and reinforce perceptions of systemic shortcomings [16]. In this context, service failures become observable through

aggregated complaints and outage documentation; media coverage transforms such visibility into accountability demands; administrative actions generate new factual inputs; and subsequent reporting assesses the adequacy and effectiveness of those responses (As shown in Table 2).

Table 2. Evidence Matrix of Media Accountability and Administrative Responsiveness

Mechanism	Media accountability evidence	Administrative response evidence	Interpretation
Problem visibility	Reports connect resident experiences with outage records	311 complaints and NYCHA outage data make service failures observable	Individual complaints become public governance issues
Responsibility attribution	Reports identify NYCHA and city agencies as responsible actors	Agencies issue explanations or repair updates	Technical failures become administrative accountability problems
Response verification	Follow-up reports compare official claims with resident experience	Closure records, restoration notices, official statements	Administrative response becomes publicly checkable
Institutional learning	Media frame repeated outages as systemic	Data disclosure, repair programs, policy discussion	Response moves from case handling to institutional correction

6. Discussion and Conclusion

6.1. Discussion

This study shows that administrative responsiveness in a mediated governance environment has a clear communicative dimension. Public agencies are expected not only to process complaints and restore services, but also to make their responses visible, verifiable, and understandable. In the NYCHA case, responsiveness included complaint handling, public explanation, service-status disclosure, repair updates, and administrative data release. Media accountability increased the visibility of service failure by connecting resident experiences with outage records and framing utility interruptions as a public housing governance issue.

The findings extend the meaning of responsiveness in public management. Responsiveness involves response speed, response substance, transparency, and institutional correction. A complaint may be administratively closed, yet public accountability may continue if residents or media question whether the service failure has actually been resolved. Open data and service-status portals can support credibility, but they can also expose delays, repeated failures, and gaps between official response and resident experience.

The case offers three practical implications. First, governments should treat media accountability as a public service feedback mechanism that helps identify recurring failures and improve administrative response. Second, open data platforms can improve transparency, but their value depends on data quality, consistency, and interpretability. 311 complaints should be understood as governance signals rather than complete measures of service failure, because complaint volume may reflect reporting willingness, digital access, and community organization. Third, responsive governance should move from case-by-case processing toward a loop of complaint identification, public explanation, service repair, and institutional improvement.

6.2. Limitations and Conclusion

This study has limitations. It examines a single case from New York City public housing, so the findings cannot be directly generalized to all jurisdictions, agencies, or

policy domains. The analysis relies on public records, media reports, and open data, which capture observable governance processes but cannot fully represent residents' lived experience, internal agency decision-making, or the technical quality of individual repairs.

Overall, the paper argues that media accountability and administrative responsiveness are mutually shaped through institutional rules, open data practices, media framing, and administrative communication. Media reporting increases the visibility and accountability pressure associated with public service failures. Administrative agencies respond through explanation, repair, disclosure, and institutional adjustment. The NYCHA case demonstrates that responsiveness in public management functions as an administrative, communicative, data-supported, and institutionally mediated governance process.

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