

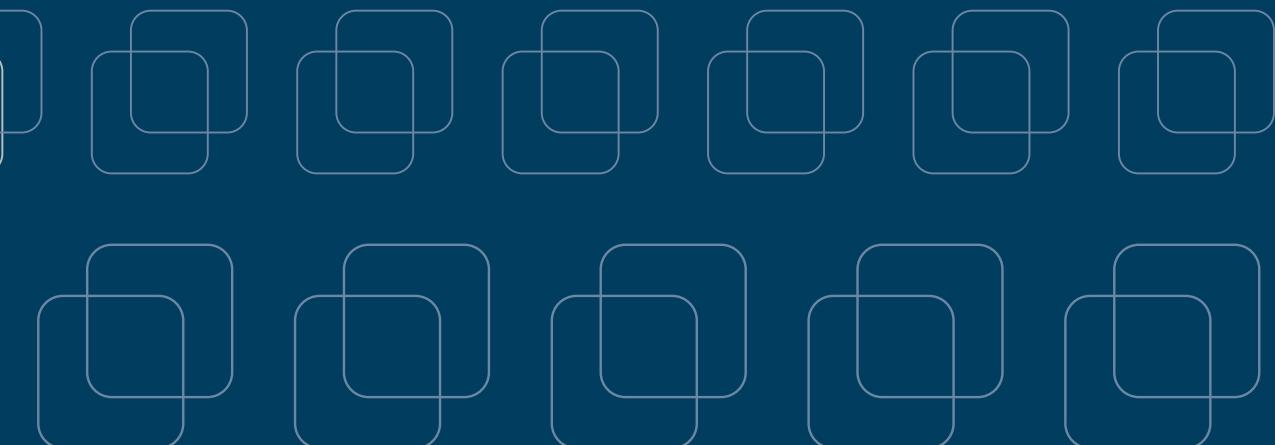
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LEAD ARTICLE

The three levels of digital divide in East EU countries

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Abstract

This article brings to light significant insights into the three levels of digital divide in the particular setting of East EU. It discusses and analyses indicators related to the spread and use of the Internet (first level of digital divide), the level of digital skills (second level of digital divide), and digital services used by citizens in East EU countries to improve their quality of life (third level of digital divide). The article specifically focuses on the third level of digital divide, by analysing, on a macro level, three tangible outcomes, namely eGovernment service completion and use, eHealth in terms of seeking health related information and interacting with practitioners online, and eCommerce. Data from Eurostat, including digital scorecard and other reports, showed clear discrepancies among countries of East Europe, as well as distinct difference between some countries and overall European Union averages, suggesting the existence of two groups of countries, one as high performance in terms of services offered and high growth in terms of use, and the second is at medium performance in terms of services offered, and low in terms of growth and use.

Keywords

Digital inequalities, digital inclusion, digital development, digital divide.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to bring to light meaningful insights into the three levels of digital divide in the particular setting of East Europe. Using data from

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Digital Agenda Scorecard², this article will give an overview of inequalities between East EU countries, in terms of access to the Internet, digital skills and digital engagement. Particularly, this paper will focus on digital inequalities in the East European countries that joined the European Union after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 and specifically after the dissolution in 1991 of Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), the Warsaw Pact, and the Soviet Union. As it is well known, not all countries that regained the independence, such as Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, joined the Europe Union, while other countries joined the European Union in different times. Czech Republic, Estonia, Poland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Slovenia, for instance, joined the EU in 2004, while Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, and finally Croatia 2013. This specific area of Europe, on which our paper is focussed on, is from one side thriving in terms of development of digital technologies and online public services, and at the same time it is often lagging in terms of use of these technologies and services offered. This article will, therefore, attempt to compare and contrast differences and similarities between these countries, through the lens of digital inequalities and its consequences for everyday life. However, as it will become soon clear, it is not possible to look at this area as a unique and uniform block, as we can notice several levels of digital inequalities, corresponding to the three levels of digital inequalities. Indeed, there are still differences in terms of access (first level of digital divide), digital skills and digital competences required to use the Internet competently (second level of digital divide), and inequalities in the capacities to get the benefits from the access and use of the Internet (third level of digital divide). These three levels of digital divide are evident between these countries. Indeed, as we shall see, for instance, the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) differ from other East Europe countries in terms of Internet penetration, while countries such Czech Republic have higher level of digital skills compared both to the EU average and to other Eastern countries. Other differences and inequalities exist in terms of how much people make use of the Internet to better themselves and their lives. The aim is to shed light into the development of digital technologies and how they are affecting citizens' relationship with online services that have the potential to enhance people's lives. More specifically, we will focus on three main outcomes that might contribute in fostering citizens' life chances, namely the availability and use of eGovernment public services, the availability and use of eHealth services, and finally the availability and use of eCommerce.

² <https://digital-agenda-data.eu/charts/analyse-one-indicator-and-compare-countries>

The eGovernment Action Plan 2016–2020 aims to ‘engage more with citizens and businesses to deliver high quality services’ (EU, 2016). This plan followed the previous EU’s eGovernment Action Plan 2011–2015, which posed a general target of 50 per cent of citizens (digital agenda) and 80 per cent of businesses making use of eGovernment services. In this vein, previous studies on eGovernment have shown how the adoption of ICTs by public institutions will eventually foster policies and programmes, improve the quality of services offered to citizens, and widen political participation (Bourquard, 2003; Garson, 2004; Gartner, 2000). Our macro analysis brings to light some useful (though not exhaustive) insights on the digital development of EU, by analysing how East EU countries are following the eGovernment Action Plan 2016–2020. The macro analysis between countries gives an overall overview of the inequalities in terms of the first level of digital divide (accessing the Internet), second level (digital skills) and third level (getting some benefits from the Internet).

In what follows, we first briefly discuss the evolution of digital inequalities and we introduce the three levels of digital divide. Then, by using data coming from DESI 2018/Digital Agenda and focusing on the macro level, this paper will split the findings into three main subsections corresponding to the three levels of digital divide and discuss some of the social implications of these inequalities. Finally, a short conclusion section will close this article.

Theoretical context

Internet penetration is rapidly increasing everywhere in the world, significantly reducing the gap between those who access and those who are excluded from the digital realm. However, while shrinking, a gap in access still persists and inequalities in accessing the Internet may be observed both between countries (global digital divide) and within countries (social and democratic digital divide). Some countries, indeed, experience high Internet penetration rendering virtually the whole population to be connected. More specifically, in Europe, some countries, such as Denmark, Luxembourg and the Netherlands have almost bridged the digital divide in terms of access, since almost everyone have access to the Internet. However, some other countries in Europe, such as Bulgaria and Romania, have lower Internet penetration rate when compared with other European countries, showing a clear gap or divide in terms of access to ICTs. Access to ICTs is the first and most obvious criterion used to investigate digital inequalities between and within countries. Indeed, as Castells (2001) pointed out, without access to the Internet, a discussion about digital inequalities would have no sense. However, physical and technological ownership and access and connectivity cannot be the only element to be taken

into consideration in analysing digital inequalities. Indeed, Internet penetration is only one part of the broader axis of digital inequalities. We cannot reduce the multidimensionality of digital divide to a dichotomous difference between those who access and those who are excluded from the digital realm (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2016). This binary division, defined as the first level of digital divide, focuses on the original idea of digital divide (Newhagen & Bucy, 2005), and provides a partial and limited picture of digital inequalities. Beyond the simple access to the Internet, other dimensions play a key role in determining digital inequalities. Indeed, as the Internet penetration increased and the gap between those who access and those who are excluded from the Internet reduced, both policy makers and scholars (Brandtzaeg, 2010; Chen & Wellman, 2005; DiMaggio et al., 2004; Selwyn, 2004; Van Dijk, 2005; Zillien & Hargittai, 2009) started to look at new forms of inequalities, such as the level of skills available that allows the use of the Internet in satisfactory ways (Litt, 2013) or the quality and types of Internet usage (Hargittai & Hinnant, 2008). The different support, motivation, capabilities and skills used to safely and confidently navigate the Internet are known as the second level of digital inequalities. These inequalities vary in relation to the frequency of usage, types of activities, length of time and in terms of content. Such inequalities are intertwined with socio-economic and demographic variables such as gender (Fallows, 2005; Meraz, 2008; Subrahmanyam et al., 2001; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007), age (Bonfadelli, 2002; Fox & Madden, 2005), education (Howard et al., 2001; Robinson et al., 2003; Van Dijk, 2005), income (DiMaggio et al., 2004; Ragnedda & Muschert, 2013; Zillien & Hargittai, 2009), geography (Hindman, 2000), race (Ono & Zavodny, 2008), and social capital (Ragnedda & Ruiu, 2017). Recently, scholars (Ragnedda, 2017; van Deursen & Helsper, 2015) have identified the third level of digital divide that underlines inequalities in the benefits gained from the different levels of access and usage of the Internet. By analysing the third level of digital divide, scholars start to put emphasis on social implications and inequalities in the tangible outcomes gained from different forms of access and usage of the Internet.

Against this theoretical background, we shall argue that inequalities, across Eastern European countries, are evident at all three levels of digital divide.

Methods and material

To give an overview of the levels of digital divide across Europe and specifically across East EU countries, we analysed and cross matched data from European Commission research data, including DESI 2018 (Digital Economy and Society Index) and European Union Digital Agenda Scorecard reports. These composite

indices, provided by the EU, summarise relevant indicators of Europe's digital performance and digital competitiveness. We looked also at the Annual European Digital Progress Report which benchmarks developments in digital in six domains: connectivity, human capital, Internet use, digitisation of businesses, digital public services and research, development. Specifically, to determine the first level of digital divide, we looked at statistics of individuals who use the Internet regularly, defined as at least once per week. To give an overview of the second level, instead, we used the 'Digital Skills Indicator' based on the Digital Competence Framework that identifies five competence domains: information, communication, content creation, safety, and problem solving. However, it must be noted that the ICT survey collects data about activities realised during the previous three months by Internet users covering four of the five domains (excluding the safety domain). Individuals not using Internet at all are classified without digital skills, while the scores are split into three main categories: basic, above basic, and none. Finally, in order to shed light into the third level of digital divide, we looked at the inequalities in three main domains: eGovernment and public services, eHealth, and eCommerce, by using data from Communication on Digital Transformation of Health and Care in the Digital Single Market 2018 report and Eurostat 2018.

Findings

By using data from DESI 2018 and Digital Agenda Scorecard we analysed several forms of digital inequalities. First of all, we looked briefly at the differences in terms of access to the Internet, to gain an understanding of gaps and trends in terms of the first level of digital divide. While Internet penetration is growing almost everywhere, and specifically in technologically advanced countries, differences in terms of access still persist. Secondly, we discuss differences and similarities amongst East EU countries, in terms of digital skills and digital capabilities in accessing and using ICT. Finally, in the third sub-section, we looked elaborately at the tangible outcomes deriving from the access to ad use of ICTs that might influence the quality of citizens' life. More specifically, in this part we look at what services are migrated online and are available on the digital realm, the percentage of citizen's using them and the benefits they might gain by using them.

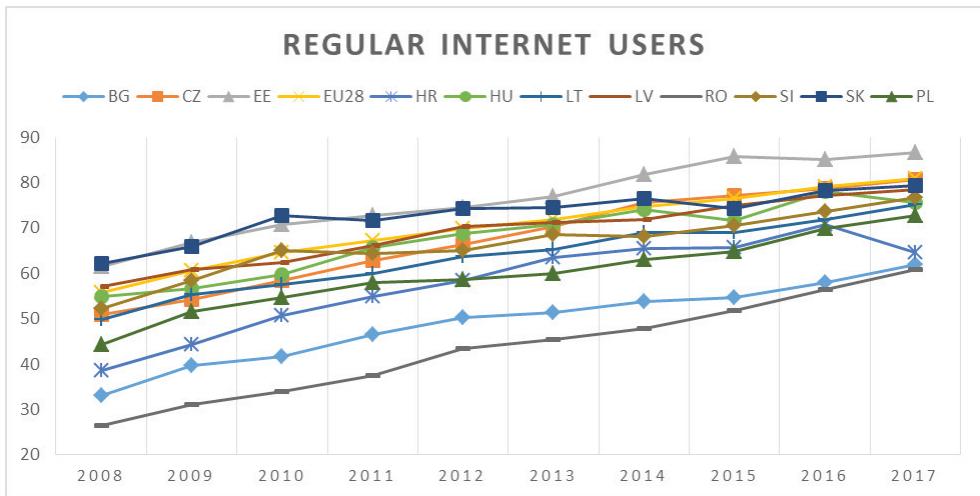
First level of digital divide: Gap accessing the Internet

The trend for countries across Europe, as well as countries over the globe, is an increase in number of those individuals who access the Internet. For this reason, by looking at statistics of individuals who use the Internet regularly, defined as

at least once per week, we can have an overview of the digital inequalities in terms of access and the progress made in the last decade to close this gap.

Chart 1

**Individuals using the Internet at least once a week
in East Europe plus EU average**



As we can see in *Chart 1*, East EU had an average annual increase of Internet users of over 2.5 percent each year with several leaps, as with Romania, which had an annual average increase of 3.4 percent, moving number of Internet users from 26 percent in 2008, to almost 60 percent in 2017 (Eurostat, 2018c). This is a significant improvement and it demonstrates the effort made by Romanian governments and private companies, in the last decade, in closing (or attempting to) the gap with other European countries. Secondly, the chart shows also that the slowest increase was in Slovakia at an annual average increase of 1.7 percent, from 62 percent in 2008, to almost 80 percent in 2017 (Eurostat, 2018c). Nonetheless, this increase still allowed Slovakia to bring the number of regular Internet users to bar with European Union average.

Although, Internet penetration is steadily rising all across Europe, it would be too optimistic to claim that inequalities in terms of access have been mended and that the first level of digital divide has been bridged. There are still significant differences between countries in terms of Internet penetration and physical access to the Internet. As already noticed, it is wrong to look at East EU countries as a uniform block in terms of access. Indeed, inequalities in access to the Internet vary significantly. Some countries, such as Romania and Bulgaria, lack Internet penetration and are far below the EU's average, while

other countries, such as Lithuania or Estonia, are above EU's average. More specifically, despite the effort in boosting the Internet infrastructures and all the policies adopted to close the first level of digital divide, inequalities in accessing the Internet is still high if we compare Romania (60%) with the Netherlands (94%) or Denmark (95%) (Eurostat, 2018c).

The digital access gap between these countries reflects differences in terms of policy adoption, infrastructural investment (both public and private), technological development, cultural and social issues, and is part of a broader picture of socio-economic differences. However, this chart shows that inequalities in accessing the Internet are still an issue, even in one of the most technological and industrialized regions in the world, and that the first level of digital divide is far to be bridged. These data show also that the number of citizens regularly using the Internet increase at different pace and rate and this is due, again, to several socio-economic and political reasons. However, what is clear is that in the decade 2008-2017 all East EU countries have improved Internet penetration and more and more citizens started not only to access but to use the Internet regularly, reducing (but not closing) the first level of digital divide.

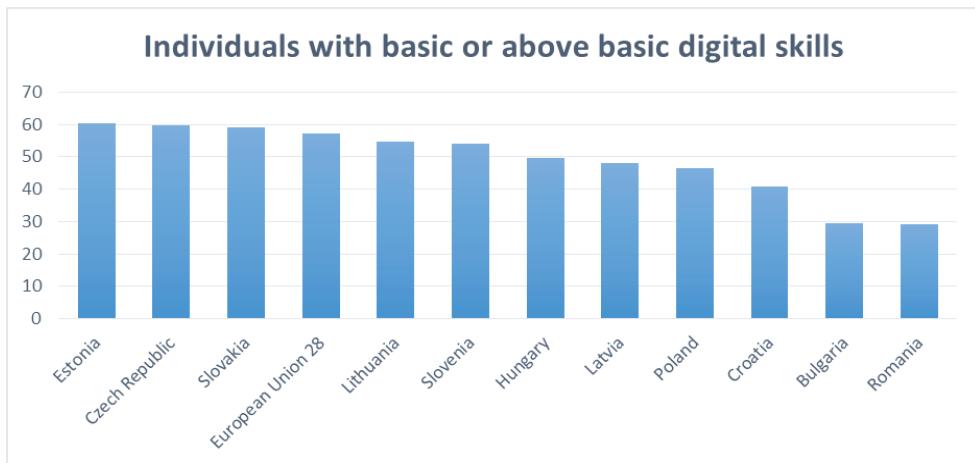
Second level of digital divide: Digital skills and digital capabilities

As we have seen, beyond the inequalities in accessing the Internet, there are inequalities in the digital abilities and skills to use ICTs to participate and enjoy the benefits of the information society (B chi & Vogler, 2017; Hargittai & Shaw, 2013). These inequalities in using the Internet are increasingly important in a digital-enabled society. Indeed, the greater the digital capability and skills in accessing and using the Internet, the greater the benefits. At the same time, the greater the technology is, the further disadvantaged citizens become if they do not have access to or they cannot use it properly. We have seen how different the access to the Internet across East EU countries is, specifically between the Baltic countries and Romania and Bulgaria, both positioned at the really bottom of European ranking. These inequalities in accessing the digital realm have serious social consequences, since more and more services, activities and utilities are migrating online. Indeed, those who are totally excluded from the Internet are also excluded from accessing these services and enjoying the benefits of the Internet. However, accessing alone is not enough if citizens do not have enough motivation, capacities and skills to use the Internet. These inequalities, as we have seen, are labelled as the second level of digital divide. Differently than for the first level of digital divide where it is easier to analyse these inequalities by looking at the number of people accessing regularly to the

Internet and those who are totally excluded, in the second level of digital divide many different dimensions should be considered. We focused our attention on one of the main indicators of digital inequalities, namely the level of digital skills, which play a key role in determining inequalities in using the Internet. These inequalities influence not only the way citizens use and maximize the benefits of their Internet use (Lee et al., 2011) but also how confident they are using the Internet (Eachus & Cassid, 2006; Eastin & LaRose, 2000), the sense of privacy and security (Janssen et al., 2013), the capacities to manage information (Ahmad et al., 2016), communicate (Siddiq et al., 2016) or collaborate (Choy et al., 2016) with others, and are part of broader factors that help in preventing social exclusion (Facer & Furlong, 2001). Digital skills and competencies are, therefore, vital in the information age, since they determine and influence our everyday life.

Chart 2

Percentage of people with skills allowing for meaningful Internet use



As per access, inequalities across East EU countries are found also in terms of digital skills. Indeed, as *Chart 2* shows, the different levels of digital skills are quite evident. Countries such as Estonia, Czech Republic and Slovakia, are above the European Union average. In the case of Estonia and Czech Republic this is in line with the Internet penetration's data, where both these countries are above Europe Union average, demonstrating a good performance both in terms of access and digital skills. Slovakia, by contrast, is below the European Union average regarding the Internet penetration, while is above in terms of digital skills. This shows that digital skills do not improve automatically by

increasing the number of people who regularly access the Internet. Digital skills are, therefore, related to other factors such as the overall level of education, digital literacy programmes and digital training courses.

At the very bottom of this rank, we find Bulgaria and Romania well below the European Union average. These data pair with similar performance in terms of Internet penetration, making these countries among the worst in Europe in terms of digital access and digital capabilities. The digital skills indicator is vital because it allows us to understand differences between people having, or missing, some basic digital skills to move confidently in the digital realm. From a macro level point of view, these inequalities also show the differences between East EU countries in the way citizens are ‘ready’ and prepared to use digital facilities and services in the information society and to access the job market than increasingly require some forms of digital skills. Since social and digital inequalities are strongly intertwined, the reasons beyond these inequalities must be looked in the social, political, cultural and educational differences between these countries.

Third level of digital divide: Tangible benefits of using the Internet

The third level of digital divide, as noted above, refers to the inequalities in the tangible benefits users gain by accessing and using the Internet. While it is difficult to map all social, cultural, political, personal and economic benefits individuals may get from an appropriate access and proper usage, in this section we have included several benefits from being online. Particularly, we have focused on three main features that influence the everyday life of citizens: eGovernment and public services, eHealth, and eCommerce.

Digital public service

The first main tangible outcome on which we focused our analysis is the level of interaction with digital public service. As noticed, more and more public services are migrating online, thus increasing the importance for citizens’ everyday life to digitally engage with these services to improve their quality of life. We collected data from the EU eGovernment Benchmark 2016 report (European Commission, 2016b), which discussed the differences in performance of EU countries in terms of average growth and absolute score, ranked countries to Accelerators, Steady Performers, and Moderate Performers. The accelerators are the countries with over EU28 average in both average growth and absolute score, Steady Performers are countries with absolute score above EU28 average, and average growth that is below that, while Moderate Performers are countries

that are below EU average in both metrics. The Baltic states – Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania – were all ranked as Accelerators, with the rest of countries efforts putting them as Moderate Performers. The report suggested the rise of a ‘Digital Diagonal’ across Europe, moving from south-west to north-east across Europe, with countries ranked as accelerators. The lack of Steady Performers in East Europe further demonstrates the divergence in performance among countries of East Europe.

By looking at the level of online services completion data, Eastern EU countries are following, to a certain extent, the EU general plans to offer public services online. However, differences between and within countries persist in terms of what government may offer to citizens, and more notably in citizen’s usage and readiness to embrace these new services. These differences are rooted in the already existing social inequalities. Richer and more technologically advanced countries, such as countries of Northern Europe, are the first to propose projects to improve eGovernment and making use of eGovernment services by rendering it responsive to individual needs. In addition, on local level within each country, inequalities in the use of governmental services over the Internet are determined by vital variables of social inequalities, such as education and occupation (White & Selwyn, 2013).

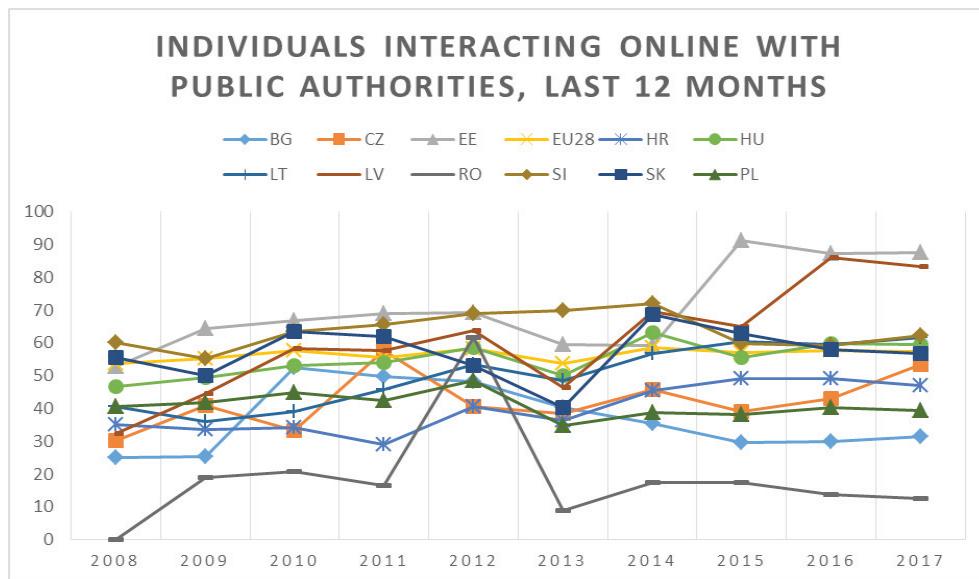
Additional rationale behind the divergence in performance can be related to the quality and usability of services offered. Although the percentage of services available online may seem high, the quality and usability differ a lot among countries. The EU, as part of a methodology established in the eGovernment Benchmark Framework 2012-2015 (European Commission, 2012), used mystery shoppers to assess eGovernment services offered. The mystery shoppers would simulate life events conducted by citizens, such as regular business operation, car ownership, job search, moving locations, small claims, and issues related to studies and setting up a small business, were covered in 2015 and 2016 editions of the EU eGovernment reports (European Commission, 2015, 2016).

Disparities between what services are available and the percentage of citizens’ using them is a clear indicator of Internet use gap between countries. For eGovernment services, this can be clearly seen by comparing trends of online interaction with public authorities online, with the percentage of services that can be completed online in a public service life event, and the change in Internet penetration rates. The data available shows that most countries in the EU provide online facilities to complete most public service events, with an average of over 80 percent of public services available, and can be completed online for countries of the European Union (Capgemini, 2015). The difference in level of

services available online is narrowing, converging to almost 100 percent as in Estonia, with no country having less than half of its public services available as online services.

Chart 3

Change in percentage of general public interacting online with public authorities



Nonetheless, the number of people interacting online with public authorities (*Chart 3*), although is generally increasing, does not correspond to the same trend line and distribution of Internet users. In East EU, the percentage of individuals interacting online with public authorities has been increasing at an average of 1.6 percent each year, with Latvia leading with over 5 percent average increase in the past 10 years pushing percentage of people interacting online with authorities from 32 percent in 2008 to over 83 percent in 2017, while countries like Slovakia, Slovenia, and Bulgaria had a shy average annual increase of 0.14, 0.22, 0.62 percent respectively, hovering around the European Union total average annual increase of 0.36 percent. Poland was the only country to actually have a total decrease, though slight, of 0.12 percent annually (Eurostat, 2018a).

Comparing the annual average increase, although gives a great perspective into efforts put towards inclusion in online governmental services and their effectiveness, lacks the context of actual percentage of individuals interacting with the government online. When compared to the EU total average annual

increase, only two countries in East Europe are below that average, namely Slovakia and Slovenia. These two have done better than other countries in Europe, in increasing number of people interacting with governments online. However, this gives a false impression that the overall situation of eGovernment usage is better there, neglecting that the baseline these countries started with a decade ago varied a lot. The two countries with the least positive average annual increase in online interaction with the government are in fact doing well in terms of actual percentages of individuals interacting with their government online. These two countries, Slovakia and Slovenia, were leading Eastern European countries in 2008 as the top two countries, with 55 percent and 60 percent respectively, followed by Estonia at 53 percent and Hungary at 47 percent. However, they did not better enough in this decade, allowing other countries to bypass them. This is similar to poor performance of Poland, which is the only country with the decrease, and which was sitting at the fifth position in East Europe with over 40 percent in 2008, almost maintaining the percentage a decade later at 39 percent, but dropping to the ninth position. In 2017, the leading countries were Estonia with 88 percent, and Latvia with 83 percent springing from 53 and 32 percent in 2008 respectively. The countries that started from the lowest baseline were Romania with zero percent use, and Bulgaria with 25 percent. These countries have shown clear efforts in filling the gaps, by increasing to 13 and 31 percent respectively.

eHealth

The second major tangible outcome we analysed, in order to see inequalities in the way citizens use the Internet to improve their life and get benefits, is the eHealth. This includes services offered either by the government or health practitioners to allow for electronic interaction with patients or, among them including, but not limited to, making appointments and accessing and sharing medical records, in addition to the use of other resources available online to access health-related information and advice. A comparative look at both gives us an idea on the level of motivation citizens have to use eHealth services and access related information.

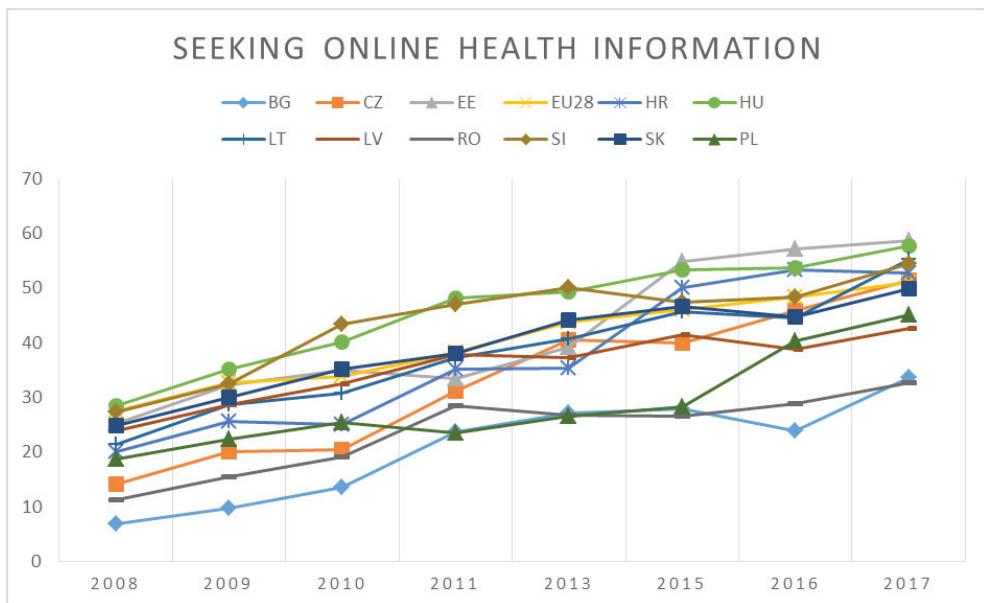
In its latest Communication on Digital Transformation of Health and Care in the Digital Single Market (European Commission, 2018) the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions concluded that the uptake of digital solutions for health and care, or eHealth, remains slow and varies greatly across Member States and regions of Europe. The communication set three main priorities for action in Europe related to eHealth. The priorities are to enable

citizens to securely access their health data across the borders, to allow pooling of research resources and share data to enable personalised medicine across the EU, and finally, to empower people to look after their health using digital tools, particularly in relation to prevention and interaction between users and health care providers. The third priority is the one related most to users' habits and affected by their digital skills and availability of resources, official and non-official, splitting into two main activities, seeking health-related information and interacting with health service providers.

Seeking health-related information does not necessarily involve official sources, and the change in how many individuals do use the Internet in this aspect is related to level of digital skills they have and motivation. This aspect had the most considerable average increase across all aspects studied in this article, showing that citizens indeed are interested and motivated to using the Internet to seek information related to health. The data from Eurostat (Eurostat, 2018) shows a constant increase over the past ten years among all countries studied. In 2008, the lowest country in terms of percentage of individuals seeking information on health online was Bulgaria, with less than 7 percent, and the highest Hungary with 28 percent and a regional average of 20 percent, lower than the EU average of 27 percent, these numbers differed vastly to reach a regional average of around 49 percent, ranging between 33 percent for Romania, and 59 percent for Estonia, nonetheless, even with an average annual increase of 2.8 percent. This, however, did not match the increase in other regions in Europe, as the EU average jumped to 51 percent, but with slower growth, at an annual average increase of 2.36 percent. This feature was one of the only two aspects with regional average annual growth higher than that of regular Internet users, with 2.8 percent, compared with 2.6 (Eurostat, 2018e).

Chart 4

Individuals using the Internet to seek health-related information

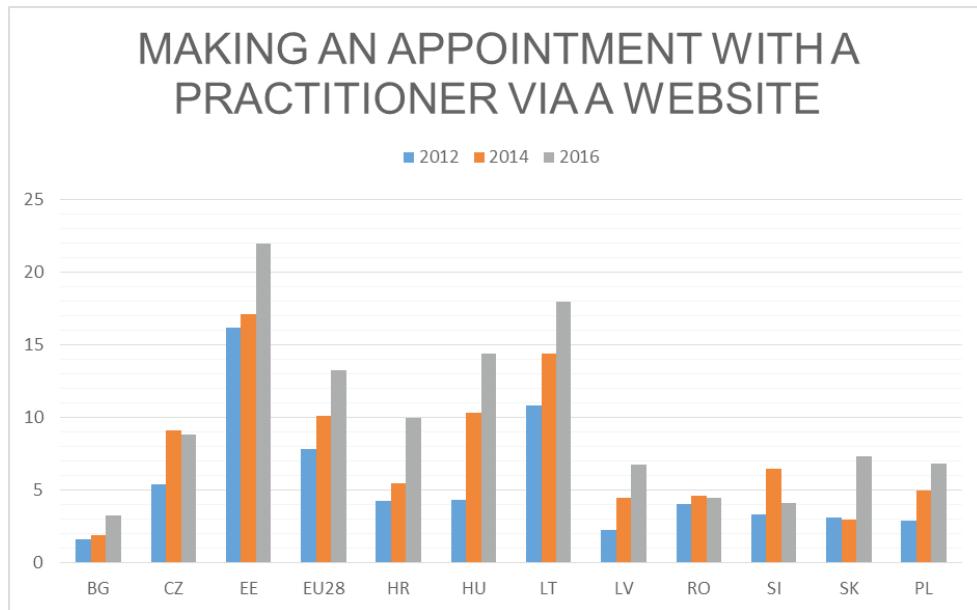


These results show that the overall region is indeed advancing in terms of using digital tools to access health related information, to look for their health at a rate higher than that of the whole EU region. More specifically, six of the eleven countries – Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Slovenia, Croatia, and Czech Republic – have percentage of individuals seeking health information online higher than EU overall average, though marginally. The lowest performers were, once again, Romania and Bulgaria with around 33 percent each, and this is in line with the lowest performances in terms of access and digital skills.

A similar case about growth rate can be also made with using the Internet to interact with health service providers, including getting an appointment with a health practitioner using digital means. In this area, couple of East EU countries managed to triple the number of people using the Internet for this purpose in the four year period between 2012 and 2016. These countries are Hungary and Latvia, while other countries managed to increase the use significantly, doubling their numbers, as in Croatia, Slovakia, Poland, and Bulgaria. Unfortunately, this growth in percentage of people using the Internet for local eHealth does not reflect the fact that the number of individuals is rather low, stretching between a mere 3.3 percent as in Bulgaria, and 22 percent in Estonia, 50 percent over the European Union average (Eurostat, 2018d).

Chart 5

Individuals using the Internet to make appointments
with health practitioners



It is important to consider the nature of this type of usage, and how it requires that health service provider makes the facility to interact with them and makes appointments online available, as well as the need for visiting health practitioners. However, when compared to the overall EU average, we can clearly see that Estonia, Latvia, and Hungary are the only countries in the region that are above the EU average, while the rest of the countries are significantly below that, with Bulgaria tailing the list at 3.3 percent.

The level of usage here gives an idea on the opportunities people are using to utilise the development of digital technologies towards affecting their health and relationship with health providers. This affirms the results mentioned earlier from the communication on health and technology in Europe, that there are high inequalities in how different countries and regions in the EU are interacting with health-related issues using digital technologies.

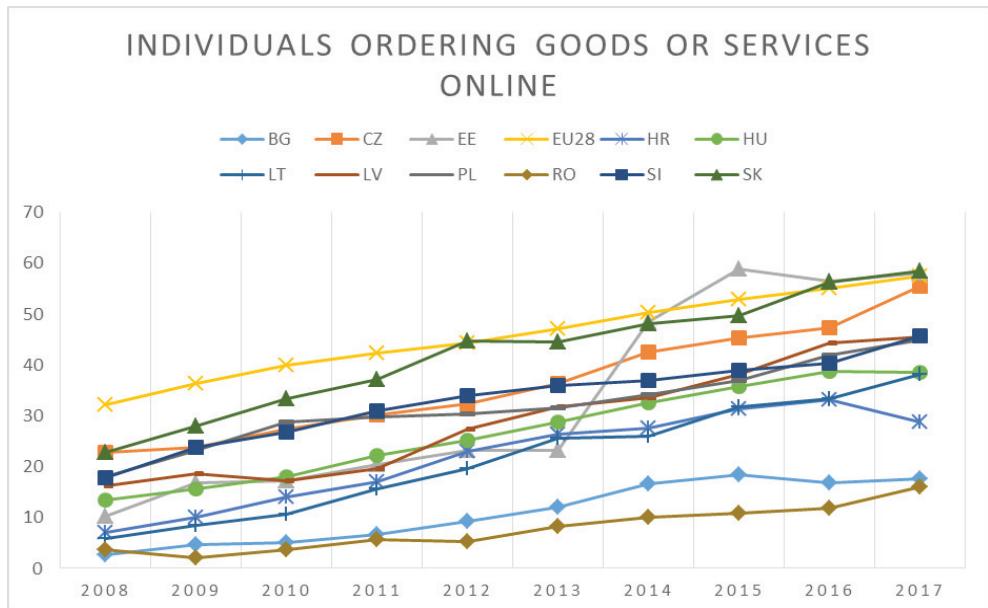
eCommerce

Finally, the other main outcome affecting our daily lives we looked at is the eCommerce, which became the main method adopted by many people to buy or sell products. In Europe, the number of people ordering goods or services online has jumped from less than one-third of the population to well over half, in the ten

years between 2008 and 2017 (Eurostat, 2018b). Showing the interest people have gained in this aspect of Internet use, and the advancement in offering and required support infrastructure (Eurostat, 2018b). In East Europe, the adoption has also increased, bypassing in many countries the EU average of use, and in all but two countries, having faster growth than the EU average.

Chart 6

Percentage of people using the Internet to order services or goods



Between 2008 and 2017, the average annual growth in individuals ordering good or services online in East Europe was 2.8 percent, higher than the EU average of 2.5 (Eurostat, 2018b). This change did not, however, occur equally across the region. Indeed, only two of the eleven countries in the region – Romania and Bulgaria – had growth slower than the EU average, while the other nine had significant growth. These data, once again, confirm the bad performance of these two countries in terms of digitalization.

Other East EU countries, such as Estonia, had a growth rate of 4.8 percent over the period studied, increasing numbers of individuals using eCommerce from 10 percent in 2008 to 58 percent in 2017, a little over the 57 percent of the whole EU. Slovakia was the other country in the region to reach an average higher than the EU, at 58.5, but with slower annual average change of 3.6 percent since it started with much higher percentage, at 22 percent. Other countries have also

achieved good growth such as Czech Republic at 55 percent, and Slovenia, Latvia, and Poland all around 46 percent (Eurostat, 2018b). Inequalities in terms of eCommerce are evident within East EU, with countries – Bulgaria and Romania – struggling at a mere 18 and 16 percent of individuals using eCommerce, raising from 2.6 and 3.7 ten years ago, respectively. These differences are reflected also on a micro level, where consumers' patterns and habits are changing with the introduction of eCommerce. More and more consumers tend to order goods and services online. However, also in this case, we can observe similarities amongst East EU countries, but also strong inequalities in the way citizens access and use the Internet to gain some concrete benefits, such as eCommerce.

Conclusions

The aim of this article was to shed light into some features that characterize digital inequalities across Europe, and specifically across the East EU countries. We have shown how strongly digital inequalities, in terms of digital access, digital skills and tangible outcomes gained from the Internet, are evident between these countries. At the same time, we have also noticed similarities, between some countries, in the way they speed up the process of digitalization in order to catch up with other European countries. In some case, we have noticed, that some countries constantly score above Europe Union average, showing excellent performance in terms of Internet penetration, digital skills and digital engagement. More specifically, as we have seen, Internet penetration is rapidly growing everywhere in Europe, strongly reducing the number of citizens who are totally excluded from accessing the Internet. However, while gaps in accessing the Internet are shrinking, it is wrong to assume that the first level of digital divide has been bridged. Indeed, as we have seen, significant differences still exist between North and East EU countries and even within East Europe itself. Particularly significant are the differences between the Baltic countries and Romania and Bulgaria that are at the very bottom of Europe ranking in terms of Internet penetration. Furthermore, as noted above, access to the Internet is only one of the criteria to examine digital inequalities. Other forms of digital inequalities persist and grow, and are related with digital skills, and with the uses of digital services, integration of digital technology, and digital public services to improve the quality of their life. Specifically, while analysing the second level of digital divide, we focused mainly on the inequalities on the level of digital skills. This is one of the limitations of this article, since the second level of digital divide cannot be reduced only to the digital skills. However, digital capabilities and skills in using the Internet efficiently and confidently play a key role in determining digital inequalities and provide a robust picture

of the inequalities in the Internet usage and activities users carry on online. Finally, in the attempt to bring to light meaningful insights into the third level of digital divide, we concentrated on some of main outcomes deriving from an efficient and purposeful use of the Internet, and namely the digital engagement with eGovernment and public services, eHealth, and eCommerce. Another limitation of our article is that these three outcomes are not exhaustive of the whole panorama of tangible outcomes that determine the third level of digital divide. Furthermore, we analysed them only at the macro level, comparing countries instead of individuals with different socio-cultural backgrounds. However, we assumed that engaging efficiently with eGovernment and public services is a real and tangible outcome that improves the quality of citizens' life. The same applies to eHealth and eCommerce, since improving both the quality of health and economic exchanges (both in terms of buying and selling goods and services) are concrete outcomes deriving from different access and skills in using ICTs.

In this study, we have revealed, though partially, differences in access, usage and benefits exist across Europe, and specifically in East EU countries. We have also seen that not necessarily increasing the growth of Internet penetration implies an automatic and proportional increase in digital skills or tangible benefits. Future research should also determine whether there is any growth or reduction of these three levels of digital divide in other countries in Europe and if these trends follow a similar path. Finally, future study should also include other dimensions of digital inequalities and more tangible outcomes.

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CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

Old conflict, new perspective: Power shift in the news from Gaza

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Abstract

This study draws upon in-depth interviews conducted with the leading scholars, journalists, anti-war campaigners and peace activists commissioning the new media tools including Skype. Notably, it brings about eye-witness accounts of the Gaza conflict as some of the participants have survived the Israeli assault on aid-ship Freedom Flotilla (Mavi Marmara). In this sense, it offers first-hand descriptions and the experience of consuming and resisting new media technologies.

This analysis shows that most journalists are compelled to be cautious in reporting Israeli actions inside the occupied territory (Gaza). Further, media coverage of Gaza reflects a disproportionate reporting because most sections of the mainstream media include soundbites and opinions of writers that endorse the Israeli government propaganda. In contrast, the evidence shows that media systematically excludes the progressive voices including the Jewish scholars and campaigners. Thus, too often, news emerging from Gaza mainly through the mainstream media is either biased or manufactured.

This state of affairs stimulates ordinary people; be they peace activists, campaigners, or scholars to make use of alternative means of communications and news dissemination that is the new media. However, this study finds that new media has transformed the Gaza conflict to an extent that Europe has more Palestinian sympathizers than ever before. Despite, perceptible progress and achievement, the new media is facing a threat that comes from the powerful political elites and the large media corporation. Arguably, new media sites such as Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube are icons on a

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switchboard where the push buttons lie under the fingertips of powerful elites, be they the governments or media conglomerates.

Keywords

Gaza conflict, new media, propaganda, news reporting.

Introduction

Reporting from conflict zones continues to pose a vast challenge for the global news media organizations. Particularly in regions where governments have adopted a policy of strict control; put a barricade on journalists of entering into affected areas. As a result, jeopardizing of impartial reporting of atrocities, human rights and press freedom all emerged as crucial challenges. Furthermore, war and conflict reporting has become more of a perilous task than ever before and so has the safety of those intending to capture and transmit news.

The world witnessed one of the most ruthless accounts of press freedom and human rights violation in the 22-day invasion of Gaza, known to world as Operation Cast Lead, which was launched by Israeli army on December 27, 2008. During this period, both Israeli and international journalists were prevented from reporting from the occupied territory. The incident prompted scholars, media experts and critics to discuss and debate the emerging roles of new media and ‘citizen journalists’ in covering conflicts particularly in controlled situations. In the heart of the discussion was use by media outlets of news, photographs and videos from conflict zones where mainstream media had been either banned or had limited access.

At that moment, the Reporters without Borders Press Freedom Index (2009) dropped Israel’s ranking 46 places to 93rd out of 180 countries as result of its controlled media policies in Gaza, which continues today in one form or another (Reporters without Borders, 2009). Gidon Levi affirmed in 2011 that ‘no Israeli journalist has set foot in Gaza in three years and one month’ (Israel Social TV, 2011). In 2014, Reporters without Borders ranked Israel even lower, 96th (RWB, 2014).

The depiction of a media blockade is universally visible that is a well-known weapon of control in the government weaponry. Denial of media access has become a widespread phenomenon even in democratic countries such as the United States of America, Britain and Europe, where *The Guardian* has been banned because it published *WikiLeaks* cables. Chelsea (née Bradley) Manning and Julian Assange face trial for disclosing facts that have embarrassed governments in these countries.

During the Gaza conflict, news was so channeled through social media that many viewed this phenomenon as watershed moment. Jon Burg described the

Gaza assault as, ‘The World First Social Media War’ (Burg, 2009). In a same vein, Moeed Ahmad, head of new media at Al-Jazeera branded the conflict as ‘War 2.0’ (Flora TV, 2009).

It could be said that the story of Gazans is passion against power, struggle versus suppressor, and fact versus falsehood. Manifestly, this narrative is often seen in the mainstream media that too often is accused of taking the same line of argument as that of the Israeli government. Arguably, in recent years, Palestinians have gained enormous attention and sympathy mainly on the new media platforms around the world.

For many writers and researchers social media is changing the landscape of the Palestine issue despite crackdowns in various forms and government monitoring. In contrast, most sections of the mainstream media are evidently less accommodating of the Palestinians cause which is also documented in several academic studies. Mariam Barghouti argued that the mainstream media has not only misunderstood Palestine but it also shows that the ‘Portrayal of Palestinians in Western mainstream media have not changed much since the colonial era’ (Aljazeera, 30 December 2017).

For various reasons, Israel-Palestine conflict continues to draw attention from the media experts, critics and academics. Perhaps, one aspect is that it continues to happen in episodes almost every year during festive season or at the peak of Christmas. This paper particularly examines the 2008 brutal assault of the Israeli forces on Gaza and the way mainstream and new media reported it.

Previous studies embark upon reporting Israel-Palestine conflict considering both parties perspective that include (Hass, 2003; Liebes, 1997; Schleifer, 2006). Now, by all means, innovative ways of technology has enabled ordinary people to disseminate information as eye-witness accounts that were exclusively limited to the mainstream media. Thus, several recent studies acknowledge the significant shift in the news with rise of new media that include Bayoumi, 2010; Berenger, 2013; Hayes et al., 2013.

Notably, this article provides a narrative of a shift in public understanding and opinion of the Israel-Palestine conflict with the rise of alternative means of news gathering and dissemination in the age of new media. Further, based on scholarly evidence it examines the Gaza war coverage in the mainstream western media. In the context of alternative journalism, it also aims to provide an account of ordinary people war coverage using cyber devices particularly those boarded on the Flotilla aid ship.

Method and research questions

Most of this work's findings are drawn from a set of interviews conducted during and after the Gaza assault in 2008 and Flotilla attack in 2011. These interviews were carried out both online and face-to-face with scholars, journalists, campaigners and activists including Flotilla on-board aid-workers. A total of twenty individuals with dissimilar backgrounds were interviewed in different time periods (2009–2015) with a blend of open and close ended uniform questionnaire. It is essential to elucidate that respondents' 'dissimilar backgrounds' here refer to their roles in the professional spheres as well as their dissimilar opinions of conflict. This article is an upgraded version of previous research that dealt with the same subject. Notably, part of previous research has been published in *Palestine Chronicle* (19 October 2016) and *Al-Ahram* (3–9 November 2016).

One of the research questions was: 'What role did the social media play in the Gaza conflict and in what ways it was different from the mainstream media?'

Table 1

**List of academics, campaigners, and journalists
consulted and cited by author**

Names of interviewees	Professional background	Year
Norman Finkelstein	Professor	2011
Ewa Jasiewicz	Journalist (survivor of Flotilla)	2011
Charles Glass	Journalist	2011
Phil Rees	Independent film maker	2011
Yvonne Ridley	Journalist	2009
Andrew Gilligan	Journalist	2011
Peter Obourne	Journalist	2011
Nick Davies	Writer and journalist	2011
Avi Shlaim	Professor	2011
Paul Weller	Journalist	2011
Ian Black	Journalist	2011
Martin Bell	Professor	2010
Brain McNair	Professor	2010
Roy Greenslade	Professor	2010
Antony Loewenstein	Journalist	2010
Greta Berlin	Campaigner (survivor of Flotilla)	2015
Paul Larudee	Campaigner/activist	2015
Mary Hughes-Thompson	Activist	2015
Noha Mellor	Professor	2015
Salman Sayyid	Professor	2011

A notable feature of this article is that it presents eye-witness accounts of those boarded on the aid-ship Freedom Flotilla that came under attack from the Israeli Defense Forces. A number of leading academics, journalists, campaigners and activists went on to assist Gazans in the wake of attack. It argued that conflicts will continue to happen around the globe mainly because global powers are in the business of arms trade. Governments, private businessmen and warlords are drawing huge deposits of profits out of arms sales.

Also, one may say that the role of new media in reporting wars and conflicts has been somewhat glamorized in recent years. The fact of the matter is that the media conglomerates are disinclined to capitulate their powerful roles as the controllers of media contents to those ordinary people (new media users) that aspire to report the Israeli atrocities. Furthermore despite several success stories of the new media unveiling and covering sensitive issues that largely went unreported before, it is still too early to proclaim new media has changed the landscape of conflict reporting.

Additionally, it is worth noting that since the interview process started in 2009, the working conditions for the journalists covering Gaza conflict have shown no sign of change. To this day, the Israeli army has attacked, detained without trials, banned and killed several journalists reporting and entering into the most vicious sieged Gaza zone (Aljazeera, 25 April 2018; MEMO, 13 August 2013 and 5 September 2018; CPJ, 2018). These states of affairs have paved the way for new media to report from the war-zones around the globe such as the Gaza.

Admittedly, reporting the Israel-Palestine conflict is one of the most sensitive, multifaceted and complicated issues that encompasses numerous technicalities and constraints including a Western media ‘hostile’ to the Palestinians and a Palestinian press biased towards Israel (Dor, 2004; Liebes, 1997; Schleifer, 2006). For such serious allegations and delicate reasons one may say that the conflict reporting is a tricky business that involves professional and legal challenges, safety and security of journalists, freedom of expression and human rights (Cottle et al., 2016; Mbaine et al., 2006; Nohretedt & Ottosen, 2014). Both sides have their own narratives and views, as one side see themselves as the victims and the oppressed, while the other are in denial and emotional attachment to land.

Henceforth, a close attention has to be paid to explore and incorporate wide-ranging opinions when reviewing the literature. Moreover, it must embrace the representation of various strands of public that is discernible in the interviewees list. Given the privacy of sources and their right to data protection and information, consent was taken from all participants for the use of material,

as well as their names in citations and direct quotes. This limits the chance of misinterpreting and altering the respondent's responses especially in case of a limited space, sensitivity of the topic.

Why does this topic seem to be important after 10 years?

Nearly a decade on, evidence shows that nothing has much changed in the media coverage of Gaza nor there has been any substantial revolution recorded in the attitude and position of political elites in relation the Israel-Palestine conflict. During the 2008 invasion of Gaza, several mainstream media organizations reporting on the Gaza attack were labelled as biased for various reasons, for instance the BBC. Ten years on, take the reporting of the BBC that is supposed to be an independent news organization still faces pressures, accusations and criticism of its Israel-Palestine reporting biases (The Guardian, 12 January 2009 and 23 May 2011; The Independent, 15 August 2018).

Worryingly, an ongoing systematic media presentation of Gaza seems so insolent that it is unable to unearth cautious selection of a word 'Operation' behind the Israeli government shrewd efforts to curb its brutalities. Take, for instance, phrases such as Operation Hot Winter (2008); Operation Pillar of Defense (2012); Operation Protective Edge (2014). It is therefore argued that most sections of the media are equal actors of the conflict. Hence, Gaza conflict remains one of the few examples of the media failures in reporting tragedies and victims.

Furthermore, in the world of information, the authenticity and accuracy of news reaching out from Gaza seems like a Mount Everest to be climbed as Israeli government maintained the blockade. This paper sets a scene for a broader inquiry into Israel-Palestine conflict that remains a test case for the news media organizations as well as several democracies around the world. Evidently, those nations take pride in endorsing and supporting human rights and freedoms appear to be reluctant over the inhumane actions of Israel.

Literature review: Question of fairness in reporting Gaza

This section explores and examines wide-ranging debates and discussions surrounding the role of the new media technologies in the Gaza conflict. Obviously, people of Gaza have lived with the horrific atrocities of war long before the advent of new media technologies what we know today as YouTube, Facebook, blogging, live streaming and podcasting. Undeniably, the new media has made it possible to witness what was nearly impossible before say for instance coverage of events where there were no reporters present on the spot. Now it is not a fiction but a reality. 'Brave New World' novelist Aldous Huxley predicted almost over 60 years

ago that ‘Someday a much cheaper alternative to typesetting may be developed and there will be a “Do It Yourself” movement’ (Huxley, 1956). Huxley’s prescience has become reality as ordinary people can produce and dispense news from war zones to a global community. The opening question to ask is that how this old conflict has changed with the rise of new media?

The dilemma of media coverage of the Israel-Palestine issue can be traced back to the beginning of the conflict itself. Unfortunately this long-standing issue remains stagnant. Several media studies have included: MIFTAH (Media Monitoring Unit) May and June 2005 reports titled ‘Public discourse and perceptions: Palestinian media coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict’; KESHEV (Centre for Protection of Democracy) reports of March 2005 and January 2006 titled ‘Disconnected: The Israeli media coverage of the Gaza disengagement’; FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting) report January/February 2001 and several other reports accessible at these and other organizations’ web-sites¹ dealing with the issues of media find disparity and elements of media bias in the coverage of Israel-Palestine conflict on both sides.

The widespread notion of Israel having unconditional backing of the American and British governments while the Palestinians lack support in the western media and political circles may not be a fairer assumption. The Gaza assault was largely opposed in some sections of the western media which increases public sympathy for Palestinians particularly visible in blogs, campaigning organizations web-sites and social networking sites that specially highlights several high-profile incidents:

- An alleged hit squad of Israeli agents used stolen passports issued by a variety of countries to fly into Dubai in 2010 from different countries, assassinate Hamas leader Mahmoud Al-Mabhouh, who had just arrived at a Dubai hotel en route to another country, and flew away within 24 hours. No one has ever been arrested. The misuse of British passports caused a public outcry for a governmental investigation.
- Following the Gaza attack, British teachers’ and trade unionists boycotted of Israel in 2009 and Israeli money was refused by organizers of the Edinburgh International Film Festival, joining the boycott of Israeli State Institutions (BDS, 2009).
- In addition, because of the demonstrations against British public financial assistant for the Palestinians [Viva Palestina] and the issuing of the ‘British arrest warrants of Tzipi Livni on war crimes’ most high profile Israelis have avoided travelling to Britain for fear of being charged for war crimes.

¹ Available from: www.miftah.org; www.keshev.org; www.fair.org

These are a few examples that reflect the complex nature of this issue but at the same time few illustration also dismiss the perceived notion that the entire western media, scholars and politicians favour Israel regardless of its atrocities. Take the case of the BBC refusing to on-air an appeal for Gaza humanitarian aid, which caused public outcry and raised questions about the BBC editorial standards in covering Gaza war. However, in an interview with the *BBC* Tony Benn launched the appeal by himself during his appearance in a BBC talk (*The Guardian*, 26 January 2009). Benn continues to tell audience bank details to financial assistance for Gaza children and need people waiting for the help (YouTube, 2009)².

On the other hand, the Israeli government and its supporters often point out uneven coverage of the conflict from their own perspective. For instance, Alan Dershowitz (2006) complains that Israel receives negative media treatment: ‘In one sense, it should come as no surprise that tiny Israel, the Jew among nations, attracts such disproportionate attention from the world. After all, the Jewish people – both before and after the establishment of the state of Israel – has always been the focus of disproportionate attention, mostly negative, despite the small number of Jews in the world’ (Dershowitz, 2006).

But evidence suggests an opposing narrative of the conflict to what Dershowitz’ claims that Israel (as a government) had little or off-putting news coverage in U.S. media. Importantly, the evidence also dismisses the widespread notion of presenting all Jews as oppressors and Zionists. For instance, ‘Jews against Zionism’ and ‘True Torah Jews against Zionism’ are few of many organizations that dissent with those believe in oppression. Opposite to these voices are political neocons in the United States who openly advocate tough laws and support military actions in Gaza.

For example, in *The New York Times* of January 14, 2009, Thomas Friedman, who vigorously supports Israeli attacks on the Gaza strip, famously referred to such attacks as an ‘education’ and said that ‘this “education” worked on Hezbollah, and he hopes it will work in the current conflict in Gaza’ (Uruknet, 2009). For many reasons, Friedman’s argument appears insensible as we have seen aggressive policies fail in Afghanistan, Iraq and even in Iran before the start of the war. Leading scholars – mostly on the Left – dismiss the aggressive approach. In line with Friedman, British columnist Melanie Philips persistently defends Israeli policies and argues that Israel is doing its ‘self-defense’: ‘Europe has waited for 50 years for a way to blame the Jews for their own destruction.

² Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E21MdXe3BOQ&gl=GB&hl=en-GB>

So instead of addressing genocidal Muslim anti-Semitism, the Europeans have seized upon a narrative which paints the Jews as Nazis and Palestinians as the new Jews' (Berry & Philo, 2004).

Propaganda model in practice

Drawn upon Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman (1988) 'Propaganda Model of News' that is based on five categories namely: concentration of the media ownership, advertising, source of information, flake (negative response) and anti-communism and fear as control mechanism, it argued that despite the criticism this model is visibly dominant in the news relating to Israel-Palestine conflict. Robert Fisk offers a best illustration that is descriptive of 'Propaganda Model' in case of Palestine that is often described as 'neighborhood' but not as a 'colony' or 'outpost' (Fisk, 2006; 2001).

The massive use of propaganda in the Israel-Palestine conflict has long interested academics. The effective use of propaganda is often visible in the Israeli government campaigns compared with efforts by its opponents who supposedly benefit from Al-Manar and Al-Aqsa TV channels.

Ha'aretz published a story December 22, 2000, which quotes an Israeli minister who admitted 'To his great dismay <...> the information provided by Amira Hass in *Haaretz* concerning some of the incidents in the territories has been more accurate than what he was been told by IDF' (cited in Hass, 2003). Hass provides evidence of such propaganda practices within the Israeli army. In a series of interviews with Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), Hass quotes a soldier who admitted to her that the IDF rules of engagement 'change every day'.

Several leading studies talk about propaganda tactic in wars and political situation that is used to shape public opinion (Bagdikian, 1983; Karim, 2004; Miller, 2004; Snow, 1998; 2002; 2004; 2010; Thussu, 2004). Terence H. Qualter (1959) calls it the 'weapon of power politics'.

Howard Friel and Richard Falk (2007) offer a comprehensive account of media reportage of Gaza that indicates media bias. These authors examined *The New York Times* editorial pages on Gaza issues and conclude the major global paper went easy on Israel's 2006 attacks on Hezbollah in Lebanon. *The New York Times* declined to criticize Israel's military campaign. Friel and Falk analyzed reports from leading global newspapers, newswires and international donor agencies such as *Haaretz*, *Jerusalem Post*, *Independent*, *The Guardian*, *Amnesty International press releases*, *France Presse*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Yediot Achronot*, and *Reuters* from July 8 to November 13, 2006 and found that *The New York Times* failed to put facts in the right order (Friel & Falk, 2007).

According to Friel and Falk, *The New York Times* labelled Noam Chomsky an ‘extremist’ for his outspoken views on Israel while its writer Ethan Bronner praised Alan Dershowitz (2003) and tag the professor’s book as ‘intelligent polemic’ in a review (Friel & Falk, 2007). They pointed out how the *New York Times* crossed intellectual honesty borders by calling Dershowitz an expert and discrediting Chomsky, a recognized thinker of our times.

In John Pilger’s recent documentary ‘The War You Don’t See’ David Mannion, the Editor in Chief of *ITV News* admits that ‘The Israeli propaganda machine is very sophisticated and in its own terms it’s quite successful’ (Pilger, 2010). Furthermore, the findings indicate a visible media disparity in covering Gaza, the *BBC* Head of Newsgathering, Fran Unworth, argues ‘The *BBC* has a duty to report what the government and their representatives are saying’ (*ibid*).

In the same documentary Greg Philo argues that most journalists feel fearful of talking against Israel (*ibid*). Philo further notes the British journalist are so fearful that before filing story about Israel some ask their bosses ‘what can I say, which words can I use’. In his interview with Stephen Sackur of the *BBC Hard Talk* (January 23, 2007) George Galloway exposes several cases of the media unequal coverage of the Israel-Palestine issue in the Middle East and points out the following: ‘Andrew Gilligan who actually told the truth and he got sacked. The man who backed him Greg Dyke, the Director General of the *BBC* stood by his man and got sacked. Gavin Davis stood by his DG and got sacked <...> Piers Morgan in the *Mirror* got sacked, I got sacked’ (YouTube, 2010).

Systematic media reporting and the excluded voices

Close scrutiny of media coverage of Israeli-Palestinian conflict holds several accounts of disproportionate reporting. Chris Hedges avers that critics and scholars such as Yuri Avnery, Tom Segev, Ilan Pappe, Gideon Levy and Amira Hass, Noam Chomsky, Dennis Kucinich, Norman Finkelstein and Richard Falk, are all ignored, unrepresented and voiceless in the media (Truthdig, 2009).

Hedges’ observations are accurate as most mainstream media, including Middle East news outlets, have given little time or space to Jewish peace activists. Absent from the media are spokespersons from a long list of Jewish peace organizations including ‘Jewish Voice for Peace’, ‘European Jews for a Just Peace’, ‘Jews for Justice for Palestine’, ‘The Jewish Peace Lobby’, ‘Independent Jewish Voices’, and ‘Jews against Islamophobia’.

The fact is that in case of Gaza Israeli government exercises strict control over national and international journalists to report its actions against civilians. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) ‘Operation Cast Lead’ brings a media blockade which has opened novel avenues for new media to generate information and

news supply as Will Ward describes ‘The government even prohibited Israeli soldiers from bringing in mobile phones. By now the medium of choice for leaks of embarrassing information the world over’ (Ward, 2009).

Thus, new media has become latest target of the government control as Ward suggests ‘Analysis on the role of new media in the Middle East has largely centred on how “citizen journalists” can now set the agenda for news outlets, and how social media users repackage, comment on, and distribute content in innovative ways’ (*ibid*). Hughes-Thompson experienced worse restraints from IDF: ‘In the pre-dawn hours we suddenly saw live feed from the Mavi Marmara showing Israeli commandos rappelling down from helicopters and shooting passengers... (as the IDF shot out the cameras)...the Israelis confiscated all their cameras, computers, cell phones and all their electronics (along with other possessions including money, credit cards, etc.) Israel then used social media to put out false information claiming they had been attacked and were merely defending themselves’ (Interview with author, 2015).

The bloggers and independent filmmakers have brought the angle of conflict and, as a result, the anti-war movements are growing and more people are showing their opposition to this longstanding conflict. For instance, in a video *Russia Today*³ reporters shows stream of interviews that includes: the Israeli broadcaster Ehud Shem Tov the editor of *Social TV*, Professor Tamar Liebes of Hebrew University and Lt. Aliza Landes, head of the Israeli Defense Forces new media department.

It explains on the basis of conversation that the footage of Flotilla was edited by the Israeli army before it reached the television channels. For instance, the demonstrations happened inside Israel were not shown to avoid public anger and hence the public was shown a military broadcast version as Tov says, ‘Israeli media doesn’t give Israeli public a true picture what is happening’. All Israeli military correspondents worked in the army and there is a deep connection between them. Definitely there are videos that army is not releasing’ (*Russia Today*, 2010). Likewise Jasiewicz pointed out, ‘The activists on the ground in Gaza during the massacres 2008-2009 (myself included) were all either blogging or sending our email reports to their contact lists’ (Interview with author, 2011).

Discussion and analysis

Most all of the respondents consider new media as a force for change that has transformed the news patterns from conflicting zones such as the Gaza. But they also raise fear that Israeli government has the power and sources to shut

³ Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvwti0p0p8o>

new media sites. So the question then arises is that whether or not the new media is an independent entity? And will it survive government restrictions?

The new media facilitates to establish bond between Israelis and Palestinians [common people] which reminds us the fall of ‘Berlin Wall’ that failed to resist before people’s desire. Coincidentally, in this case ordinary people through networking are becoming closer to each other than ever before and it seems the idea of ‘Iron Wall’ as offered by Avi Shlaim (2001) is noticeably declining.

About half of the participants of this study said that social media is still beyond the reach of many people. Phil Rees argues that only wealthy ‘westernized groups’ use social media whilst countryside and urban dwellers are ‘largely disenfranchised’ that makes its role as ‘unrepresentative’. Further, Rees concluded: ‘Its role has been exaggerated precisely because it has not challenged the news agenda. It did not challenge a simplistic, often inaccurate perspective (a pro-Western, democracy seeking majority fighting a religious extremist and oppressive regime)’ (Interview with the author, 2011). In contrast, Norman Finkelstein expressed a different point of view: ‘Because of the new media, the mainstream media no longer set the agenda: the mainstream media must now compete for an audience with the new media’ (Interview with author, 2011).

Truly, recent years have witnessed many channels, community radios, blogs and web-sites those give space to marginalized communities, for instance, in an outstanding short film ‘Year to commemorate war in Gaza’ (2011), Eitan Lerner, of *Israel Social TV* brings about an insight of Israeli citizens who staged at Robin Square to mark solidarity with Arabs. In this film, Lerner display interviews of political activists, scholars, journalists and professionals who choose to act and oppose Israel’s brutal siege of Gaza which includes: Combatants for Peace Event, Hadash Party and Doctors for Human Rights Association series of demonstrations held in Tel Aviv and Jaffa during the months of January and March 2009 (YouTube, 2011).

But Israeli government restrictions and pressures on new media users as well as shutting of social networking sites displays the bleak-side of social media. Take the case of assault on Freedom Flotilla incident that had cost Israeli government a strong opposition outside the world. During the attack on Gaza Flotilla the eyewitness account reaches to the entire world as Ewa Jasiewicz said: ‘The Israelis bombed the transmitters for phones and Internet in the North of the strip, so, there was no tweeting or emailing or even calls I could make or take, not me or anyone else’ (Interview with author, 2011). However, such experiences also taught activist and new media users to be more prepared and cautious as Hughes-Thompson explained her experience of the year 2011: ‘I was on the Canadian flotilla boat TAHRIR in Greece (our boat was on the island of

Crete) and by that time we had WiFi on board, previously unheard of... we had the ability to email photographs & videos in seconds' (Interview with author 2015).

Notably, the Paris attacks of 2015 were marked with safety check features for people. Additionally, Facebook users changed their display profile (DP) to French flag but on the same day Facebook neither allowed people to mark Beirut attack nor to change their display profile (Al-Jazeera, 15 November 2015).

News from Gaza in the age of new media

The world has begun to see live podcasts, audios, visual images and videos of concentrated camps, military patrols in the streets, rotten remains of bombed hospitals and mosques showing civilians under attack, demolition of Palestinians homes, stopping children from going on to schools, and forcefully separating them from parents. Charles Glass describes Palestinians sufferings as, 'I do know about Gaza, where people would have every right to be angry with or without the Internet' (Interview with author, 2011). Evidence shows that the new media has emerged as a blessing for the Palestinians. Greta Berlin shared her experience in the following words: 'When we began organizing to sail a boat to Gaza in 2006, the only social media available was Gmail. The rest were in their infancy. By the time Freedom Flotilla I was attacked in 2010, we were working with Twitter, Facebook, Google groups and web-sites. In four years the world changed completely. Social media has changed the playing field of information' (Interview with the author, 2015).

Almost all participants interviewed for this study believe that the new media has potentially changed the view of Gaza conflict that was ignored and unreported for several decades. A few recent studies on the role of new media in Israel-Palestine conflict affirm the similar view that new media has transformed the conflict reporting (El-Zein & Abusalem, 2015; Zeitzoff, 2017).

In contrast, the mainstream media has overwhelmingly refused to investigate human rights abuses, torture and everyday harassment experienced by the Palestinians. This behavior raises concerns for many living in the democratic world including the partakers of this study. As Mary Hughes-Thompson puts it, 'some reporters are daring to (occasionally) report on crimes against Palestinians, though most such crimes go completely unreported, while every single attack on Jewish Israelis (or Jews anywhere) is front page news' (Interview with the author, 2015). Others, like Norman Finkelstein, have raised similar concerns: 'Newspapers like *The New York Times*, which are basically mouthpieces of the Israeli foreign ministry, no longer control public perceptions of the Israel-Palestine conflict' (Interview with author, 2011).

Arguably, most news media organizations cover various events according to their own financial and political vested interests. Take for instance, the case of Iraq War in which most of the western the media misguided and misinformed the public (Basile, 2017; Dodge, 2006; Mitchell, 2013). Not only wars but also elections in democratic countries like America and Britain the media had tool sides and manipulated the public opinion in favor of liked-minded politicians (Bartle & Allen, 2018; Beers, 2010).

Noticeably, the Gaza assault and blockade is yet another reprehensible illustration of the mainstream media reporting that has badly failed it. For Yvonne Ridely Gaza is often unreported because the ‘mainstream media is under the influence of politicians and a very strong Zionist lobby’ (Interview with author, 2015).

Maybe, those media organizations align with the Israeli government avoid covering Palestinians suffering at the hands of IDF. Fairly speaking both sides endorse their view point across through various channels including the media.

Several scholars have noted that both Israel and the Palestinians have employed propaganda tools as part of their key strategies to present the conflict to the wider world that include textbooks curriculum in schools to literature and use of the mainstream as well social media brimming with horrific pictures to persuade public opinion (Chesnoff et al., 1969; Peled-Elhanan, 2012; Robinson, 2013).

On the other hand, the IDF also notices the growing importance of social media and makes use of every social media platform available that includes notable names such as Twitter and YouTube. An Israeli military spokesman Major Avital Leibovich publicly admitted, ‘We open channel on YouTube and the purpose was to reach audience in other countries in other land <...> my dream is to have everyday blog in Arabic and in English next time when we have a conflict’ (YouTube, 2009). In contrast, Hamas employs PAL Tube and The Electronic Intifada for updates during the siege. However, Israel has an edge over Hamas because it is considered a terrorist organization in the west which support Israel’s point of view.

Will Ward (2009) finds that, ‘The Israeli military debut its own YouTube channel to broadcast clips of surveillance and air strikes, eager to portray its weapons as precise and show off its technological command of the battle space. Hamas has also sought to use the media. In Gaza, a group of Hamas fighters allowed Algerian journalist Zouheir Alnajjar to videotape the inside of their homemade rocket factory’ (Ward, 2009).

But new media has made it possible for people to report war crimes, which was previously unthinkable. An eyewitness of Gaza atrocities Paul

Larudee illustrates as, ‘Gaza is mass murder and ethnic cleansing. It is war crimes and crimes against humanity’ (Interview with author, 2015).

The notion of humanity is the significant thesis behind western invasions and interference in others matter in the Middle East and beyond. But when it comes to Israel many western nations appear to be silent. As Noam Chomsky has suggested that, ‘Israel has been abducting civilians for decades, and no one has ever suggested that anyone should invade Israel’ (cited in Barsamian, 2007).

Take the case of Israeli assault on Gaza dozens of short films and documentaries were broadcast at various video hubs those includes: YouTube, Vimeo, Netflix, Hulu, Daily Motion, Metacafe, Veoh, Screen, TV.com and Break.com. Simultaneously, on other front bloggers channel news from inside Gaza during and after the conflict making it the rest of the world to look into the issue from a completely different perspective of mainstream media and politics. For example, blogs such as ‘Gaza Mom’, ‘Iraq Burning’, ‘Live from Gaza’, ‘Podcast from Gaza’, ‘Telling the Story of Gaza’, ‘Gaza.mov’ and ‘From Gaza with Love’ are evident of emerging trends of new media.

In addition, *Al Jazeera*’s ‘Creative Commons Repository’ programme assist students from Islamic University of Gaza to produce short films of their daily life under occupation and share it with the outside world. In brief, Finkelstein has rightly put it as, ‘The main achievement of the new media is that it has loosened the monopoly of the mainstream media’ (Interview with the author, 2011).

For instance, documentaries such as ‘The Gaza Strip’ (2002); ‘Death in Gaza’ (2003); ‘The Other Israel’ (2006); ‘Occupation 101’ (2007); ‘Tunnel Trade’ (2007); ‘Tears of Gaza’ (2008); ‘The Birth of Israel’ (2008); ‘Erased: Wiped Off the Map’ (2009); ‘Sleepless in Gaza’ (2010); ‘The Zionist story’ (2010) and ‘Valley of Wolves Palestine’ (2011). All these videos present liberal and insight view of the conflict, for instance, Ronen Berelovich documentary ‘The Zionist Story’ includes interviews of Israeli historians, scholars and campaigners who hold opposing views of Israeli government that hardly ever appear on mainstream media channels. In sum, Noha Mellor points out: ‘Social media in the MENA region, as elsewhere, serve as new platforms for virtual conversations, and these tend to become quite heated during crisis situations, such as the Gaza conflict in July-August, 2014. Numerous hashtags appeared on Twitter, as part of Hamas’s crusades such as #GazaUnderAttack, #StopIsrael and #PrayforGaza’ (Interview with author, 2015).

Conclusion

The analysis offered in this article is by no means final. It clearly has to be refined, in order to do full justice to a more comprehensive study and, since the crisis

in Gaza is ongoing, there has been a radical shift in the Britain, America and the European domestic political landscape that will certainly have an impact of the Israeli-Palestine conflict. Besides, the political situation in Syrian, Yemen and beyond in the Middle East will also have an effect on the conflict. This inquiry has erudite that in the past few years Israel-Palestine issue has gained more scholarly and public attention as the world of information has enormously changed.

New means of communications including smartphone's, tablets, mini-computers, satellite phones and other smart technological instruments have now made it possible to report any event live or at least record it happens. The campaigners, activists and volunteers on Mavi Marmara aid-ship witnessed, recorded and somehow managed to disseminate the brutal Israeli commandos attack on the Flotilla. Somehow, one may call it a new turn in reporting from Gaza, 'as it happens' because of information technology revolution.

Arguably, it has now become more challenging for those in power to control the flow of information than ever before. In turn, the case of Palestine and Gazans is strong and it gets more sympathizers in Europe and around the world. Another significant change signals growing role of new media in strengthening and mobilizing anti-war voices inside Jerusalem. In addition, anti-war campaigners and human rights activists are using online platforms to connect and drive likeminded communities globally in favor of Gazans. Somehow, new media has emerged as a blessing for the Palestinians. Evidence show that the Palestine issue has gained more popularity after the invention of Facebook, YouTube and Twitter that many believe have become battle ground among unarmed Palestinians and the Israelis.

Until the present, new technologies are constantly evolving in advancement which makes it impossible to scale new media future as well as its successes and failures. Also, despite growing use of new technologies yet today for most people around the globe new media technologies are luxury items. However, given the rise of humanitarian activist movements in Europe and beyond most people involved are reasonably educated and well aware of these technologies so in this regard there is a potential and space for new media technologies. Globally, blogging is still a prevalent source of expressing alternative opinions and news dissemination. But of course new technologies are still beyond the reach of majority of the world citizens who also requires knowledge and skills to operate smart phone and write blogs.

The other side is bleak and that is media conglomerates and governments increasing pressures and crackdowns on web-sites, blogs and all sorts of new mediums of news. It is here the real challenge lies ahead in future. Based upon

the analysis of interviews it concludes that besides challenges there are hopes and success stories of new media in Gaza and this keep the passion moving. The challenge ahead for the researchers and academic community is yet to find an answer to a question that whether or not the new media is more or less independent from media conglomerates and political elite's control and also whether it can be both professional and trustable.

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Appendix

The Media Report Card Studies list: *Deadly Distortion: Associated Press Jan. 2004 – Dec. 2004, Off the Charts: ABC, CBS, and NBC Sep. 2000 – Sep. 2001 Jan. 2004 – Dec. 2004, Off the Charts: New York Times Sep. 2000 – Sep. 2001 Jan. 2004 – Dec. 2004, SF Chronicle (CA) Report Card Sep. 2000 – Mar. 2001, San Jose Mercury News (CA) Report Card Oct. 2002 – Mar. 2003, San Jose Mercury News (CA) Report Card Apr. – Sep. 2002 and New London Day (CT) Report Card Mar. – Jun. 2003*.

ARTICLE

Newspapers and magazines of Russian million cities: Role in media system, main peculiarities, factors of development

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Abstract

The article presents the results of a sociological study that analyzes the media system of some of the largest cities in Russia. The research is emphasized on 13 cities with a population of over one million people. It details the place of printed media among all others and highlights relevant structural, thematic and functional characteristics of this exact type of media. The study, which involves more than 400 newspapers and magazines, provides a detailed analysis of all the main demographical, economic, social and cultural forces that form the media system of these cities. This makes it possible to identify the average structural model of the modern press in million cities.

Keywords

Media system of million cities, Russian mass media, newspapers and magazines, urban press.

Introduction

Peculiarities of the Russian media system are stimulated by a whole range of factors defined by specifics of Russian history, political culture, ethnic culture and structure of the society, and a number of other nationally determined features. Among the main peculiarities Russian researchers underline some, such as significant territory and low density of population, which considerably creates

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problems in distribution of printed media and turns television in dominating mass media in Russia (Vartanova, 2015). Altogether, understanding the development of contemporary Russian mass media requires general comprehension of theoretical frames within which media research is currently being made. Russian media researchers frequently use the sociological instruments to conceptualize changes happening in the media, as well as to forecast new trends in the process of transformation (Vartanova, 2015). Meanwhile, problems of development of the media are still at the periphery of scientific discourse, which prevents formation of an aggregate picture (Kolomiets, 2015).

Relevant studies underline that mass media is a complex phenomenon that is determined politically, socially, economically and anthropologically by external factors (Dunas, 2017). At that, a close interaction between changes in society takes place, and many social processes influencing the development of modern societies mingle together, such as increase of social disparity, uneven global and regional economic development, growing multiculturalism of societies, and mobility of labor market (McQuail, 2014; Vartanova, 2013; 2015; 2018). The modern society is defined as mediatized, and the research proceeds to comprehend fundamental issues of relations between mass media, culture and society (Gureeva, 2017). According to the researchers' opinion, we need to understand which motivations influence the nature and development of media. Besides, it is important to determine and systematize the main drivers of development of the media and factors influencing them (Demina & Shkondin, 2016; Vartanova, 2018; Vyrkovsky, 2010).

The main goal of the study

Therefore, the main goal of this research is to study the media system of 13 Russian cities with over 1 mln inhabitants (except multi-million cities Moscow and Saint Petersburg), conditions and factors that influence the establishment of the media system, its key characteristics, the content, the role of various media in shaping the media image of urban life, and its perception by the audience. Among such cities are: Volgograd, Voronezh, Yekaterinburg, Kazan, Krasnoyarsk, Nizhniy Novgorod, Novosibirsk, Omsk, Perm, Rostov-on-Don, Samara, Ufa, and Chelyabinsk. Currently, the population of these cities altogether exceeds 30 million people and keeps growing. The status of the cities with over 1 mln inhabitants allows participating in a greater number of federal programs and projects, as well as promotes the investing attractiveness of the city, which in total creates the more favorable climate for development of the media space.

The project is run by the Department of Periodical Press and the Laboratory of Actual Problems in Journalism. It continues the ambitious

research of newspapers in Russian medium cities and towns, which started in 2013¹.

Novelty of the presented research is largely defined by the fact that the media system of million cities was first studied in the context of a general demographic, economic and social-cultural state of cities with over 1 mln inhabitants, as well as regions where they represent administrative centers².

Significance of this complex study is explained by the fact that cities with over 1 mln inhabitants play a great role in the development of Russia, because these are places of concentration of the main economic, scientific, intellectual, educational and cultural resources of the country. These are centers of large agglomerations, which greatly influence the processes occurring in the country. Megacities are important not only for urban agglomeration, but for suburbs as well, because these are centers of public, economic and cultural life of the whole region. Megapolises embrace scientific centers, universities, and leading cultural institutions (creative unions, theaters, museums, archives, libraries, etc.), institutions of healthcare, trade, and a developed transport infrastructure. Such cities are pioneers of technological breakthroughs in science and production; here innovative projects of various natures are born, tested and realized.

The research object is the periodical press market of Russian cities with over 1 mln inhabitants.

¹ During the first stage of the study, editors and journalists from 66 newspapers, representing 26 of all 85 subjects of Russian Federation, were surveyed. Their positions according to the wide range of issues related to the state and development perspectives of local press were obtained. We have analyzed functions, content, genre structure, convergent processes, relationships with the audience, a founder and an owner; status and economic status of publications; personal situation; problems and ways of development of the local press. See: SVITICH, L. G., SMIRNOVA, O. V., SHIRYAYEVA, A. A., & SHKONDIN, M. V. (2014). *Gazety srednih i malyh gorodov Rossii v 2010-h gg.* [Newspapers of middle and small town in Russia in the 2010s]. *Moscow University Journalism Bulletin*, 5, pp. 3–25; 6, pp. 52–72; SVITICH, L. G., SMIRNOVA, O. V., SHIRYAYEVA, A. A., & SHKONDIN, M. V. (2015). *Gazety srednih i malyh gorodov Rossii v 2010-h gg. (rezul'taty oprosa redaktorov i zhurnalistov)* [Newspapers of middle and small town in Russia in the 2010s (results of the survey among editors and journalists)]. Moscow, MSU Faculty of Journalism.

² See: SVITICH, L. G., SMIRNOVA, O. V., & SHKONDIN, M. V. (2016). *Issledovanie krupnyh gorodov Rossii: Resursy mediasistemy* [The research of big cities of Russia: Resources of the media system]. In: *Journalism 2015. Informational potential of the society and media system resources: Materials of the International Scientific-Practical Conference*. Moscow, 6-7 February 2016. Moscow, MSU Faculty of Journalism, MediaMir, pp. 221–222.

The main research questions are:

- What peculiarities does the press structure of the cities with over 1 mln inhabitants have?
- What are the main characteristics of newspapers and magazines of these million cities?
- How do the million cities influence the life of regions, especially in terms of providing citizens with the information on regional and city events?
- How much do the structure and content of the million cities' press depend on infrastructural factors of urban and region development?
- What are the main factors of development of newspapers and magazines of cities with over 1 mln inhabitants?
- Is it possible to elicit an average structural model of modern press in the million cities?

This article does not cover any other aspects of newspapers' functioning and content, though they are important for understanding the state of media landscape. Some of them have already been analyzed in other publications of the authors (Svitich et al., 2015; 2016; 2017), the others will be considered later.

Methods

The robust research of the media system of cities with over 1 mln inhabitants is impossible without considering the peculiarities of each city. We are of the opinion that the basic approach should be the modern approach used for urban science and sociology, which embraces the complex of territorial-residential, administrative, economic, social-demographic and social-cultural contexts. In this project, it is necessary to emphasize the information-communication component of functioning of a modern big city. For a reason, while describing and analyzing the media sphere of the city in scientific publications such terms as 'media space', 'media landscape', 'media picture', 'media life', 'media behavior', 'media practices', and 'media citizen' are used. The media resource is the most important factor of functioning and development of a city and vital activity of its population, which has not yet been fully realized.

In structural and functional context, the media system should be adequate to parameters of the city, characteristics and needs of the population as the potential media audience. First foreign and then Russian researchers introduced the term 'mediapolis' in the scientific rotation. A mediapolis is a media projection of a city representing the variety of spheres of its life, information-communication objects, social classes and groups. The concept of the 'media city', which emphasizes the definitive role of media technologies in the dynamic process of establishment of the modern urban space, and also analyzed the

close interaction of media technologies and urban development, effects of deterritorialization, destabilization of traditional coordinates and stability of urban forms initiated by development of electronic and digital media, becomes more and more vital (McQuire, 2014)

In the first stage, the data were collected on the main characteristics providing the image of the actual situation in regions and cities, and on which backgrounds depending on demographic, national, spiritual, economic, ecologic, educational, and cultural modus should mass media system be built, including newspapers and magazines, their concept, communication strategies and models³.

The second stage of the research, performed in 2017, included sociological research of the content of newspapers in the million cities under several important categories and features, among which are the following: theme, problematic, genre structure, authors, subjects of opinion, sources of information used in publications, objects of publications, nature of titles and illustrations, types and topics of the official materials, type and nature of advertisement.

Factors of formation of the media system of million cities

The urban social space is in great demand of a mass informational interaction that would be mediated through routine and new media. It needs relations of openness and publicity as within the framework of the urban society, so as on the national and global scale. Therefore, the media sphere of the big city absorbs the information resources of all the mentioned levels (Demina & Shkondin, 2016; Shkondin & Zamotina, 2016).

The urban media system is aimed at creation of the optimum media space that would provide mass information relations between all the social subjects: personalities, different communities representing spheres of culture, economic, political, scientific and other types of activity. Basically, this is the public dialogue on an urban-wide scale. The result of such information interactions is creation and continuous update of the information potential of the urban

³ The main sources for collecting information on the infrastructure of million cities: http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/publications/catalog/doc_1138631758656; Sites of city and regional administrations: Volgograd <http://www.volgadmin.ru/ru/>; Voronezh voronezh-city.ru pgu.govvrn.ru; Yekaterinburg ekburg.ru екатеринбург.рф; Kazan <http://www.kzn.ru/> <http://prav.tatarstan.ru>; Krasnoyarsk admkrsk.ru; Nizhniy Novgorod [нижнийновгород.рф](http://nizhnynovgorod.ru); Novosibirsk novo-sibirsk.ru; Omsk admOmsk.ru омск.рф; Perm gorodperm.ru; Rostov-on-Don rostov-gorod.ru; Samara city.samara.ru; Ufa ufacity.info; Chelyabinsk cheladmin.ru

society, which absorbs intellectual and innovative possibilities of the city, as well as the resources of national and global nature.

Furthermore, the increasing mediation of the public space reveals problems that are caused by the fact that the social benefit is often limited by possibilities related to commercial considerations of media profitability (McQuire, 2014). Such business logics may, on the one hand, stimulate the development of the urban media space, but on the other hand, it may to some extent decrease the effectiveness and the quality of the urban communication.

This influences the media picture of the city that is born in the minds of citizens. Not always it embraces all the spheres of their life activity and provides information interaction between all the social subjects: the personality, separate social structures – economic, political, administrative, etc. Publicity of the urban life is characterized first by a certain level of information relations between social subjects where the audience has the possibility of continuous mastering all the main information resources that represent conditions of life activity of the city and its environment, the most important innovations and problems of social life of the city (Shkondin, 2016).

The complex of media present in a certain big city demonstrates a structural plurality, within which there exists a certain distribution of labor in the all-city mass information process. Meanwhile, media is characterized by a specific uniformity of type:

- a unified social community that participates in mastering of the information potential actual for citizens of this city;
- a unified social community that participates in creation of information potential;
- a unified functional integrity (model), related to provision of certain information relations between subjects of the urban life, which create information resources that characterize the objective conditions of city life, as well as new ways of solving existing problems and developing the urban society.

Large cities differ from medium and especially from small ones not only by territory and population, but also by social-demographic, social-cultural and economic characteristics. Due to huge territories and high population, million cities have more complicated administrative structure, which also needs information-communication provision (Golosheikin & Motovilov, 2009; Zatsepilin, 2006).

To a great extent, this function is still running by newspapers of general interest (in Russia, they are traditionally called social-political). In fact, currently these are not political issues in a general sense, but newspapers of urban issues

and city-wide significance. As a rule, they are published by the bodies of state urban administration. Nevertheless, their actual designation is not to ‘serve’ the administration in an informative way, but to provide the citizens with the effective communication, which would stimulate the development of the city. It happens so, that such issues simultaneously have a status of regional affairs, and should provide the involvement of the urban society into all-regional context, and through publication of certain content – to all-Russian context.

Foreign and domestic researchers denote the historically established peculiarities of forming the identity and solidarity of million cities’ citizens. While in small towns and rural settlements it is based on blood and neighbor relations (communality), in large cities it is based on similar attitudes and interests, same outlook, social relations, production, etc.

In million cities, due to peculiarities of their development, the demographical composition of the population (gender, nationality, etc.) is more heterogeneous; professional composition is more varied due to multi-aspect nature of activity. Therefore, along with universal issues provided to the mass audience, there is a need in segmentation of the media market, in issues that would be designed for narrower (‘niche’) target audiences, as the social structure of large cities is quite dynamic.

Million cities provide ample opportunities for getting education. That is why the educational level of the population here is higher, which inevitably creates conditions for keeping the demand for qualitative periodicals. Sociological studies of the audience show that in Russia the number of readers of qualitative media makes only one fifth of the total newspaper-reading audience. And still, it is worth mentioning that qualitative newspapers are demanded particularly by citizens of million cities who are well educated and perform not only executive labor, but a range of managerial duties as well. Apparently, large cities offer a greater variety of work positions, including managerial ones. We should also add that cities with over 1 mln inhabitants always include major research centers and universities, which create the environment for publication of scientific and popular science journals.

In cities with over 1 mln inhabitants, the level of computer science and Internet spread among the population is also very high. Consequently, million cities provide wide possibilities for new media development, which is extremely demanded by the younger part of the audience (Svitich & Smirnova, 2016).

The demand of business and corporate press in million cities is explained by the developed structure of industry and financial-economic activity. Trade markets, service industry, and consumer demand are actively developing in these cities; that is how the prevalence of advertising and advertising-informational press stipulates (Makeenko & Vyrkovsky, 2012; Vyrkovsky, 2010).

The social-cultural factor is very important for functioning of the media system. In the context of development of the cultural level, citizens in these cities have certain benefits: more educational, cultural and artistic institutions. In this regard, the demand for issues of the corresponding rend is fixed.

One should also mention that in million cities the percentage of migration from small towns and rural settlements, other regions and countries, is quite high. This actualizes the participation of mass media in social-cultural integration of migrants. This factor also promotes the emergence of issues for the audience of ethnic diasporas.

Million cities are characterized by a diversity of citizens' lifestyles and leisure activities typical for different classes and groups. This is also a promising thematic trend for urban media.

Therefore, on the whole the social-cultural environment of a big city is extremely heterogeneous. This is demonstrated as by value pluralism, so as by the presence of various subcultures, which should also be considered by mass media (Sabirova, 2012).

The main results

Summarizing the above provisions on peculiarities of the media system of the big city, we should underline the need to study the media system of cities with over 1 mln inhabitants and diversity of its components. Within the realization of the research program, we studied infrastructural factors of formation of media systems in all 13 cities with over 1 mln inhabitants, as well as characteristics of 403 periodicals chosen. To study the collected data, we used methods of correlation and factor analysis. Besides, using the sociological method of content analysis, we studied content-related characteristics of 18 city newspapers. Around 30 thousand publications were coded, including: 30% – journalist texts, 47% – illustrations, 6% – official materials, 17% – advertisements. This article provides the results of the first stage of the study and profound analysis of the issues⁴.

⁴ Project managers M. V. Shkondin, O. V. Smirnova. Authors of the program and research documents: L. G. Svitich, O. V. Smirnova. Research participants: V. N. Boiko, N. N. Zamotina, A. A. Novak, T. Ju. Poreckaja, I. A. Rudenko, Z. P. Simonova, T. E. Uzunova, Ju. S. Uzunova. Econometric analysis of the research data was performed by S. A. Vartanov. While revising the lists of publications, employees of faculties and departments of journalism of several universities of million cities participated: A. V. Mlechko, V. V. Tulupov, B. N. Lozovskij, S. K. Shaihetdinova, Ju. A. Govoruhina, O. N. Savinova, I. M. Pechishhev, V. V. Smeyuha, V. N. Simatova, A. A. Galljamov, L. P. Shestyorkina.

The map of the media system of cities with over 1 mln inhabitants presumed the quantitative analysis of all city media including newspapers and magazines, TV studios, TV channels and radio stations, as well as press agencies, media holdings, publishing houses, Internet media and online versions of printed media. The general data on the media system in absolute numbers are provided below (see *Table 1*).

Table 1

Media system of cities with over 1 mln inhabitants

City	Newspapers	Magazines	Press	TV	R	TV+R	Total	Population (thous., 2014)
<i>Media leaders</i>								
Novosibirsk	101	171	272	16	15	31	303	1 548
Nizhniy Novgorod	202	59	261	13	45	58	219	1 264
Omsk	35	246	251	11	31	41	292	1 166
Yekaterinburg	82	91	173	7	38	45	218	1 412
<i>Media middles</i>								
Kazan	58	60	115	26	27	53	168	1 191
Chelyabinsk	64	50	114	20	31	51	165	1 169
Samara	54	60	114	25	25	50	164	1 172
Rostov-on-Don	80	36	116	18	25	43	159	1 110
Krasnoyarsk	56	57	123	12	20	32	155	1 036
<i>Media littles</i>								
Volgograd	46	46	92	18	23	41	133	1 018
Ufa	59	23	82	18	27	45	127	1 097
Perm	58	15	73	19	29	48	121	1 026
Voronezh	38	23	61	8	20	28	89	1 014

Therefore, three groups of cities were obtained and combined by indexes of number of mass media:

- media leaders (Novosibirsk, Nizhniy Novgorod, Omsk, Yekaterinburg) – 200 to 300 media;
- media middles (Kazan, Chelyabinsk, Samara, Rostov-on-Don, Krasnoyarsk) – 150 to 170 media;
- media littles (Volgograd, Ufa, Perm, Voronezh) – less than 130 media.

Of course, the number of mass media directly depends on the number of

population: most media leaders have the highest indexes of population. Meanwhile, the analysis of dependence on other factors, which were also revealed during the study – economic, educational, cultural, etc., showed a weaker correlation.

In cities with over 1 mln inhabitants, we found a significant number of media holdings, press agencies, publishing houses, which important components of the urban media system have also been found. Therefore, it can be said that in big cities the media system is rather wide, diverse and is represented by different types of media. Still, the subjects of our study in this stage, as it has already been mentioned, are newspapers and magazines, which structure and place in the media system we will analyze. The sampling included only recently published issues, data on which were revised by our colleagues from regional universities. Besides, the list of issues included in sampling turned shorter than the list of the officially registered issues, due to the fact that we studied newspapers and magazines with circulation over 1000 copies, and corporate and serial periodicals were not included in sampling (e.g., scientific journals). Therefore, from 1733 registered printed media we managed to obtain information on 403 periodicals.

Based on the previously tested methodic, we developed the passport of the media and the codifier for analysis of newspapers that included different categories and features of periodicals (name, place of publication, locality, territory of coverage, publication type, periodicity, format, publication volume, circulation, the presence of insert and application, color and price of the publication, language, publication nature, thematic, type of prevailing functions, availability on the Internet, form of property, audience type, the number and date of state registration, the year of foundation). Providing the main results of the study we would like to begin with the results of the analysis by publication type (see *Table 2*).

Table 2

Publication type	Average with respect to the block of the sampled periodicals		Average for one city (abs.)
	Abs. N=403	%	
Newspaper	179	44.4	Newspaper
Magazine	214	53.1	Magazine
Other	10	2.4	Other

The characteristics of the actually published periodicals in cities with over 1 mln inhabitants, provided in our sampling, in 44 cases out of hundred represent newspapers, and in 53 cases – magazines, the rest are other types of periodicals, e.g. almanacs. On average, one city has approximately 30 periodicals, including 14 newspapers and 16 magazines.

Prevalence of magazine products in the media market is a feature of new times, when there were created many niche publications aimed at different specialized groups of audience. In the 1990s, due to mass increase of the number of printed press, along with state media many municipal and private were established. This was especially noticeable in million cities where, as we have already said, many different audiences were presented along with different spheres of economy, culture, science, leisure industry, etc., and where financial conditions are favorable and the advertising market is quite developed, as against small towns.

Obviously, regional media prevail in locality terms, because these cities are the administrative centers of the federal subjects (republics, krays, and oblasts). The sampling includes two republics – Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, three krays – Permsky, Krasnodarsky, Krasnoyarsky, and 8 oblasts.

On average, among the periodicals chosen for sampling there were found 2 federal, 22 regional, and 6 city ones. It is worth mentioning that on the republican and kray level, magazines are prevailing, while on the oblast level the ratio of newspapers and magazines is equal.

The *Table 3* provides the information on periodicity of the researched periodicals.

Table 3

Periodicity	Average on the block of the sampled periodicals		Newspaper %	Magazine %	Average for one city (abs.)
	Abs.	%			
Weekly 5–7 times a week	7	1.7	1.0	0.2	Weekly 5–7 times a week
3–4 times a week	6	1.5	1.0	0.2	3–4 times a week
2 times a week	15	3.4	3.2	0.2	2 times a week
1 times a week	94	23.3	21.1	2.0	1 times a week
2 times per month	22	5.5	4.0	1.5	2 times per month
1 times per month	127	31.5	7.7	23.6	1 times per month
1 in 2 month	24	6.0	0.2	5.7	1 in 2 month
1 in quarter	59	14.8	1.2	13.4	1 in quarter
Undefined periodicity	8	2.0	0.7	1.0	Undefined periodicity
Other periodicity	2	0.5	0.0	0.2	Other periodicity
Not defined	6	1.5	0.7	0.5	Not defined

The results of the study show that the share of daily newspapers (i.e. issued 3 to 7 times a week) makes 3.2%, and usually this is one periodical. On average, one city has 12 newspapers that are published two times a week, and 7 weekly editions. Most of all, monthly magazines are popular – approximately 10 periodicals per city. Also, on average 2 magazines are published once in two months, and 5 – every quarter. Therefore, periodicity of printed media is very diverse, ranging from daily to quarter, while leaders among newspapers are weeklies, and among magazines – monthlies. Among all sampled periodicals, those with monthly periodicity prevail.

The results of the analysis of formats show the following: formats A2 and A3 are the most common; their shares are 42% and 34%, respectively. Newspapers are mostly issued in the format A3 (29%, on average 10 periodicals per city), and magazines in the format A4 (35%, on average 13 periodicals per city).

Trends related to a recent-decade spread of free printed media have certainly influenced cities with over 1 mln inhabitants, which fact is verified by the results of our study. The share of free periodicals among all chosen newspapers and magazines makes more than one third (around 36%), and on average per city – 11 newspapers and magazines. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that the share of paid periodicals is rather significant and makes more than a half (53.6%), which on average makes 17 printed media per city. We should also mention that among paid periodicals magazines prevail – 31.8% (if compared to paid newspapers, which share makes 23.6%).

In the context of thematic of media, an interesting result for us is that in million cities there are twice more media on special topics than universal ones (74% and 26%, respectively). As a result, among analyzed newspapers and magazines, the city on average has 8 periodicals on universal topic and 23 periodicals on special topics. Among universal periodicals newspapers openly prevail, among special ones magazines prevail with greater frequency (magazines on universal topics make only 6.9%). It appears that for million cities this is typical due to differentiation of the audience, its needs and interests. Besides, what is important in this context is the factor related to economic and intellectual resources of large cities, which have significant possibilities to satisfy the media needs of the audience. The detailed analysis of printed media topics is provided in *Table 4*.

Table 4

Prevailing topics for specialized periodicals	Average among the sampled media		Newspaper %	Magazine %	Average number of periodicals for one city (abs.)
	Absc.	%			
Business, finances	30	7.4	2.7	4.5	Business, finances
Society, politics	20	5.0	4.2	0.7	Society, politics
Leisure, entertainment	15	3.7	1.5	2.0	Leisure, entertainment
Health	14	3.5	0.2	3.0	Health
Culture, art	10	2.7	0.5	2.0	Culture, art
Gardening, landscape	3	1.0	0.7	0.2	Gardening, landscape
Sports	3	0.7	0.2	0.2	Sports
Other	212	53.3	17.4	34.7	Other

An active business, economic, production life of cities with over 1 mln inhabitants without any doubt creates conditions for development of printed media related to the sphere of business, finance, and economy. Their share makes 7.4% (2 periodicals per city on average), and these media take the first place among specialized ones. By publication type, magazines prevail among business media. Meanwhile, among periodicals that specialize mostly in society and politics, newspapers prevail, which share for one city makes from 1 to 2. Following these are periodicals specializing in leisure, entertainment, health, sports and culture – approximately one periodical for each trend in every city.

A weighty share, as demonstrated by the analysis of the category ‘other’, is magazines where key topics are science and education. This is explained by the fact that million cities usually have many educational institutions and scientific centers. Other spheres of life, such as householding, gardening, construction, repair, transport, recruitment, family issues, etc., are also represented but in fewer media. The results show that cities with over 1 mln inhabitants have periodicals nearly on every specialization. Therefore, needs of readers in big cities are generally satisfied. And yet, comparing certain urban media systems with infrastructural factors requires the more detailed analysis, which will be performed in further stages of the study.

Among leading functions, the following were identified: informational (35% of printed media), advertising (28.5%) and informational-analytical

(28%). The middle zone (10%) is taken by periodicals performing educative, scientific and popular-science functions (altogether 11.5%). Media that perform entertainment functions make 6%. We found quite few periodicals that perform strictly analytical tasks (only 1.5%), which correspond to decrease of the level of analysis of the modern Russian media.

Therefore, the functional model of newspapers and magazines in million cities is diversified, and it can be said that the model has the following approximate structure: 11 informational, 9 informational-analytical and advertising (informational-advertising) periodicals, 3 educative and scientific (popular-science), 2 entertainment and 1 application media.

It has already been mentioned that the Internet is widely spread in million cities. That is why the results of the study showed an intense character of the presence of the researched media in the online environment (Svitich & Smirnova, 2016). Only 4% of periodicals were not present online. At that, 25% of media very intensively use wide possibilities of the Internet. 28% of periodicals have an independent content +PDF of a printed edition + archive of issues, 33% – PDF of a printed edition + archive of issues, 20% of issues have a full-scale Internet version. Herewith, one should note that newspapers more often than magazines have an independent full-scale version of the periodical, and still, in the context of using the possibilities of multimedia, magazines are leading.

Conclusion

We should first state that in recent decades quite a diverse media system, with a great number of different newspapers and magazine, TV and radio stations, local press agencies, media holdings and publishing houses, has developed in cities with over 1 mln inhabitants. As it was demonstrated by the study, maturity of the media system and total number of mass media have a noticeable positive correlation with the population of a city, and a much weaker correlation with economic and social-cultural factors.

Summarizing the analyzed information (at different degree of presence of periodicals in certain cities and the specifics of media systems), we can present a generalized structural typological model of the press of statistically average million cities.

In such a city, approximately 30 printed media are published regularly (except corporate periodicals and small-print media that were not considered during the study). Three groups have been defined: media leaders, where approximately 50 significant issues are published regularly, which were taken for sampling, media middles – around 30 issues, and media littles – around 20 issues.

In each city, 14 newspapers and 16 magazines were identified on average. By their locality, they are represented by regional issues – 22 issues on average. A daily newspaper (with periodicity 3 to 7 times a week) is usually the only one; averagely, 12 newspapers are issued twice a week; around 7 weekly issues were identified. Also, 10 monthly magazines are issued in a city on average. Newspapers are mostly issued in the format A3, while magazines – in A4.

Meanwhile, 8 periodicals are of universal topic, and these are mostly magazines. Nevertheless, most periodicals are specialized – on average 23 media, and these are usually magazines. Around 2 specialized business magazines are dedicated to finances, business, and economics, 1-2 issues review social and political spheres, science, culture, and leisure. The rest of the media represent very different specialization: householding, repair, construction, transport, technique, production and trade union topics, recruitment, trade, religion, family issues, etc.

Speaking of the functions performed in the market of statistically average cities with over 1 mln inhabitants, there are approximately 11 informative, 9 informational-analytical and advertising (informational-advertising) periodicals, 2-3 educative and science (popular science), 2 entertainment, and not more than one media of application nature. Therefore, the functional structure of issues is generally informative, informational-analytical and advertising, commercial with elements of education, scientific popularization and entertainment.

Most issues – on average 17, are paid, but 11 are distributed for free, and these are mainly advertising newspapers and magazines.

The overwhelming number of printed media in million cities exists as in printed, so as in online form. Averagely, 9 periodicals have an independent content + PDF of a printed issue + archive of issues, 10 periodicals – PDF of a printed issue + archive of issues and 5 periodicals – a full-scale Internet version. And on average, 3 media are less or absolutely not present on the Internet.

So, the study has showed that we can speak of a developed, multifunctional, modern structure of newspapers and magazines in cities with over 1 mln inhabitants. It appears that for cities of such a kind these results are not typical due to differentiation of the audience, its needs and interests. Besides, there is a factor of great importance that is related to economical and intellectual resources of million cities that have significant possibilities to satisfy the media needs of the audience.

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