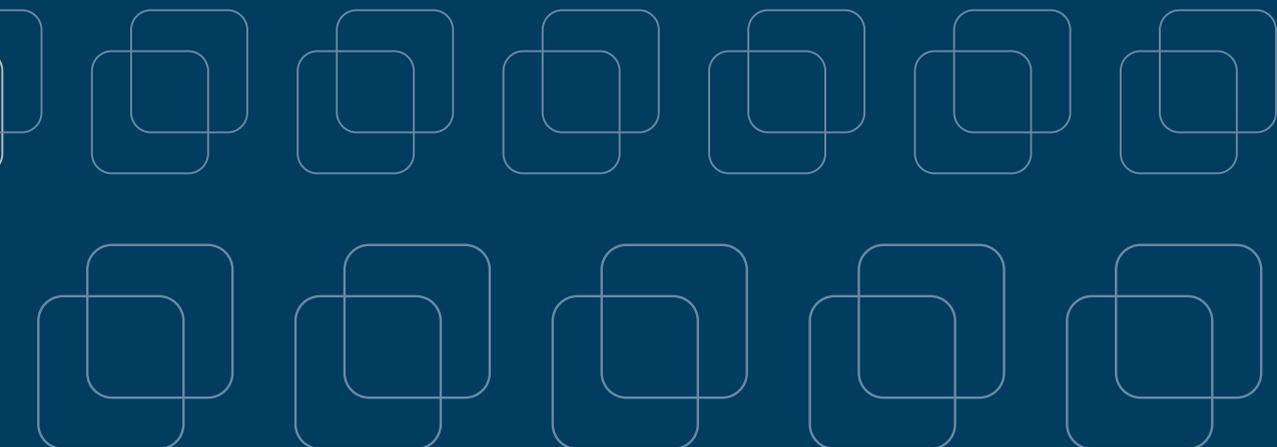


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LEAD ARTICLE

Reporting under fear and threats: The deadly cost of being a journalist in Pakistan and India

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Abstract

The journalists' right to perform their watchdog role and to do their routine jobs without fear of being killed, kidnapped, harassed, and attacked is a topic of utmost importance for freedom of the media and freedom of expression. However, in the past decade, journalists' killings across the globe indicate that journalism is no more a safe profession. Noticeably, the Asia-Pacific region is the third worst violator of media freedom in the world. While the level of media freedom and journalists' safety is not better in the Middle East and the North African regions, the Asia-Pacific region stands out because it is home to the two of the top ten worst countries for journalists' killings over the past 25 years, namely: Pakistan and India. Therefore, drawing on the system theory, this study aims to investigate the journalists' lived experiences of diverse safety risks in Pakistan and India. To accomplish this aim, this study uses the qualitative methods of document reviews and in-depth interviews. Besides, this study uses thematic analysis to analyse the gathered data. The analyses of journalists' lived experiences of safety risks reveal a stark systemic failure to protect them and safeguard their right to freedom of expression in these two countries.

Keywords

Journalism practice, safety risks, journalists' lived experiences, the Pakistani journalists, the Indian journalists, system theory.

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Introduction

Journalism is now recognized as one of the deadliest professions around the world (Carlsson & Poyhatri, 2017; Jamil & Appiah-Adjei, 2020a). Violence continues to pestilence journalists in different forms, including rape, murder and assault, online harassment, increased surveillance, impersonation, forced detention, and other digital threats (Hicks, 2013; Jamil & Muschert, 2020; Reporters without borders, 2019; Sohal, 2020). Hence, in the past decade, journalists' killings around the world suggest that journalism is no more a safe profession and threats to journalists' safety are seriously affecting the freedom of media in many countries of the world (Jamil, 2019b). According to Committee to protect journalists (2019), 1872 journalists have been killed between 1992 and 2018, and the killers remained unidentified in the majority of cases especially in non-democratic regimes. There are countries worldwide (such as China, Egypt, Turkey, Brazil and others) – where media freedom has largely declined due to violence against journalists, their killings and imprisonment, and the climate of impunity (Reporters without borders, 2020).

Particularly, the Asia-Pacific region is the 'third-worst violator of media freedom' in the world. While the level of media freedom and journalists' protection is not better in the Middle East and the North African regions, the Asia-Pacific region stands out because it is 'home to the two of the top ten worst countries for journalists' killings over the past 25 years', namely: Pakistan (the worst-ranked country in 2014 in terms of journalists' killings) and India (Reporters without borders, 2019). Reports by international organizations suggest that the number of killed journalists, in Pakistan and India, is apprehensive. For example, the Committee to protect journalists' latest report reveals that 61 Pakistani and 50 Indian journalists have lost their lives in the line of their duty during this period (Committee to protect journalists, 2019). Unfortunately, the existing culture of impunity allows the perpetrators to go scot-free, and the victims do not get justice. For instance, Committee to protect journalists' Impunity index (2019) indicates that Pakistan and India rank in the top twelve of those countries that do not probe and prosecute journalists' killings and violence against them.

The abusive and repressive nature of the ruling governments and military, armed with laws that restrain journalists' freedom of expression and the freedom of media (such as Pakistan Penal Code, 1860; Pakistan's Official Secrecy Act, 1923; Defamation Ordinance, 2002; Investigation for Fair Trial Act, 2013; Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act, 2016; Indian Penal Code, 1860; India's Official Secrets Act, 1923; India's Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 1967; Section 499 and 500 of Criminal Defamation of Indian Penal Code;

India's Armed Forces [Special Powers] Act, 1958) have proven to be the utmost apparatus for curbing the media's and the journalists' freedoms in Pakistan and India for years. Nevertheless, what is more, alarming is the fatal safety risks that Pakistani and Indian journalists face when doing their day-to-day work. Unfortunately, now the growing concerns over the journalists' right to freedom of expression and media freedom are being replaced by their 'fear of staying alive' in the course of reporting.

Journalism scholars recognize the potential risks to journalists' lives in many countries of the world and there has been a growth in academic research within the area of safety of journalists. For instance, recently many scholars have paid attention to analyse journalists' safety issues, to mention a few studies: journalists' protection in conflict situation from practical, legal and humanitarian perspectives (Lisosky & Henrichsen, 2011); organized crimes against journalists in Mexico (Hughes & Marquez-Ramirez, 2017; Relly et al., 2013); typology of digital risks to journalists (Henrichsen et al., 2015); journalists' killings and physical targeting (Cottle et al., 2016); threats to journalists' safety in Kenya (George, 2016); risks to journalists in Pakistan (Ashraf & Brooten, 2017; Bhattacharya, 2015; Jamil, 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2019b, 2020a; Masood, 2017; Rizwan, 2014); challenges to journalists' protection in Nepal (Adhikary et al., 2016); social responsibility and protection of journalists in South Asia (Rao & Weerasinghe, 2011); freedom of speech and expression amid rise of nationalism on India (Siddiqui, 2017); appraisal of constitutional safeguards, legal restrictions and impact of state control on journalism in India (Sohal, 2020); freedom of expression, impunity and journalists' online and offline protections (Carlsson & Poyhatari, 2017; Jamil et al., 2020; Larry, 2017).

Despite the scholars' growing research interest to investigate threats to journalists' safety in various countries, limited studies exist that offer qualitative and comparative insights into journalists' lived experiences of safety risks in Pakistan and India, which are neighbouring countries and used to be one territory of the Indian sub-continent before the partition in 1947. Therefore, drawing on the system theory, this study aims to investigate the journalists' lived experiences of diverse safety risks in Pakistan and India. To investigate the abovementioned research objective, this study uses the qualitative methods of document reviews and in-depth interviews. Besides, this study uses thematic analysis to analyse the gathered data. Hence, this article begins with a review of literature into the system theory and the issue of the safety of journalists in Pakistan and India. Subsequently, the article explains the methodology and findings of this study. Finally, it presents the conclusion.

Literature review

System theory

The proponents of system theory posit that a system consists of interconnected parts or sub-systems. Any changes in the operation of one sub-system do affect the function of other sub-systems and on the system as a whole (Bertalanffy, 1968; Fuch & Hofkirchner, 2009; Ziemann, 2007). The theory has been extensively used in many disciplines including sociology, political science, economics, and journalism. This study draws on Luhmann's social system theory that focuses on the interdisciplinary study of a social system. Luhmann classifies social systems at three levels: societal systems, organizations, and interaction systems. He suggests that societal systems (such as politics, religion, law, art, education, science, etc.) are interlinked with each other and are 'closed systems comprising of various fields of interaction'. He defines organizations as a 'network of decisions which reproduce themselves'. And interaction systems are 'systems that reproduce themselves on the basis of communication rather than decision making' (Seidl & Becker 2004; Vermeer, 2006). This study posits that journalists are part of a wider social system comprising of other sub-systems (such as economic, legal, political, and cultural systems). Their protection and safety are dependent on the proper functioning and effective networking of decisions and communication among other correlated systems (especially legal and political systems). Therefore, in this study, the rationale for using the system theory is that it helps to understand the ways social systems and other linked sub-systems shape or influence the journalists' experiences of safety risks in Pakistan and India.

Safety of journalists in Pakistan and India

When looking at the case of Pakistan, the country is recognized as one of the most dangerous places for journalists in the world (Jamil, 2019b; Ricchiardi, 2012). Ironically, the Pakistani journalists deal with the dilemma of their right to safety clashing with the people's right to know (Jalil, 2014). Local journalists do not only face death threats on a regular basis, but they are also regularly monitored by the government's officials and intelligence agencies (Aslam, 2011; Jamil, 2020a). Conflict, violence, and religious extremism have made journalism one of the most difficult professions to practice in Pakistan in recent years. Consequently, the country had the highest fatality rate for journalists in the world between 2000 and 2014 (Rehmat, 2014). Jamil (2017a) suggests that the Pakistani journalists work in an unsafe institutional environment where different safety threats affect their work and the overall quality of journalism

in the country (see also Masood, 2017). More recently, Committee to protect journalists, in its latest report, also reveals that at least 61 Pakistani journalists have been killed since 1992, suggesting the quandary of Pakistani journalists to work in an unsafe environment (Committee to protect journalists, 2019).

As far as India is concerned, in 2019, the country was ranked at the 140th position on The World Press Freedom Index (Reporters without borders, 2019). India is among the worst performers in protecting journalists and preserving the freedom of speech and expression in the South Asia region. According to the RSF report (2019), press freedom in India has been adversely affected by a combination of social and political factors, such as a spike in violence against journalists, state sanction of media control, police brutality, pressure from criminal groups, and political turmoil. Indian journalists, who highlight critical issues (such as state negligence and failure to maintain national security, large-scale public and corporate corruption, threats to social order and public safety from power groups and political parties) are routinely targeted and silenced using draconian laws that are enshrined in the Indian Constitution and the Indian Penal Code (Sohal, 2020). The right to accessing telecommunication services and the internet has been suspended on many occasions in India, creating an information blackout for the public and the media (International federation of journalists, 2019). The Indian journalists are frequently taken into custody, detained and harassed by the police, and attacked by communal mobs for covering sensitive issues during riots and public protests (Press Trust of India, 2020). Female journalists receive threats of sexual assault, sexist slurs, and torrents of online abuse (Gudipaty, 2017). Freedom and integrity of independent media are threatened by obstructing the flow of advertising revenue and using other financial and political tactics to pressurize media and enforce self-censorship. The Indian media organizations, which are critical of the national government, are denied government advertisements, forcing them to either shut down operations or to tow the official line. Journalists, covering conflicts in Kashmir and Maoist insurgency, are at the highest risk of their lives and work under immense pressure (International federation of journalists, 2019).

These are some key facts that are mostly reported by international organizations monitoring freedom of media and journalists' protection. This study is unique given it provides qualitative insights into the issue of the safety of journalists and it unpacks the first-hand account of journalists' lived experiences of safety risks in Pakistan and India.

Methodology

Data collection in Pakistan

This study has used the qualitative methods of document review and in-depth interviews (face-to-face) to investigate a research question, namely: What are the journalists' lived experiences of safety risks in Pakistan and India? Initially, different types of documents have been reviewed for this study including reports by international organizations on violence against journalists, the Constitution of Pakistan (1973), Pakistan Penal code (1860), Defamation Ordinance (2002), Wage Board Award (2013), the proposed Bill for Journalists' Safety (2016) and Harassment of Women at Workplace Act (2010).

Using purposive sampling², a total of 30 male and female journalists from five ethnicities (i.e. Sindhi, Punjabi, Pashtu, Baluchi, and Urdu-speaking) and of religious sects (i.e. Shia and Sunni) have been interviewed to investigate their lived experiences of safety risks in Pakistan. In terms of the gender bifurcation of interviewees, the study includes 10 female and 20 male journalists. The selected number of female journalists is lesser as compared to male journalists given the male dominance in the Pakistani news media. The selected male and female journalists are of age ranging between 25 and 65 years, and they are full-time employees of Pakistan's mainstream Urdu and English languages' newspapers and television news channels that operate in Karachi. These news media organizations include six English language's newspapers (*Daily Dawn*, *Express Tribune*, *The Nation*, *The News International*, *Business Recorder*, and *Daily Times*); three Urdu language's newspapers (*Daily Jang*, *Daily Express*, and *Nawa-e-Waqt*); eleven Urdu language's television news channels (*Geo News*, *Express News*, *SAMAA News*, *ARY News*, *AAJ News*, *Dunya News*, *Channel 92*, *Ab Tak News*, *Dawn News*, *News One*, *Pakistan Television Corporation – PTV News*). The key location of data collection is Karachi; however, all selected journalists have work experience in more than one city of Pakistan.

Each journalist, in this study, has been interviewed for around one hour (i.e. 60 minutes). All interviewed journalists have been asked questions relating to their lived experiences of diverse types of safety risks that they combat while performing their routine work. Moreover, the researcher (i.e. the first author) has collected the data of this study between December 2018 and February 2019. Initially, the researcher had contacted almost 50 print and electronic media journalists in Karachi through phone calls and e-mails. Then, the researcher

² Purposive sampling refers to a type of non-probability sampling that involves selection of information-rich and reliable data sources that can efficiently answer the research question (Maxwell, 1997).

finalized the list of participating journalists, who had agreed to give face-to-face interviews.

As far as the procedure of data collection is concerned, all questions during the interviews have been asked in Urdu-language (i.e. journalists' mother tongue in Pakistan), and then interview transcripts have been transcribed in English-language and verbatim. All participants, in this study, have been provided a project information sheet that provides information about the objectives of this study, methodology, types of research questions with examples, voluntary participation, the confidentiality of journalists' names, and their access to research findings. To ensure the privacy and safety of research participants, all interviewed Pakistani journalists have been quoted using numbers (ranging between 1 and 30).

Data collection in India

The documents reviewed, in this study, relate to safety risks for journalists in India. It includes reports by international organizations and news media organizations, statements by the Editors' Guild of India (EGI), the Constitution of India (1950), the Indian Penal Code (1860).

Following the method of purposive sampling, a total of 30 male and female journalists from seven ethnicities in India (i.e. Punjabi, Haryanavi, Himachali, Kashmiri, Bengali, Marathi, and Hindi-speaking) and four religious sects (i.e. Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam, and Jainism) have been interviewed to investigate their lived experiences of safety risks. The study includes 10 female and 20 male journalists. The selected male and female journalists are of age ranging between 25 and 65 years and are full-time employees of India's mainstream news media, including Hindi, Punjabi, Marathi, and English languages' newspapers, news magazines, news websites, and television news channels that are based in the Indian cities of Delhi, Mumbai and Chandigarh. These news media organizations include five English language newspapers (*The Times of India*, *Hindustan Times*, *The Indian Express*, *The Hindu*, and *The Tribune*), two Hindi language newspapers (*Dainik Bhaskar*, and *Dainik Jagran*); three Punjabi languages news television channels (*News18 Punjab*, *ABP Sanjha* and *PTC News*); three English language news television channels (*Times Now*, *NDTV* and *CNN-TV18*); two English language news magazines (*Open Magazine* and *India Today*); one Marathi language newspaper (*Loksatta*); two English language news website (*The Print*, *News Laundry* and *UNT*). The prime location of data collection is Chandigarh, Delhi, and Mumbai; however, all selected journalists have experience of working in more than one city of India.

For this study, each journalist has been interviewed for about an hour (i.e. 60 minutes). All interviewed journalists have been provided a fact-sheet explaining the objectives of the study. Interviewees have been asked questions related to their lived experiences of diverse types of safety risks faced by them during their routine work as a journalist. The data has been collected between November 2019 and March 2020. A total of 45 journalists were initially contacted by the researcher (i.e. the second author) through phone calls and emails. Then finally 30 of them were selected based on their availability and relevance to the study. All questions during the interviews have been asked in English, Hindi, and Punjabi, based on the language fluency of the interviewees. The final transcripts of the interviews have been transcribed in English and verbatim. All the participants have been provided a project information sheet that explicitly mentions the objectives of this study, methodology, types of research questions with examples, voluntary participation, the confidentiality of journalists' names, and access to research findings. To ensure the privacy and safety of research participants, all interviewed Indian journalists have been quoted using numbers (ranging between 31 and 60).

Data analysis

This study uses thematic analysis to analyse the gathered data under two key themes that have emerged inductively from the interview data, namely: (i) journalists' lived experience of safety risks in Pakistan; (ii) journalists' lived experiences of safety risks in India. To present the study's findings clearly under different sub-themes, the thematic analysis of qualitative data (i.e. in-depth interviews) has been corroborated with the semi-quantification analysis, which means the use of quantitative estimations within the journalists' responses to each research question and in different sub-themes (Maxwell, 2010). The sub-themes have been identified based on the prevalence of keywords in the journalists' responses to each research question. The prevalence of sub-themes (i.e. indicated with p), substantiated with quantitative estimations (See *Tables 1* and *2*), has been decided based on the number of journalists' responses in each sub-theme (see also Jamil, 2020b, 2020c).

Data validity

Data triangulation has been used in this study. Triangulation in research refers to the use of two or more research methodologies or theories to investigate and answer a research objective (Denzin, 1970; Flick, 2000). Thus, qualitative data from document review and in-depth interviews have been used to interpret, articulate and validate the findings.

There are a couple of challenges that both researchers faced during data collection in Pakistan and India. Firstly, it was hard to engage female journalists in both countries due to male dominance in the journalism profession. Therefore, both researchers from Pakistan and India had to compromise with the gender gap in sampled journalists. Secondly, both researchers had to face challenges to schedule interviews with journalists in repeated slots due to the cancellation of scheduled interviews on several occasions both in Pakistan and India. Most interview cancellations occurred due to routine issues with journalists. Thirdly, the location of data collection was restricted only to the major cities in Pakistan and India (i.e. Karachi, Delhi, Mumbai, and Chandigarh) to reduce the travel cost incurred by both researchers. Moreover, analysing a large set of data from both Pakistan and India was challenging for both researchers given that the data had revealed commonalties of safety risks faced by journalists more as compared to any rare experiences distinct to their respective countries. The experiences of risks and threats to safety shared by the respondents were difficult to isolate and categorize into independent categories due to the interdependence of these occurrences. The experiences appeared to result from systemic issues that co-depend on each other, and many of these systemic issues are universal and are present in systems of similar nature and context.

Findings

Journalists' lived experiences of safety risks in Pakistan

Over the last decade, journalists' safety and protection have emerged as serious issues in Pakistan. According to the latest report, published in Daily Dawn, around 33 Pakistani journalists have been killed during the past six years (Dawn, 2019). This study also reveals that Pakistani journalists, either from print or electronic media, face diverse threats countrywide regardless of their ethnicities and specific beats. The most pressing concern, raised by the interviewed male and female journalists, is regarding their physical safety. This study finds that Pakistani journalists have to employ self-censorship to avoid consequences such as life threats, kidnapping, attacks, and even murder. *Table 1*, below, explains the diverse safety risks faced by Pakistani journalists.

Table 1

Journalists' lived experiences of safety risks in Pakistan

Sub-themes	In-depth interview		
	Number of journalists (n=30)	Number of female journalists (n=10)	Number of male journalists (n=20)
Sub-theme 1 (P=29) Physical risks (i.e. killing, kidnapping, attack, assault, injury, and physical surveillance)	29 out of 30	10 out of 10	19 out of 20
Sub-theme 2 (P=29) Psychological risks (i.e. anxiety; depression; feelings of fear and pressure and frustration)	29 out of 30	9 out of 10	20 out of 20
Sub-theme 3 (P=30) Financial risks (i.e. forced job termination, non-payment of salary, and low pay scales)	30 out of 30	10 out of 10	20 out 20
Sub-theme 4 (P=21) Digital risks (i.e. digital surveillance of journalists' communication; threats through mobile phones, e-mail, and social media; e-mail and social media accounts' hacking; abusive emails and social media troll)	21 out of 30	7 out of 10	14 out of 20
Sub-theme 5 (P=17) Gender-specific risks (i.e. rape, sexual harassment, offline and online use of sexist slurs and blackmailing from opposite gender)	17 out of 30	10 out of 10	7 out of 20
Sub-theme 6 (P=9) Topic-specific risk	9 out of 30	2 out of 10	7 out of 10

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Sub-theme 7 (P=25) Public risks	25 out of 30	7 out of 10	18 out of 10
Sub-theme 8 (P=21) Legal risks (i.e. punitive laws, imprisonment, risk of legal suit, extrajudicial or encounter killing and arbitrary detention)	21 out of 30	4 out of 10	17 out of 20

This study highlights that mostly investigative journalists are attacked, and it is always difficult to accuse any particular group or institution directly. For instance, one interviewee highlights that ‘in 2011, there were several incidents of target killings in Karachi’ (Interviewee number 5). When talking about physical and other risks to journalists, the director news of a local television news channel states:

We receive life’s threat and regardless of our ethnicity. A journalist, from any ethnicity, can be attacked and people are doing journalism even in this situation. Previously, the perception of threat was different. A journalist’s family used to be aware that police has picked him, in the case of his arrest. Today, the difficulty is that even a journalist’s family does not know – who has picked him? Police or who else? And journalists’ families wait for them for weeks (Interviewee number 15).

The above-mentioned cases are only a few examples of violence and attacks against journalists in Karachi. In recent years, safety threats have spawned serious challenges for the working journalists across Pakistan, especially in the conflict areas of Baluchistan and Khyber Phakhtunistan. Interview data reveals that journalists particularly confront severe threats from militants in the conflict zones of Baluchistan and Khyber Phakhtunistan. In this regard, Interviewee number 6 mentions that ‘journalists face the threats of militants in conflict zones and while talking about controversial issues such as Pakistan’s Blasphemy Laws’. Another interviewed journalist particularly talks about threats in the conflict zones of Pakistan. He unpacks:

Journalists from Karachi or Islamabad or Lahore get astounded, when they hear stories from the journalists of Khyber Phakhtunistan and Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA), how much they are sustaining pressure. Many things do not come on screen. There is a huge difference between the situation of FATA and Karachi (Interviewee number 29).

An information barrier has also been created due to the fearful environment of Pakistan and life's risks in conflict zones. Ironically, media organizations have to compromise on the quality of information from these areas. For instance, one male interviewee reveals:

Let us take the example of Baluchistan. My reporters cannot go there. They are worried about their safety because they can be kidnapped or shot either by militants or the government. Personally, as an editor, I feel that there are a lot of issues, which can be reported but these are never reported in the media due to safety threats. Another example is Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Our journalists cannot go as militants there. So, we have to rely on second-hand information (Interviewee number 13).

This study manifests that some Pakistani areas including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), FATA, and Balochistan are the most dangerous for working journalists as violence has been on a rise in these areas for the past several years, making their job risky and difficult (see also Ashraf & Brooten 2017; Jamil, 2017a, 2015a, 2015b). 'Many journalists in FATA and Balochistan have discontinued reporting due to their increased vulnerability to fatal risks in these areas, those who have continued their jobs, are reporting under severe fear and pressure of militants, army, and intelligence agencies', reveals the editor of an English language newspaper (Interviewee number 2). Unfortunately, the incidents of violence against journalists do not only occur in Balochistan, but violent incidents and journalists' killings are common countrywide. One of the reporters of a local television news channels in Karachi, who has worked in FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa areas as well, reveals:

From 2008-2012, I was assigned to cover Taliban activities along with the areas of North and South Waziristan, Khyber Agency, and other tribal areas where they have a stronghold. I used to receive death and kidnapping threats almost every day. Twice, I was attacked and I had suffered severe injuries to the extent that I could not continue work for weeks. My organization did not provide complete medical expenditure; and therefore, that is another traumatic story about how I managed my treatment (Interviewee number 13).

In the light of system theory, these findings indicate that the Pakistani media organizations and the government both lack organizational and institutional support systems to ensure the protection and safety of journalists when they cover conflict areas in the country. The organizational support system means a comprehensive briefing about the conflict and conflict area, safety training on survival techniques, provision of safety equipment (such as bulletproof jackets), provision of life and medical insurance – in the case of death and injury respectively (Jamil, 2019a, 2019b). Indeed, the organizational support system

should not just focus on working journalists, but also consider the protection of photojournalists, cameramen and other crew that work in conflict zones. In this regard, a senior male political journalist shares one of his experiences:

In 2006, I was covering a story near the Afghan border and my cameraman got injured with the bullet of a law enforcement agency personnel. I had a narrow escape too. Later, I came to know that the driver of my van had lost his life and the cameraman had suffered disability due to injury in his leg. Both, either cameraman or the driver, did not receive any compensation from their organization. Now the provincial journalists' unions have developed safety funds for the financial aid of journalists (Interviewee number 13).

The dilemma of journalists' safety not only necessitates ensuring their safe access to the conflict areas in Pakistan but also improving the level of safety provided to them by the local law enforcement agencies and media organizations. For example, interviewee number 5 mentions the negligence of Pakistani media organizations towards journalists' safety and says that 'big television news channels provide blood-proof jackets to their reporters to undertake their work. Small television news channels do not provide any security to reporters, drivers and cameramen'. Interview data reveals that the journalists do not merely face physical risks, but they also confront substantial financial risks in the form of low pay scales, forced job terminations and non-payment of salaries up to several months. Some journalists (see *Table 1*: Sub-theme 3) mention that they are compelled to manipulate the information to serve the vested interests of their owners and for their financial protection. For example, according to a male interviewee:

Chances of my job termination can increase if I do any story that hurts the vested interests of my owner and editor. Organisation tries to present the information after moulding it in a way that reality is contradictory to the given information (Interviewee number 21).

Likewise, an interviewed female journalist highlights the ways physical and financial risks, and social class stratification, are resulting in psychological threats to journalists (see *Table 1*: Sub-theme 2). She says:

During 13 years of my career, I have changed jobs thrice. Once I was terminated due to the downsizing of staff in my news organization. I got a job after a struggle of seven months. This was my first experience of depression as a journalist. Then in my two jobs, I was never paid a salary on-time, which used to be stressful (Interviewee number 29).

Another female journalist, from an English language newspaper, explains how gender-specific threats affect the mental health of female journalists in Pakistan. She states:

Female journalists suffer psychologically more because they are not only targeted as a journalist but also as a woman. Sexual harassment is common in the Pakistani news media and especially in television news channels. Then we face sexist slurs and social media trolling. It is not just the fear of life that affects us. We are suffering many psychological issues that range from depression, anxiety, and frustration (Interviewee number 10).

This implies that the Pakistani female journalists experience sexual harassment and abuse physically and online both, resulting in greater chances of gender-specific risks to them as compared to male journalists. In addition to physical, psychological, and financial risks, the Pakistani male and female journalists confront digital risks in various forms (see *Table 1*: Sub-theme 4). Thus, a female news producer highlights:

With the online threats to journalists, I feel that the violence experienced by many female journalists has simply moved into cyberspace without changing its basic nature. I have experienced verbal abuse, social media troll, and even threats of acid violence once because I used to be on the production team of a political talk show at a leading Pakistani news channel. Many of my male colleagues have suffered from e-mail and social media accounts' hacking (Interviewee number 3).

Studies have shown that perpetrators of online abuse against journalists are armed with simple, less expensive, and faster means of attacking journalists, such as a smart device with an internet connection is enough for perpetrators to attack journalists online. Therefore, digitization of the journalism practice has heightened the vulnerability of journalists to online attacks (Antonijevic, 2016). Different social media strategies are used by different actors to attack journalists, as well as discredit their stories (Ferrier, 2018). But for Pakistani journalists, threats are much diversified. For example, several interviewed journalists also highlight that they are suffering from topic-specific and public risks too (see *Table 1*: Sub-themes 6 and 7). For example, an interviewed male journalist reveals:

Pakistan is a conservative country. One cannot write openly here about certain social issues (such as homosexuals and LGBTs); religious matters; issues of national security, government, army, and judiciary. We may suffer from life risks because of writing on these issues, but more than that it causes fear and pressure of any possible harm to our lives and our families. The public has also emerged as a big threat because people do attack journalists. So, at times psychological threats kill us more than physical threats (Interviewee number 16).

Considering the pressing need of protecting journalists psychologically, in 2014, Peshawar University's Departments of Psychology and Journalism

have established a ‘Competence and Trauma Centre’ in collaboration with Deutsche Welle Akademie, which is a German media company. However, the establishment of more counselling centers is required in other provinces of Pakistan – where journalists can consult for free on their psychological and emotional problems. Moreover, several interviewed journalists express their apprehensions regarding the legal system of Pakistan, which is fostering legal risks and the culture of impunity in the country. According to a male interviewee:

Media organizations and journalist’s unions do not come forward to provide legal assistance for longer periods of court proceedings <...>. We do have the right to a fair trial on paper. But the Article 10 (A) of the Constitution does not ensure the elements of transparency, decorum, and judicial propriety that are the basic ingredients of a fair trial (Interviewee number 16).

The Pakistani journalists’ feedbacks unpack that blasphemy is a crucial religious issue in the country. The Blasphemy laws, under Pakistan Penal Code (1860), restrict Pakistani citizens from any sort of derogatory speech against Islam and the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him). Therefore, journalists should be very careful in their religious speech to avoid any legal action and the public’s reaction in general. This study substantiates these facts. For example, interviewee number 30 states:

Blasphemy is a very sensitive issue here. We are very sensitive towards religious symbols and icons. When we write Holy Prophet, we do write ‘(peace be upon him)’ or write ‘Holy Qur’an’. So, these are the things that journalists have to do because they do not want hundreds of people coming and torturing their offices (Interviewee number 30).

Thus, drawing on the system theory, this study reveals that Pakistan’s journalists are working in complex social, political, and legal systems that lack proper functioning, transparency, values, and propriety. This indicates that the scope of safe journalism is limited in Pakistan until effective initiatives and reforms are made at various levels.

Journalists’ lived experiences of safety risks in India

This study reveals that Indian journalists face multiple threats and risks as part of their routine job, which is quite similar to the case of Pakistani journalists. Financial instability, job insecurity, public risks, and threats to physical safety are among the most commonly experienced issues, which induce psychological risks and emotional distress. *Table 2* below highlights the risks experienced by the Indian journalists.

Table 2

Journalists' lived experiences of safety risks in India

Sub-themes	In-depth interview		
	Number of journalists (n=30)	Number of female journalists (n=10)	Number of male journalists (n=20)
Sub-theme 1 (P=29) Physical risks (i.e. killing, kidnapping, attack, assault, injury, and physical surveillance)	29 out of 30	9 out of 10	20 out of 20
Sub-theme 2 (P=30) Psychological risks (i.e. anxiety; depression; feelings of fear and pressure and frustration)	30 out of 30	10 out of 10	20 out of 20
Sub-theme 3 (P=30) Financial risks (i.e. forced job termination, non-payment of salary, and low pay scales)	30 out of 30	10 out of 10	20 out of 20
Sub-theme 4 (P=29) Digital risks (i.e. digital surveillance of journalists' communication; threats through mobile phones, e-mail, and social media; e-mail and social media accounts' hacking; abusive emails and social media troll)	29 out of 30	9 out of 10	20 out of 20
Sub-theme 5 (P=15) Gender-specific risks (i.e. rape, sexual harassment, offline and online use of sexist slurs and blackmailing from opposite gender)	15 out of 30	10 out of 10	5 out of 20
Sub-theme 6 (P=22) Topic-specific risk	22 out of 30	7 out of 10	15 out of 20
Sub-theme 7 (P=20) Public risks	20 out of 30	10 out of 10	10 out of 10
Sub-theme 8 (P=23) Legal risks (i.e. punitive laws, imprisonment, risk of legal suit, extrajudicial or encounter killing and arbitrary detention)	23 out of 30	6 out of 10	17 out of 20

This study highlights that financial risks, which include situations leading to job insecurity, low wages, job loss, deferral in salary or non-payment of salary, among others, are experienced by all Indian journalists, irrespective of their ethnic origin, specialization, organizational association, gender, and years of experience (See *Table 2: Sub-theme 2*). A male journalist working for an English language newspaper in North India says that ‘financial insecurity begins early in the career of a journalist as the entry-level wages are low and increments are inconsistent with the work profiles and experience of journalists, which makes several emerging journalists reconsider journalism as a long-term profession’ (Interviewee number 33).

Issues related to ethical violations in Indian journalism are often linked to the low wages and poor financial conditions of the journalists, which makes them vulnerable to accepting cash, gifts, and favours, in return for publishing planted news (Shaw, 2015). This means that the Indian and the Pakistani journalists both are attracted to corruption and unethical conduct because of their financial crises. For example, a female interviewee reveals:

I know several colleagues in my office who have ultimately resorted to accepting bribes or favours to meet their financial needs. I have been offered money on a few occasions by political parties, and they try to normalize it by saying that they know that journalists are not paid well and that everyone at one point takes it (Interviewee number 36).

While financial insecurity and low wages are associated with unethical reporting in media, and interviewed journalist mentions, ‘at times I publish insignificant stories just to please my source. These stories mean little to the average public, but my sources have some micro-level vested interest. So, I publish planted stories too’, says a crime reporter from a leading English language newspaper in India (Interviewee number 41). Comparing the cases of Pakistan and India, the Pakistani journalists are usually forced to publish and broadcast the planted stories being under pressure of the government, intelligence agencies, and militant or religious groups. In both cases, the Pakistani and the Indian journalists are the victims of fear and pressure.

Furthermore, all the Indian interviewed journalists unpack that they have felt threatened and unsafe in public on several occasions while carrying-out their routine work. Journalists are often confronted with situations where there is little scope for peaceful negotiations with the public. At times, these situations lead to the assault on journalists. Like the Pakistani journalists’ experience, the public risks and physical risks are routinely experienced by the Indian journalists working in conflict zones or troubled areas or by beat reports while covering sensitive news stories or facing an angry mob (see *Table 2: Sub-themes 1 and 7*).

Interestingly, the Indian journalists face public risks even while covering seemingly peaceful situations, which is not the situation faced by the Pakistani interviewed journalists. For example, one of the male Indian journalists says:

The public risk while covering a story can be sensed, but I know that I can be targeted after the publication of a news story and this attack can come in any form. Even though journalists write stories in the public interest, there is always a political party that feels that they have been targeted or wronged. It can be a challenge to deal with them (Interviewee number 43).

In addition to the physical risks, Indian journalists do experience considerable digital risks. The digital risks include snooping, trolling, or abusing on social media, digital surveillance, and threats using phones, social media, and emails, among others. Digital media is also an easy tool to harass as the identity of the abuser can be easily masked. This implies that the nature of digital risks faced by the Indian journalists is quite the same as faced by the Pakistani journalists (see *Table 1: Sub-theme 4; Table 2: Sub-theme 4*). Concerning this, one of the male journalists, working as a reporter for an English language TV news channel says, 'online trolling against journalists has become very common. Journalists are not only trolled for the stories that they publish, but they are also targeted for their personal opinion. I have experienced very disturbing online abuses personally' (Interviewee number 38).

Similar to the Pakistani journalists' experience, the interviewed Indian journalists also reveal that financial insecurity, everyday risks, and physical risks as the biggest cause of emotional and psychological distress, which is experienced by all the interviewees at different times in their careers. One of the male journalists working with a TV news channel highlights:

In the early years of my career, I used to often remain depressed thinking about my financial situation. My family did not support my choice of being a journalist, so I could not even share my worries with them. There have been several moments that have distressed me, being attacked and being harassed by the public were common reasons besides my depressed state of mind. I am not sure whether I have learned to deal with stress and whether I have accepted it as part of my profession. What I know is that it has taken a toll on my mental health (Interviewee number 44).

From a gender perspective, India is among the most unsafe places to be a woman. Society has deep-rooted patriarchy that makes it difficult for women to break the glass ceiling without sacrificing family life, risking their safety and public image (Dewan, 2018). The study reveals that gender-based risks are also

experienced by the female interviewed journalists. While a few male journalists reveal that they have been sexually harassed, all interviewed female journalists unpack that they have experienced sexual harassment and have been at risk of sexual assault at their external workplaces and within organizations. One of the female journalists, who work for a newspaper, says:

Sexual harassment is an everyday thing for me. It begins in my office, where obscene language and sexist comments are commonly used, and inappropriate physical contact is a normal routine activity. If female journalists complain about such behaviour, they are considered meek and unfit for the job of a muckraker. I had once complained to my senior about a sexual harasser in my office, I was calmly told to ignore the man as he was a good reporter (Interviewee number 53).

Another female journalist, working with a vernacular newspaper, reveals her experience of facing sexual harassment at work. She states:

I cover the political and crime beat, so I often enter very male-dominated premises to carry out my newsgathering routines. I am seen as a sexual object and I hear sexual comments almost every day by different people. There have been incidents where senior police officials have commented on my body parts publicly. A female journalist is viewed as someone willing to compromise her dignity for a news story or a few favours. I get a lot of unwanted attention, which affects not only my work but also my mental health (Interviewee number 54).

These findings are not unique to India because most Pakistani interviewed female journalists in this study and a recent gender specific study in Pakistan highlight that the Pakistani women journalists find it difficult to work as a journalist by sexual harassment and verbal abuse both outside and within their media organizations (Jamil, 2020e). Unfortunately, laws protecting female journalists from sexual harassment in both India and Pakistan, are not effective enough to facilitate a safe working environment for them (Sohal, 2021). Like the Pakistani legal system, the Indian legal framework neither protects journalists from diverse types of safety threats and nor it is strong enough to combat the prevailing culture of impunity to crimes and violence against journalists.

Discussion

The media, in both India and Pakistan, have been crucial to the movements to attain independence from the British Empire in 1947. News media, in South Asian society, have always been a battlefield, chained up to colonial legacies of

being used as an instrument for nation-building versus operating as a watchdog for the state authorities. International organizations, monitoring freedom of the press and journalists' safety, recurrently suggest that the state of media and journalists' safety have curtailed in both countries (Reporters without borders, 2020). Interviewed journalists' feedbacks, in Pakistan and India, substantially echo this fact. According to an interviewed Pakistani journalist:

I do not see much difference between the situations of Pakistani and Indian journalists. We share a common political history and similarities in our news media ecology <...>. We experience similar nature of threats to our physical, psychological, financial, legal, and digital safeties. Unfortunately, the level of impunity to a crime against journalists is also more or less similar to a lack of an effective regulatory and judicial system that can prosecute crimes against journalists fairly and within due course. Overall, we are all in the same boat. The distinct aspect of Pakistan is that now the country is witnessing a decline in the number of journalists' killings, but the state of media freedom has drastically declined due to in-direct pressures from the government in the forms of digital censorship, digital surveillance, and frequent internet shutdown, which ultimately impinge on journalists' routine (Interviewee number 5).

When talking about digital mass surveillance as a threat to journalists' safety, a Pakistani journalist states:

I do not say that the situation in India is better than in our country in terms of journalists' safety. But digital surveillance of journalists and internet censorship have both appeared as a potential threat to the physical and digital safeties of Pakistani journalists, as well as a threat to their right to freedom of expression. Probably, the level of journalists' self-censorship is higher in Pakistan as compared to India (Interviewee number 9).

A recent report, released by the Human Rights Outlook (2019), reveals that nearly half of the world's population (i.e. 3.38 billion or 46 percent) lives in countries where freedom of speech is waning, and about 28 of these countries have authoritative regimes (Maplecroft, 2019). The report also highlights specific high-risk nations – where the journalists' protection, their sources' safety, and privacy are being curtailed and digital risks are increasing. These countries are also have been marked at extreme risk for human rights violations, suppression of speech, and free press. Such indices highlight the interconnected nature of oppressive and anti-democratic trends within countries. Suppression of the freedom of speech and expression, and violation of journalists' right to report factually and safely appear to be occurring within the same systems where 'strongmen

authoritative regimes', a surge in hyper-nationalism and media censorship are thriving.

With such a large population of the world under state control or experiencing oppression of free speech, there is an imminent threat to democratic values at a global level. Thus, in a globalized economy, the freedom of speech and right to privacy directly impact technology and media companies, and erosion of these democratic rights among a significant population of the globe threatens the rule of law and social justice beyond borders. For example, social media company Twitter recently warned that it is concerned about the safety of its staff in India (Ellis-Petersen, 2021). The Indian government had asked the social media platform to remove over 1000 accounts related to a recent farmers' protest against new agricultural laws in India. The Indian government stated that these accounts were spreading propaganda and misinformation. When Twitter refused to take down these accounts, citing the importance of the flow of communication, the Indian government threatened fines and imprisonment up to 7 years for Twitter's staff in India by issuing an order under the country's Information and Technology Act that permits government's action in cases where public order is disturbed via social media or technology.

The Pakistani government's attempts to censor the news stories and the Internet have also drawn strong reactions from the country's journalists, as well as the Internet companies including Facebook, Google, and Twitter. Internet companies have threatened to stop their services to Pakistan if digital censorship is enforced, because of which access to sources of information and democratic channels of communication are under existential risk (Goel & Masood, 2020). 'Earlier we were subjected to censorship offline, now it is happening online. At least social media companies can express their concerns. We are simply dumb watchdogs', says a Pakistani journalist expressing his grievance over news censorship (Interviewee number 6). Unfortunately, journalistic communities in India and Pakistan, are not empowered to urge their respective governments to respect their rights to operate freely and safely.

Both Pakistan and India are the two nuclear-armed belligerent neighbours in South Asia, a free and independent press is also required to maintain peace among the two nations and in the region. A free and independent press of a country keeps the state in check and tries to hold it accountable for internal and external peace and security. A state-controlled and censored media, as seen in cases of countries like Rwanda, Somalia, and the Balkans, instils insecurity of the other in the minds of the public, and often mongers for war and retaliation

to favour nationalist and political agenda, while reneging the internationally acceptable routes of diplomacy and dialogue. This study highlights the risks faced by journalists covering conflict zones in Pakistan and India, illustrating the attempt to silence the press by state and non-state actors. Kashmir and Balochistan, which are a bone of contention between India and Pakistan, are the two most dangerous conflict zones for journalists and report a high violation of human rights. Over the last few years, the rise of nationalism in both countries has derailed the peace process between the two. State and non-state actors, with vested interests in the conflict, have used state-regulated and corporate-owned media to create a media frenzy against the other nation. Moderated voices, factual reporting, and independent journalism on mainstream or internet are waning under fear and risk to life and livelihood of the media workers.

Exploring the lived experiences of risks and threats to journalists in Pakistan and India, this study attempts to bring the attention of the global scholarly community to the fragile state of democratic institutions in the Asia-Pacific region that is significant in terms of geopolitics, international trade, and global economy. Pakistan is also a major non-NATO ally, while India pledges to several United Nations Peace Keeping missions and conflict resolution efforts in the broader region. The violation of the human rights of journalists and the waning of the freedom of the press in the region is a matter of immediate attention. Therefore, efforts should be made to strengthen democratic institutions like the judiciary and the legislature, and free and safe space for the exchange of ideas and information, akin to the concept of the internet, should be cultivated for peace and security within the two nations and globally.

Conclusion

The analyses of journalists' lived experiences of safety risks, in Pakistan and India, reveal a stark systemic failure to protect journalists and safeguard free speech in these two countries. Journalism practice is part of a larger system that is interconnected with social, economic, and political systems (Jamil et al., 2020) Political and economic instabilities, in these two low-income countries, are responsible for widespread corruption that discourages ethical practice of journalism. Culture of impunity and state sanction of press control endangers the life of investigative journalists in both countries. The conflict zones, in Pakistan and India, are hotspots of attacks against journalists and are rife with human rights violations against civilians and press workers. The absence of strong protective laws for media workers, and a lack of agency within the media, have

not only encouraged unethical journalism but also compelled several financially strained and socially ostracised journalists to tow the official line and avoid critical reporting of controversial issues.

The prevailing threat of terrorism in the South Asia region, along with the rise of nationalism, conservatism, and communalism in politics, has expunged liberal thought from the national discourse threatening all democratic institutions, especially the press, and the freedom of speech and expression. The study also reveals the presence of a class system among Pakistani and Indian journalists. As a result of structural inequalities within the social and economic systems of these countries, journalists working with the regional, local, or vernacular media; the female journalists; the journalists belonging to the minority community of journalists belonging to low-income or socially backward families are more vulnerable to threats and risks.

Given the system-induced multiple threats and risks faced by journalists in Pakistan and India, a systemic approach is recommended to safeguard the press and press workers. The analysis of lived experiences highlights a need for a stronger legal framework and protection mechanism for journalists against gender-based, physical, and public risks. The financial risks faced by journalists should be addressed with standards prescribed by labour laws in the industry and corporate sector with an added provision of enhanced coverage in personal and health insurance schemes. Media organizations, in both countries, should develop organizational support systems to protect journalists physically, financially and legally; and to train their staff in essential transferable skills to combat offline and online threats (see also Jamil, 2020d; Jamil & Appiah-Adjei, 2020b). Finally, governments in both countries, need to incorporate their supportive roles to develop a robust national system to buttress journalists' protection using a multi-stakeholder approach, which means developing efforts together with individual journalists, media organizations, and journalists' unions.

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ARTICLES

The what, how and why of fake news: An overview

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Abstract

This article examines the nature of the origin, definitions and functional principles of so-called fake news – reports that are deliberately false in nature which can create a stir in society around a non-existent informational case born of the same news source. In combination with viral technologies and mechanisms of distribution in the media and social networks, fake news in modern political campaigns is becoming a dangerous tool for influencing mass consciousness of societies. The main task of fake news in modern political campaigns and processes is interception of the political agenda, with its subsequent closure to the news feed generated by the fake news itself, as well as creation of general excitement around the given news story. This present article seeks to review and analyse the academic debates on the what (definition), how (operationalization) and why (motivation) questions pertaining to the fake news phenomena. These aspects are then combined to generate the beginnings of creating a conceptual taxonomy to understand this highly topical and emotive concept.

Keywords

Fake news, deception, perception, information war, digital journalism.

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Introduction

The topic of fake news has become increasingly popular as a subject of study and an object of ‘communication’ in an increasingly chaotic and divided global information realm. Often, authors cite the 2016 US Presidential Election as being a milestone moment in the fake news academic debate and evaluation of its practice (Farkas & Schou, 2018; Guess et al., 2020; Jankowski, 2018; Van Duyn & Collier, 2019). It has been noted in critical research that ‘the current media and political environment provides a fertile breeding ground for fake news’ (Guo & Vargo, 2020). Fake news requires not only definition, but also classification, as well as elaboration of proprietary methodologies, which motivate studies of this phenomenon in its environment. International studies are gradually shaping certain attitude towards fake news as an object of political analysis. For instance, Pennycook, Cannon and Rand (2018) believe that fake news must be understood as a completely false content claimed to be actual, yet which is able to create an ‘illusion of truth’, however, featuring low level of credibility. Verstrarte, D. Bambauer and J. R. Bambauer (2017) believe that propaganda, satire, and trolling may be attributed to fake news. Drexler (2019) links the phenomenon of fake news to the politics of ‘post-truth’ which is disseminated by the Internet intermediaries like Facebook and Twitter. Schnellenbach (2018) suggests that people oftentimes need fake news to validate their own beliefs, assertions, and fears. This demonstrates a truly diverse academic interpretation of this contemporary hot political topic.

News and information are increasing about influencing and persuading audiences at the levels of politics (Kazun & Kazun 2020) and international relations (Gavra & Naumenko 2020), which can manifest as a clash of interpretations of reality by mass media outlets and audiences. At the same time, many authors claim that fake news, its dissemination in social media, and the effects spawned by the same should be controlled on the government level (Metaxa-Kakavouli & Torres-Echeverry, 2017). There is, however, a different opinion with this regard. For example, Lima de Carvalho (2017) considers control over fake news as threatening ‘freedom of liberty of expression of opinions’ in the online environment. The analysis of these works shows that scientific comprehension of the fake news phenomenon is highly active, and yet at the same time largely descriptive in nature.

A critical evaluation of academic definitions shall form the basis of trying to formulate a conceptual understanding of what fake news is, how it is used and why it is used. These aspects shall be supplemented by an empirical analysis of news media narratives on the operationalisation aspects of fake news.

Combined, these two parts shall be used in an attempt to answer the following research question. What are the informational and cognitive conditions that support a fake news environment?

After the methodology and approach is detailed for the reader, the next section of the paper engages with the role and value of information and the three domains of the human world (physical, information and cognitive). This establishes the basis and context for moving to the issue of fake news, which begins with an overview of the current state of the art academic literature concerning the definition (the what) of the concept. Then the next section involves an overview and analysis of the role and purpose of fake news (the how). Following this is the section on the academic literature on the motivations for using fake news (the why).

The three domains and the information sphere

It is necessary to understand how the physical, informational, and cognitive components of the human world inter-relate and interact with each other. Within the realm of information warfare, there are three domains to be considered: the physical domain, the information domain, and the cognitive domain (Alberts et al., 2001)². In terms of the search for political, social or economic influence, the domain that they seek to influence is the cognitive perception of the physical one in order to enable practical operations and policy. This is the easiest domain to measure as it is a tangible one. An understanding of the reality and ‘ground truth’ translates into psychological or policy effectiveness and information dominance. On the intangible side, information exists and is created in the information domain. It is shared and can be subjected to manipulation, which means that the information in it may not accurately reflect the ground truth as it is a ‘representation’ of reality. This domain concerns the communication of information among and between the various vested actors. The information domain is subject to competition and interference from other actors present, which implies offensive and defensive dimensions to communication activities. The objective is to gain information superiority within the information domain over the adversary. The minds of the participants are found in the cognitive domain, which is ‘where perceptions, awareness, understanding, beliefs, and values reside, and where, as a result of sense making, decisions are made’ (Alberts et al., 2001). This is the domain in which the physical and psychological competitions are actually won or lost as it involves such crucial intangibles as

² For more details on these domains please refer to chapter two in Alberts et al., 2001.

leadership, trust, group cohesion, level of knowledge and experience, situational awareness and public opinion. All content in this domain passes through the filtering process of human perception, therefore the objective of mass communication is to influence and persuade the collective cognitive domain.

A new conceptual framework for research on public relations, propaganda and promotional culture is in the making. This is Organised Persuasive Communication (OPC), which is ‘a systematic conceptualisation of different forms of persuasive communication including categories of dialogical, non-deceptive and deceptive OPC as well as persuasion working in relation to socio-political, economic and physical contexts via incentivisation and coercion’ (Bakir et al., 2019). However, it is necessary to add a further physical context of shaping knowledge and perception through managing the content appearing in the information domain. Bakir et al. (2019) venture as far as to state that OPC ‘is essential to the exercise of power at national and global levels’. They also observe that its study within the context of the political system of liberal democracy is a ‘blind spot’. Within the context of deceptive messages and communications, Freelon and Wells (2020) note that ‘disinformation messages under this definition are munitions in campaigns of information warfare, non-lethal weapons intended to subdue adversaries rather than reason with them’³. Hence OPC, including disinformation is playing an increasingly active role in the field of political communication.

How does this relate to news, its conceptual values and pragmatic practice, in the wider context of political communication? Given the various conceptual and operational transformations and shifts in the idea and practice of news, there is a need to define what news is and what role it does/should play in society. This is important as the historical memory shapes our current understanding in terms of what the idealised relationships and the inter-generational links with the contemporary situation as news transforms from analogue to include digital formats. In 2001, Harcup and O’Neill concluded (with exceptions to the rule) that news stories need to have at least one of the following elements present in any given story: the power elite, celebrity, entertainment, surprise, bad news, good news, magnitude, relevance, follow-up, and editorial agenda (Harcup & O’Neill, 2017). There is also the conceptual expectation of an independent and adversarial role, McNair (2004) defines the function of the fourth estate as being ‘an independent institutional source of political and cultural power which

³ Freelon and Wells (2020) avoid the term ‘fake news’, which they deem as a concept that is lacking theoretical relevance owing to the nature of its popular application and characterisation that stripped it of its analytical value.

monitors and scrutinises the actions of the powerful in other spheres'. This ideal notion and practice are supported by other academics and practitioners, such as Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007). However, the traditional values of news and journalism are transforming along with the social, political and economic in which it is operating. 'The era of news objectivity as "just the facts" is dead and gone. Interpretative journalism grows' (Ward, 2014). This necessitates understanding the separation and implications of commentary, opinion, analysis and facts, which is becoming increasingly blurred in an evolving information environment.

It has been noted (Bergström & Jervelycke Belfrage, 2018) that the environment of news production and consumption is rapidly changing. The traditional news cycle that was dominated by traditional journalists and mass media outlets is now a much more complex environment that also includes citizens and non-professionals where news outlets still produce most of the news consumed, but which also circulates through social media and aggregators. Harcup and O'Neill (2017) revised their taxonomy for news, to the following order of points: exclusivity, bad news, conflict, surprise, audio-visuals, shareability, entertainment, drama, follow up, the power elite, relevance, magnitude, celebrity, good news and news organisation's agenda. However, this is not uniform and subjected to, at times, subconscious influences as cultural, historical, educational, ideological, social or economic aspects that affect the individual and/or collective cognitive realm. These differences illustrate the effects and growing influence of the digital generation and technological environment on the news value taxonomy.

Within the context of the three domains (physical, informational and cognitive), news production, communication and intent has experienced a great conceptual shift. From the idealised notion of the fourth estate, where news, journalism and mass media sought to conceptually describe the events of the physical world in such a way (with periodic connotations of 'truth' and objectivity' invoked) as the audience can create their own cognitive interpretation of those people, places and events. This has shifted, with the idea of 'interpretive journalism' that communicates a subjective representation of the physical domain through the information domain to determine how the audience forms opinions and perceptions of people, places and events in their cognitive domain.

Methodology

The approaches to textual analysis shall include content analysis (quantifications of different elements in text), argumentation analysis (the structure of argumentation used), and the qualitative analysis of ideas in the content

(with a focus on persuasion and attraction) (Boréus & Bergström, 2017). The combination of these approaches is expected to yield results on the ontology (what exists) and epistemology (knowledge and how we 'know' things) of reactions to academic textual depictions of the fake news, its definitions and motivations for use. The objects of study include power, persuasion, journalism, politics, identity, deception and so forth (Boréus & Bergström, 2017). The academic texts then contextualize the relationships according to perceived and projected power in the constructed social world order of mankind where there is on the one hand the people and events of the physical domain, and on the other the information domain's representation of the physical environment intending to influence the cognitive domain of the target audience.

It is the intention of the author to use a qualitative approach to analysing the data, and given the size of the samples, to create an indicative study. The sample material collected for this chapter was found via a Google Scholar search in 2020. Search terms that were entered are: definition of fake news; role of fake news; motivations for fake news. The first 10 pages of Google Scholar search results were manually checked by the author for relevance based upon the stated criterion in the first paragraph of this section. A total of 76 articles were selected for further evaluation and analysis.

The theoretical method of analysis is based on phenomenology, which involves the 'understanding of how appearances affect consciousness prior to the attempt to conceptualise objects and events' (2011). Fake news as a concept is a construct that intends to provide meaning to the human experience. Gelman (1996) notes that 'concepts are fundamental to all of human experience. Naming objects, recognizing novel instances, generalizing from the known to the unknown, making inferences, and learning new information all make use of concepts'. Also noted by Gelman (1996), concepts should not be treated and analysed in isolation from theories, stating 'both are mental representations that give order to experience'. This represents the significance of concepts for the human experience and interpretation of the physical realm.

It is the intention of the authors to use a literature review to track and understand the evolution of meaning (both theoretically and practically) of fake news. A critical evaluation of the literature review of the current state of the art research on fake news is intended to form the basis for arriving at a tentative indicative result on identifying a conceptual taxonomy framework that can better inform and predict 'ideal' conditions for supporting fake news. It needs to consider the physical, informational and cognitive domains, including the relationships and interactions between them.

Definition of fake news (the what)

Fake news, like other buzzwords, is semantically confusing. This confusion is contributed greatly by the evolving definition of the concept and its purpose. The problem is further amplified by the misuse of the term fake news, which is seen as being problematic as well as its practice and effects in contemporary society (Brummette et al., 2018). Initially, fake news was associated with contrived or constructed information that is a symbolic informational representation of reality, such as talk shows and satire. This then evolved to refer to the deceptive and/or manipulative use of information to mislead audiences, with implications in the field of information warfare. Currently, the shift in definition tends to signify information that contradicts the worldview and opinions of individuals or groups, such as Trump's invocation of CNN as being fake news (Holan, 2017; Simons, 2017; Waisbord, 2018). However, the idea and practice of the definitions of fake news are vastly older than the current use of this contemporary buzzword (Burkhardt, 2017; Cooke, 2020; Shu et al., 2017; Van Heekeren, 2020). While there is little new in the concept of practice, differences are found elsewhere. 'What is different is the speed, scale and massive proliferation and consumption of false information disseminated on dominant digital platforms' (Waisbord, 2018). This opening hints at the complexity associated with the evolving manner of defining and using the concept of fake news, which leads to some scholars (Freelon & Wells, 2020) to declare that the concept of fake news lacks any analytical value. However, such dilemmas and problems have not stopped various scholars from trying to find a viable definition.

Some of the definitions of fake news contain various assumptions and taken for granted systems of norms and values inherent in the system of liberal democracy. A binary constructed reality can be attempted by academic and journalistic attempts to delineate fact from fake. This is labelled as being problematic as attempts to categorise, classify and demarcate 'fake' and 'true' is a deeply subjective and political practice in its own right (Farkas & Schou, 2018). At times, these definitions can be uncritical of any possible flaws in the system.

We define 'fake news' to be fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but not in organisational process or intent. Fake news outlets, in turn, lack the news media's editorial norms and processes for ensuring the accuracy and credibility of information. Fake news overlaps with other information disorders, such as misinformation (false or misleading information) and disinformation (false information that is purposely spread to deceive people) (Lazer et al., 2018).

This definition is based upon the actor, which excludes news media, and the intent of the actor communicating. Other scholars, such as Albright (2017) are in partial agreement with the above, where ‘factual reporting can be displaced with “alternative” narratives. The use of the “fake news” label to denote organisational untrustworthiness is a related concern, as it portrays media watchdogs as entities that operate to deliberately misinform’. Such understandings and definitions deny the significant changes occurring in news media, detailed extensively by scholars such as Waisbord (2018), Bergström and Jervelycke Belfrage (2018). The editorial norms and processes that the authors refer to have been in the process of breaking down, to the point where scholars such as Ward (2014) no longer speak of truth and objectivity in journalism, but ‘interpretation.’ This definition offers an uncomplicated informational representation of the physical domain, where ‘good’ and ‘bad’ actors are seemingly easily delineated.

Mould (2018) uses the Collins Dictionary to define fake news as ‘false, often sensational, information disseminated under the guise of news reporting. <...> Fake news, either as a statement of fact or as an accusation, has been inescapable this year [2017], contributing to the undermining of society’s trust in news reporting’. However, importantly, it was also determined what should not be considered fake news. This includes: 1) unintentional reporting mistakes; 2) rumours that do not originate from a particular article; 3) conspiracy theories; 4) satire; 5) false statements by politicians; and 6) reports that are slanted or misleading, but are not completely false (Mould, 2018). There are some parallels in other attempts to define fake news: ‘encompasses the observation that, in social media, a certain kind of “news” is spread much more successfully than others, and that this “news” is typically extremely one-sided (hyper-partisan), inflammatory, emotional, and often riddled with untruths’ (Potthast et al., 2017). At its most simplistic level, fake news is defined as being ‘a news article that is intentionally or verifiably false’ (Shu et al., 2017) or ‘viral posts based on fictitious accounts made to look like news reports’ (Tandoc et al., 2018). Van Heekeren (2020) offers the definition of ‘the intentional invention and publication of false information presented as news and designed to deceive for financial or political gain’. There is a number of commonalities observable in fake news research.

Some of those commonalities include the elements of facticity and intention. Whereas satire uses selective facts in a diverting (humorous) format, fake news uses information in a focusing format (on a particular person, issue, etc.). This leads to intention, satire is intended to entertain a target audience, fake news intends to mislead and/or manipulate behaviour within the context and frame

of falsified reality. This necessitates the audience to perceive the fake as real to physically spread the fake news and creator's cognitive intent (Brennan, 2017; Gelfert, 2018; Ha et al., 2019; Rini, 2017; Tandoc et al., 2018). In addition, fake news often contains affective content as a deliberate means to emotionally prime and mobilise the target audience (Bakir & McStay, 2018). These different elements identified in the definition and description of fake news are intended to serve the role and purpose of fake news, its operational execution that is aimed at realising different individual or organisational goals and objectives.

Role and purpose of fake news (the how)

Fake news is the spread of intended information with knowingly provocative and resonating nature. At the same time, the fake itself may contain both false and true (verifiable) information, which can be taken out of context of a specific conversation, discussion or speech. Purposes of fake news are varied and situational, they can include damaging the brand and reputational appeal (therefore potentially crippling the perceived legitimacy and credibility) of a person, subject or object. The aim of fake news is to stir a buzz around a bogus newsworthy event which is created by spreading knowingly provocative information with the desired behaviour (e.g., changing voting patterns) (MacLeod, 2019). Egelhofer and Lechler (2019), Egelhofer et al. (2020) delineate this difference in purpose as fake news as a genre (deceptive information) and fake news as a label (to inflict reputational harm). Various interpretations and applications of the practical role of fake news are suggested by other researchers using diverse focus on activity and outcome.

Differently, other scholars (Bakir & McStay, 2018; Cooke, 2020; Rini, 2017; Tandoc et al., 2018; Van Heekeren, 2020) state that the two primary motivations for producing and disseminating fake news are financial profit (converting clicks to advertising revenue) and ideological influence (promoting a particular person or set of ideas and/or undermining an opponent). Certainly, researchers have identified the role and invocation of fake news as defining the enemy ideological 'other' in confrontational political and geopolitical discourse (Meeks, 2020; Ross & Rivers, 2018; van der Linden et al., 2020). This also demonstrates the role and application of the term fake news as a slogan (Meeks, 2020), which carries a potentially powerful emotional rhetorical priming and mobilising effect on target audiences.

Due to the multivariate applications and invocations of the term fake news, some scholars understand the role of fake news as a floating signifier. That is, as an important component of political (and geopolitical) struggles, fake

news is used to attack and smear an opponent and thereby delegitimise them in the public arena (if believed by the audience). Therefore, actors involved in political conflicts and contests use fake news as a reputational signifier in order to demonstrate and generate (negatively) an image of an ideal society and its proper structure (Farkas & Schou, 2018). Floating signifiers are used as a means of constructing political identities, conflicts and antagonisms between opposing political projects and groups engaged in a hegemonic struggle (Farkas & Schou, 2018). This explanation certainly expresses good explanation value as to the evolving nature of the definition and application of fake news, instead of being caught in an endless debate as to what is the truth or not, places the phenomenon within the sphere of information warfare.

The roles of actors vary and depend on the perspective and position of the observer. Research conducted by Al-Rawi (2019) on discourses of fake news in mainstream media versus social media revealed that social media news references on fake news were mostly connected with the alleged bias of mainstream media. On the other hand, mainstream media discourses on fake news concerns social media's negative role in spreading misinformation. Not surprisingly, some researchers conclude that fake news 'is a politicised term where conversations overshadowed logical and important discussions of the term' (Brummette et al., 2018). Fake news has become an object of fear and wonder, owing to the inherent contradictions found in its presumed or assumed ability to penetrate and radically alter the information domain. This is in part fact, but also possessing a large degree of fiction.

The key task of fake news is to seize information agenda and grasp attention, so that the contents of such a fake become topical idea, for a certain period, which captures consciousness of a person influenced by the fake news. Therefore, some researchers say that one of the roles of fake news is setting a news agenda (Yee, 2017). Despite dire warnings of the power of fake news to deceive an audience, recent research indicates that fake news may in fact have limited audience effects beyond increasing beliefs in false claims (Guess et al., 2020). Research conducted in Singapore implies that many people would simply ignore fake news posts that they encounter on social media (Tandoc et al., 2020). Other research suggests that fake news is not unique and powerful in an agenda setting role, playing a much more modest role of adding some further 'noise' to an already sensationalised news environment (Guo & Vargo, 2020; Vargo et al., 2018). Interestingly, in the wake of the drama created by the 2016 US Presidential Election, the 'fake news epidemic' was blamed on the platforms that enabled the sharing of content (Papanastasiou, 2020; Tandoc et al., 2020), rather than those

producing the fake news content. There are a variety of roles and purposes that fake news can play in the information and cognitive domains, which is dependent upon the case specific individual or organisational aims and goals. In an overview of this section, fake news is intended to serve a particular operational purpose, therefore the informational programme needs to align with the defined individual or organisational objectives, which is the basis for driving psychological motivations.

Motivations for believing or using fake news (the why)

Waisbord (2018) notes that ‘conventional notions of news and truth that ground standard journalistic practice are harder to achieve and maintain amid the destabilisation of the past hierarchical order’. His logic goes on to propose that ‘fake news is indicative of the contested position of news and the dynamics of belief formation in contemporary societies. It is symptomatic of the collapse of the old news order and the chaos of contemporary public communication’. There are a wide range of actors and motivations for engaging in fake news production and dissemination.

The battle for the public mind has gained new dimensions. As pieces of propaganda, fake news is not only produced by states, it may be connected with new developments that perfected and profited from propaganda and misinformation. Enterprising actors full of business imagination reportedly made healthy profits by churning out imaginary news that tapped the naiveté of US voters. Ordinary citizens contribute to misinformation by curating and sharing trash information (Waisbord, 2018).

Thus, an underlying factor for the use of fake news is the presence of competition and conflict, especially in an already polarised social, political and economic environment. Such an environment creates both opportunities and threats for actors that occupy these spaces of conflict. Newspapers see a few threats in fake news and accordingly assign the blame. A problematic initial hurdle, even though they spend a lot of time and space to discussing fake news, they have trouble in defining it. Fake news is seen as a serious social problem and social media phenomenon that thrives in a politically polarised society, assisted by social media platforms and driven by economic considerations. It is also considered an economic competitor to an already financially stressed mass media industry as well as a means of de-legitimising the journalism profession (Schapals, 2018; Tandoc et al., 2019). These aspects represent serious challenges and risks for mass media as they seek to adapt from analogue journalism to include digital journalism in the midst of a cultural and identity transformation that affects public perception and opinion.

There is a very noticeable decline in the level of public trust in the institutions of the press and democratic governments, which were believed to be intransparent or accountable, within a rapidly polarising and partisan political environment (Bergström & Jervelycke Belfrage, 2018; Cheng & Chen, 2020; Freelon & Wells, 2020; Morgan, 2018; Potthast et al., 2017; Wagner & Boczkowski, 2019). This can create a sense of alienation and cynicism among individuals towards the mainstream (Balmas, 2014). As such, fake news has been deemed to be a national security issue owing to the assumption of it undermining the foundations of the nation state (Hacıyakupoglu et al., 2018; Roozenbeek & van der Linden, 2019; Schaewitz et al., 2020). Ironically, exposure to elite discussions on fake news may influence the perception and lower individuals' trust in media and lead them to identify real news less accurately (Van Duyn & Collier, 2019). This lack of trust, especially in mainstream news sources, is evident in patterns of perception and opinion concerning the production and dissemination of digital news product. This can lead to motivation in seeking alternative views and seeking validation of the credibility of these sources (Fletcher & Park, 2017; Kioussis, 2001; Kleis Nielsen & Graves, 2017). In the digital environment, clearly defined and trusted opinion leaders are essential in the trusting and sharing of news within social media networks, which are critical elements for following news developments (Bergström & Jervelycke Belfrage, 2018). In some circumstances, the highly selective process of news searching and consumption on social media platforms supports the development of filter bubbles and echo chambers that confirm and do not challenge world views, which applies to both audiences and journalists (Albright, 2017; Bakir & McStay, 2018; Cheng & Chen, 2020; Cooke, 2020; Gelfert, 2018; Klein & Wueller, 2017). Therefore, the transmission of fake news is facilitated when it is deemed as being individually reasonable by the audience (Rini, 2017). The effects of confirmation bias exert an effect upon the audience and user's actions, being more likely to read, like, comment and share articles that they agree with (Kim & Dennis, 2019; Oyserman & Dawson, 2020; Schaewitz et al., 2020; Valenzuela et al., 2019; Verma et al., 2017, 2018). Within the frame of assessing the size and nature of the fake news audience, Nelson and Taneja (2018) state that 'the audience for fake news was still both small and disloyal'.

The described situation is held as being responsible for creating an environment that is facilitating the existence and spread of fake news. One line of academic thought is the product of a specific group of news consumers who function as activists. In particular, due to a lack of knowledge and the issuance of negative individuals or groups who adhere to strongly felt perceptions are

motivated to actively communicate their worldview, especially via digital media, in order to influence and persuade others of their ‘truth’. The motivation is the social amplification effects of fake news (Krishna, 2017). Albright (2017) notes that social interaction is key to understanding the fake news debate. He suggests reconstructing how audience expresses sentiment around news developments. However, such conclusions can be problematic given the nature of the cognitive domain in terms of defining ‘truth’ and ‘objectivity’, which is a very subjective matter. Other studies suggest that the influence of ‘incorrect’ information cannot simply be undone by pointing out that the information was incorrect (De Keersmaecker & Roets, 2017). It also ignores the role of mainstream politics and media in the production and dissemination of fake news.

Wahutu (2019) calls for the need to pay attention to official sources as originating sources of fake news, especially during periods of political tension or contestation, which creates the motivation for vested interests to employ fake news tactics for advantage or gain. The uncritical role of mainstream journalism in the dissemination of mainstream political messages has, as a consequence, exacerbated the problem of fake news. Furthermore, the ‘discourses about fake news’ are based within the premise of ‘an informational moral panic’ (Wahutu, 2019). Some recent critical research reflects this aspect of self-examination.

Fake news web-sites appear to feed off of the sensational, and there is no lack of such stories during this election [2016 US presidential]. Perhaps, the real concern is not necessarily the growth of fake news web-sites, but rather how accurately and objectively ‘real news’ depicts the political landscape of the United States (Guo & Vargo, 2020).

This specific situation can make it difficult for the audience to distinguish the different genres of news, which has the additional effect of further delegitimising the news media further. Comparative media research on the existence and spread of fake news suggests that ‘when leading news outlets fail simultaneously, social and alternative <...>, can replace them as the main information source’ (Humprecht, 2019). The situation seems to be best explained within the theoretical framework of a crisis,⁴ where this is simultaneously occurring in the physical domain and the informational domain. Every crisis event goes along with informational flows that define perceptions and opinions formed in the

⁴ For the purposes of this paper, a crisis is understood as being the simultaneous presence of 1) a threat to values, 2) unpredictability and 3) time constraint (the longer the event continues the more damage is inflicted). See for example: BOIN, A., T’HART, P., STERN, E., & SUNDELIUS, B. (2005). *The politics of crisis management: Public leadership under pressure*. New York, Cambridge University Press.

cognitive domain. This creates a competition among the stakeholders to control those informational flows in order to try and control the construction orthodoxy of ‘reality’ and ‘truth’ that defines the physical domain.

Conclusion

Fake news is a complex and heated academic issue as well as a practitioner and policy maker debate on its operational use. There is a very broad discussion with seemingly few points of agreement on the surface, a debate that spans numerous academic disciplines, each with their own specific points of focus and attention. This present article has been a modest attempt to try and illustrate as many of these aspects as possible. In the introduction of this paper, a research question was posed: what are the informational and cognitive conditions that support a fake news environment? It was posed to attempt a tentative taxonomy of environmental (informational and cognitive) specifics that facilitate the creation and use of fake news as a concept and practice.

Fake news is both a tool of deceptive persuasive communication and an accusation that is intended to undermine the credibility and effectiveness of a competing actor as a communicator. As a form of persuasive communication, fake news already exhibits some of the narratives of older forms of persuasive communication, such as propaganda. It has become a ‘dirty word’ owing to the deceptive and manipulative reputation and practice. Therefore, being more commonly seen is the narrative that it is not something that ‘we’ do, but rather an opponent does.

In the perspective and lens as a floating signifier, fake news is brought within the framework of information warfare. It is the discursive exercise of seeking to shape how an ideal (subjectively) version of society can be imagined, communicated by the actors to the target audience – a highly symbolic representation of the physical domain that is transmitted through the information domain to influence and shape the cognitive domain. Fake news can be used defensively by the incumbent hegemonic power to ward off a challenger and retain its position as a leader. However, fake news can be used offensively by the challenger to unseat the leader and take their position of power. This concerns the acquisition or detraction of social and/or political capital as a means of projecting legitimacy or de-legitimacy in a contest for persuasion and influence.

This only leaves the creation of a tentative taxonomy of fake news, which is based on the sum of knowledge contained in this article, a means to provide a quick reference and guide to better understanding this phenomenon. The

following factors and aspects, in no particular order of appearance, are often associated in defining the meaning, nature and presence of fake news:

- Intentional and deliberate communication, it is a form of organised persuasive communication, which can overlap within the field of information warfare;
- Fake news must serve a specific organisational or individual goal – social, economic, political, etc.;
- Competition for influence, power or control in its various forms can drive the use of fake news;
- Consciously seeks to deceive a target audience, rather than the entertain or distract function of satire;
- Seeks to influence the cognitive domain through emotional and symbolic representations of the physical domain through the information domain;
- Fake news as a term (buzzword) is new, but it is not new as a practice;
- Difference between ‘old’ fake news and the current form is the immediacy and reach that has been enabled by digital communication technologies;
- There is a dichotomy of use and application of fake news, as a genre of deceptive communication and as a label intended for character assassination and reputational attack;
- Fake news acts as a floating signifier of individual and group identity, distinguishing the ‘In’ and ‘Out’ groups from each other in a simplified binary fashion;
- Fake news is enabled in moments of crisis, especially where the decline of one political or geopolitical hegemony encourages challengers, which creates a crisis of information and communication for hearts, minds and the perception of legitimacy;
- Seeks to gain as much attention and exposure to the widest audience as possible, often relying on symbolic and emotional means to quickly prime and mobilise the audience;
- Fake news actors are not restricted to ‘right-wing fringe groups’ and other such non-mainstream actors, but can be anyone with an intention to deliberately deceive, including professional journalists;
- Fake news as a cognitive construct is contextual and is in the eye of the beholder.

In way of a parting note, the academic profession requires and prides itself on the precision of definition, the clarity it brings to the study, and understanding of elements in our world. This is a completely logical and understandable basis for those that are criticising the chaos and lack of clarity present in the term ‘fake

news'. However, 'fake news' is a familiar term and has a wider interpretation in our society and this needs to be recognised. The term should be kept, in spite of its various and obvious flaws, in order for academia to be part of the critical debates in the society, rather than being apart from them in our Ivory Towers.

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Old war, new battleground: Deconstructing the potency of social media for community engagement in Nigeria's human rights advocacy efforts

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Abstract

Although the need to guarantee human rights has been long acknowledged, efforts towards their full realization seem limited to the sole reliance on the conventional top-down approach to development. However, current development discourse emphasizes the centrality of people's involvement in social development, such as human rights promotion, and the social media seem to hold considerable prospects in the actualization of this goal. Using a survey of 1,000 respondents drawn from states across Nigeria, this study investigates how new media technologies, such as social media, are shifting focus from the sole reliance on the mainstream media and influencing public involvement in human rights promotion in Nigeria. Findings showed that the social media have engendered community-wide engagements of people in efforts aimed at reducing cases of human rights violation in Nigeria, as people do not only get exposed to human rights issues on the social media, but also participate in their discussion and promotion. Overall, using the social media for human rights advocacy was significantly associated with respondents' gender (.528**), education (.674**), perception (.753**), and social media exposure (.421**). Hence, there is the need for stakeholders to leverage the potentials of the social media in the promotion of people's fundamental rights.

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Keywords

Civil liberty, development advocacy, media perception, social change, techno-activism, Web 2.0.

Introduction

Human rights constitute some of the key elements of true development, and since the dawn of history, the quest to guarantee man's inalienable rights has remained a major preoccupation of governments, groups, and individuals around the world. This singular desire has reflected in several international and regional treaties, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights in 1981. Generally, a good development effort should aim at liberating the beneficiaries from the social drawbacks of wants, ignorance, economic exploitation, and social injustice (Uwakwe, 2012). Such effort should also stimulate the process of economic and social advancements that enable people to realize their innate potentials as agents of change, build self-confidence in their ability to take part in worthwhile ventures, and lead lives of dignity and self-fulfillment in the pursuit of individual and community advancement (Soola, 2003). It is partly on the stretch of this realization that the 2030 agenda for sustainable development identifies the protection of human rights as prerequisites for national development (United Nations, 2019).

The concept of human rights has attracted numerous theorizations. In its most basic form however, human rights refer to the inalienable freedoms and benefits that are enjoyed by individuals in the society they live in. These rights comprise all the civil liberties that every citizen of a country ought to enjoy without any form of deprivation except for reasonably justified grounds that are pre-established by the constitution of such a country (Asemah et al., 2013). Human rights are natural rights and considered as basic preconditions for every individual to live a meaningful life as a member of the society; hence, it becomes unreasonable to deprive anyone of such rights without causing a grave affront to justice. These rights broadly include the right to life, dignity of human beings, personal liberty, and freedom from torture and discrimination based on gender, religion, ethnic or political affiliation among others (Pate, 2011).

As a country, Nigeria is faced with diverse socio-political challenges despite its immense human resources and economic potentials (Akoja, 2016). About 40.1% (82.9 million) of its population are considered poor by national standards, and the country grapples with access to basic indices of physical development, including good roads, portable water, and stable electricity supply (Nigeria. National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2020). Nigeria's development imbroglios

are also manifest in its social challenges as basic human rights claims, such as social justice, human dignity, privacy, equality and protection against violence and forced labour, are seemingly not easy to assert (Nzarga, 2014). Several reports indicate that on a nearly daily basis, women are violently raped; young girls are subjected to genital mutilation and early marriage; boys risk being subjected to forced labour (Amnesty International, 2019). In 2015, about 6 out of every 10 Nigerian children experienced varied degrees of violence, while 10% of boys and 1 in 4 girls were reported to have been sexually abused. Similarly, more than 23 million girls and women have suffered forced or early marriage and about 19.9 million others have undergone female genital mutilation despite global efforts to abolish the practice (UNICEF, 2015).

Although there are some noticeable efforts by governments and other stakeholders to quell the spread of human rights violation in Nigeria, scholars advocate significant paradigm changes in the approach to the challenge viz: the extent of public involvement and the platform of engagement. On the one hand, scholars assert that, like other social development efforts, the success of human rights advocacy initiatives demands an appreciable level of community-wide participation and involvement of all concerned stakeholders, including the media and the public (Uwakwe, 2012).

On the other hand, they contend that despite the recognition of the mainstream media as the major crusaders of national development efforts (Choudhory, 2011; Moemeka, 2012), the peculiar potentials inherent in the social media should be effectively deployed to raise public awareness and trigger wide scale movements on human rights issues (Mwilima & Matali, 2018; Rahamn, 2016). Such arguments are premised on the fact that the social media promote two-way communication engagements that tend to enhance people's capacity to challenge human rights abuses and participate in social development efforts (Fayoyin, 2011). With respect to human rights issues, the social media help to shatter the psychological hurdle of fear and help users to realize that they are not alone and that there are many other people experiencing as much brutality, hardship and injustice as they are experiencing (Mwilima & Matali, 2018). Consequently, current emphasis is on how the social media can be used to create a new public sphere that enables a large number of people to exchange views for the promotion and protection of human rights (Zanzoun, 2017).

This study reclines on investigating the various ways in which social media users participate in human rights development efforts in Nigeria, and how they perceive digitally mediated human rights advocacy issues posted on the social media. In the pursuit of these objectives, the study was guided by the following

research questions: (i) To what extent are social media users in Nigeria exposed to human rights advocacy messages posted online? (ii) How do Nigerians participate in human rights advocacy efforts using the social media? (iii) What is the perception of Nigerians towards the effectiveness of the social media as tools for human rights advocacy? (iv) What are the factors associated with the deployment of the social media for human rights advocacy efforts in Nigeria?

Literature review

The concept of development has continued to assume dynamic dimensions, moving away from its traditional model of physical or tangible infrastructural growth to social issues which, though intangible, are crucial to societal wellbeing. Human rights constitute one of the social issues that define the overall level of development of any society (United Nations, 2019). Modern development discourse places people at the centre of developmental efforts in order for the beneficiaries of development projects to build their capacities and realize their individual potentials (Nicholson et al., 2016; Soola, 2003). This, therefore, underscores the need for community engagement in development initiatives.

Community engagement gives the ordinary people the much-needed opportunities to play active roles in the definition of peculiar development challenges, identification of solutions and development of priorities for action and resources (Bassler et al., 2008). Its basic goals are to increase citizens' knowledge on burning issues, and to encourage the application of such knowledge in the improvement of community wellbeing and creation of regular and on-going opportunities (Bassler et al., 2008).

The mass media can be used to support and realize these goals by informing people about on-going development projects, instructing them on the roles to play, and stimulating general participation in such projects (Asemah et al., 2013). For example, the mass media can be deployed to shape people's opinion and behavior towards human rights issues, disseminate information on such issues, mobilize support groups and strengthen popular participation in the activities of civil society organizations (Okeke, 2014). In this regard, the mass media generally provide an effectual network for informing and educating people on issues related to human rights and make human rights violators realize their wrongful acts. Specifically, the roles of the mass media in human rights protection include uncovering cases of human rights violations, exposing perpetrators of human rights abuses for moral condemnation and legal action, and educating people on appropriate channels for seeking redress when their rights are violated (Asemah et al., 2013).

The social media is a broad term for the new variant of online technologies that enable users to engage in the exchange of information and creation of communication values through the virtual space. These digital platforms are offshoots of the Web 2.0 technology which relies on computer-mediated tools to promote online community building, creation of social values and facilitation of discussions among spatially dispersed people (Erubami, 2020). A major strength of the social media is their ability to enhance a free and timely flow of information among users, thereby promoting human liberty and extending the frontiers of man's inalienable right to freedom of speech and expression.

Observably, modern technological advances have influenced the manner and extent of social activism around the world. Since the wake of the popular Arab uprising, there seems to be a significant rise in techno-optimism about the potentials of digital tools, such as the social media, to enhance human rights advocacy efforts (McPherson, 2017). Scholars contend that the social media hold the capacity to boost human rights advocacy by disrupting the conventional pathway to visibility, ensuring direct citizens-policymakers interaction, and promoting equality of visibility among users (Auger, 2013; Nah & Saxton, 2013; Thrall et al., 2014).

In recent times, the social media are unsettling human rights key practices around the world, especially in the prevention of human rights abuses, investigation of human rights violations, advocacy for redress in cases of violation, and promotion of the broader culture of human rights across different strata of the society (McPherson, 2015). As a result of the high visibility afforded by the social media technology, individuals and civil society organizations across the globe have embraced the platforms to push for the protection of the civil liberties that are accruable to people in the society they live in (McPherson, 2017; Zanzoun, 2017).

In 2010, a horrifying video that documented the summary execution of Tamil prisoners by Sri Lankan soldiers was captured with a mobile phone and circulated on various platforms, including the social media. After series of verifications that confirmed its authenticity, the anonymous video provided evidence of grave violation of the prisoners' right to life by the Sri Lankan army (McPherson, 2015). Similarly, in May 2020, the social media were used to spread video evidence against an illegal act of police brutality and extra-judicial murder of a 46-year-old African American, George Floyd, in Minneapolis. The video shared on the social media captured the last words of the dying George Floyd, 'Please, I can't breathe', as the erring police officer, Derek Chauvin, pinned him to the ground with his knees on Floyd's throat. The video immediately

incited public outcry and protests against police brutality and systemic racism in American cities as millions of people within and outside the US condemned the police action and demanded immediate prosecution of the officers involved. The video also electrified online campaigns across various social media platforms and sparked off the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement coordinated by civil society organizations.

Previous studies indicate that the social media hold considerable prospects for empowering people to become informed and active advocates of human rights by promoting access to and utilization of key services that aid the fulfillment of such rights (Fafoyin, 2011). The Web 2.0 based platforms have the capacity to engender wide public participation in social mobilization and development efforts in ways that previously seemed impossible with other means of communication, such as newspaper, radio, and television (Dunu & Uzochukwu, 2015). For example, the social media were used to mobilize over 51,000 landless Namibian youths to apply for land, forcing the government to make policy adjustments in favor of young Namibians (Mwilima & Matali, 2018). Despite these potentials, there seems to be a discrepancy between the perceived effectiveness of the social media as tools for human rights activism and their actual deployment for such purpose. Zanzoun's (2017) study shows that although human rights activists in Morocco acknowledge the significant role of the social media in mobilizing and facilitating linkages between dispersed groups with a view to promoting human rights practices, only two in 10 activists are likely to deploy the technology in the promotion of human rights.

In the past, the mainstream media were solely recognized and used for media engagements in development activities, including human rights advocacy efforts. However, scholars have consistently criticized the sole reliance on the mainstream media for development communication purposes due to their perceived drawbacks of delayed feedback and one-way communication approach (Moemeka, 2012). Besides, the burning need to promote human rights calls for a corollary media arrangement that relies neither on the parochial agenda of its political or corporate masters nor the prejudices or stereotypes promoted by its own industry (Zanzoun, 2017). The social media offer users the opportunity to overcome these challenges through their unique qualities that enable the personalization of contents according to individual user's needs, presentation of timely and relevant contents in multiple formats and context, and participation of diverse groups who develop and contribute contents in meaningful ways (Dunu & Uzochukwu, 2015; Erubami, 2020).

With the social media, users can receive diverse information on human rights issues, share, retweet or rebroadcast same with numerous online friends, and independently create new human rights related stories to immediately gain empathy for victims of human rights abuses and stimulate action in their favor. Social media users can also utilize the platforms to design human rights petitions and call for signatories online or instigate a mass action simply by using the hash tag #-#- which is an exceptionally good way of managing online information and attracting global attention (Okeke, 2014).

For instance, in April 2019, a viral video of a university student, whose mobile telephone was destroyed after being unjustly brutalized by a police officer, became a point of national debate after it was posted on the social media. The ensuing public uproar made the Nigeria Police authority to sanction the erring officer and electrified a latent nationwide online social campaign, #ENDSARS, which called for the immediate disbandment of the country's Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) over its alleged brazen abuse of human rights. Similarly, in October 2020, social media tools, such as Twitter, Facebook and Youtube, were used to coordinate and mobilize young Nigerians for the #EndSARS protest which is regarded as the most significant civil uprising in Nigeria. Earlier, the hash tag had been used by the 'Bring Back Our Girls' group, #BBOG, to initiate and sustain a social campaign that pushed for the release of over 200 Chibok Community School girls abducted by Boko Haram insurgents in Nigeria's North-East.

Theoretical framework

The study was anchored on the Media Systems Dependency Theory (MSDT) which seeks to explain the relationship among individuals, the media and the social milieu in which they function. The theory emanated from the works of Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin Defleur who posited that the availability of information resources leads to changes in individuals' cognition, emotion and behavior (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). In their article published in 1976, the researchers attempted to explain why the media have distinct cognitive, affective and behavioral effects on different people.

A major assumption of the MSDT is that individuals are goal-oriented and active in their selection and use of media contents such that they may depend on a source or medium for action orientation and interaction orientation to enable them act purposefully and exhibit the desired behavior in the pursuit of their goals. In this case, dependency on a source or medium does not necessarily require its exclusive or daily use; rather, it borders on whether a source or

medium constitutes an important part of an individual's information mix. Thus, people's use of certain media sources for specialized information tend to index their dependency on that source more than their general and non-specific media exposure does (Riffe et al., 2008).

In consonance with the theory, the current paper assumes that the availability of social media information resources may influence the cognitive, affective and evaluative domains of individual users of the social media and stimulate changes in their level of active engagement in human rights advocacy efforts using the social media. Studies indicate that the social media have become veritable sources of information to many Nigerians and the use of these online platforms constitutes an integral aspect of their daily lives (Oji & Erubami, 2020). With over 126 million people maintaining online presence in 2019, Nigeria has the highest number of Internet users on the African continent (Internet World Stats, 2020); thus, suggesting some levels of people's dependence on online media platforms for general and/or specialized information. Based on this sort of dependency, the social media may be explored to engender a community wide participation and shape people's perception on human rights issues such that their abuses or violations are immediately observed, censured or commended as the case may be.

Methods

The study adopted the survey research approach which is suitable for examining many variables, including peoples' opinion, attitude, perception and intention towards a given problem or societal occurrence (Asemah et al., 2017). The population of study comprised all residents of states in the South-East and South-South geopolitical zones of Nigeria. The South-East zone consists of five states and occupies about 41,440 km², with an estimated population of 21,955,414 people, while the South-South zone consists of six states and occupies a total land mass of approximately 85,303 km², with an estimated population of 28,829,288 residents (Agbor & Ashabua, 2018; NBS, 2018). As a country, Nigeria has a densely populated and heterogeneous socio-cultural outlook, and it is generally divided into two main regional blocs of north and south which are further divided into six geopolitical zones. However, the scope of the current study covered only the Southern region which has the highest Internet and social media penetration rates (Teragon Insight, 2013). Besides, the Southern region of Nigeria also accounts for a significant number of documented cases of human rights violation in the country (Ejifoma, 2016).

A sample size of 1,000 social media users in Nigeria was drawn for the study following Comrey and Lee's recommendations that a sample of 50 is extremely poor; 100 is poor; 200 is fair; 300 is good; 500 is very good; and 1,000 is excellent (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). A multistage sampling technique was used to select the respondents. In the first stage, the stratified sampling technique was used to divide the two geopolitical zones into separate states. The states were Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo (for South-East) and Akwa-Ibom, Balyesa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers (for South-South). In the second stage, the simple random sampling technique was used to select two states to represent each zone using a lucky dip. At the end of the selection, Anambra and Enugu (from South-East Nigeria) and Bayelsa and Delta (from South-South Nigeria) were picked. In the third stage, purposive sampling was used to select the capital city of the four states; hence, Awka in Anamabra, Enugu City in Enugu, Yenagoa in Bayelsa and Asaba in Delta were purposively selected. Given the cosmopolitan nature of these areas, it is expected that they will have a significantly higher level of Internet penetration and social media usage than other parts of the state. Besides, these urban areas also tend to be more notorious for documented cases of human rights violation than other parts of the study area. For example, Enugu City features prominently on the charts of human rights abuses, recording the highest number of sexual violations against minors in 2015 (Ejifoma, 2016). The final respondents were selected through purposive sampling, using having at least basic education and active usage of the social media as the main inclusion criteria.

Instrument. A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. The instrument was designed with due consideration to previous studies (Asemah et al., 2013; Mwilima & Matali, 2018; Okeke, 2014; Zanzoun, 2017). 250 copies of the questionnaire were distributed in each of the study locations. Prior to data collection, a pre-test survey was conducted to determine the reliability of the instrument which yielded acceptable Cronbach's Alpha for the three measures – exposure to human rights advocacy messages (.866), participation in human rights advocacy (.824) and perception of social media effectiveness (.785). The data were collected between August 13, 2020 and September 28, 2020 with the help of four research assistants who were university graduates of mass communication.

Measures

Exposure to human rights advocacy. This variable was measured with a 5-point Likert scale with possible responses ranging from Strongly disagree

(1) to Strongly agree (5). Respondents were required to rate their extent of agreement or disagreement with the following questions: (1) I do come across videos/written stories concerning human rights violation posted on the social media; (2) I have received requests on the social media urging me to sign online petitions against human rights violation in Nigeria; (3) I am a member of human rights advocacy group/chat room/page on the social media; (4) I have acquired much knowledge on human rights issues through the social media.

Participation in human rights advocacy. To measure this variable, the study participants were required to value their responses on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (5). The questions included: (1) I participate in the discussion/advocacy of human rights issues using social media platforms; (2) I have created/initiated a written/video story concerning human rights issues using the social media; (3) I share/retweet/rebroadcast written/video stories concerning human rights violation using the social media; (4) I have condemned a case(s) of human rights violation in Nigeria using the social media; and, (5) I use the social media to commend advocates of human rights development in Nigeria.

Perception of social media effectiveness. Two items on a 5-point Likert scale were used to measure this variable. The questions were: (1) I feel a compulsion to act after seeing stories concerning human rights violation posted on the social media; (2) Social media are effective means of advocating human rights development issues. The likely responses ranged from Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (5).

Ethical considerations. Before the commencement of actual data collection, the researchers sought the informed consent of the potential participants through an appropriate brief on the main objectives of the research. Only those who indicated willingness to participate in the study were included in the final sample and given a copy of the research questionnaire. The collected information was kept confidential.

Data analysis. The data were analyzed using mean (\bar{X}) and Standard Deviation (SD) with cutoff points set at 3.00 and 1.41 respectively. Thus, any item with a mean score of less than 3.00 was rejected, while mean scores greater than 3.00 were accepted (Nworgu, 2006). SPSS Version 23 was used to conduct bivariate analyses to determine the variables associated with the use of the social media for promoting human rights advocacy efforts in Nigeria.

Results

The analysis was based on 909 copies of the questionnaire that were returned and found usable, representing 91% response rate. Based on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, 40.8% of the participants were females compared to 59.2% who were males. On the basis of age grouping, 7.7% fell within the range of 16-20 years old, 40.8% were between 21-34 years old, 18.3% were aged 35-44 years old, 13.4% were 45-54 years old, 5.8% were aged 55-64 years old and the remaining 14% were 65 years old and above. On the basis of highest educational attainment, 20% of the respondents have received elementary or secondary education, 67% had a Bachelor's degree or its equivalents, while the remaining 13% had postgraduate degrees. 63% of the respondents had some forms of active employment, while 37% were unemployed.

To reduce bias and determine the extent of representativeness of the sample, we compared the obtained sample results with the national population as recommended by previous studies (Balter & Brunet, 2012). Although respondents with higher education were somewhat oversampled, the socio-demographic stratification of the study participants did not differ much from that of the general Nigerian online population. Compared to the Nigerian online social stratification, 67% of Nigerian netizens are males, 78% are between the ages of 19 and 35 years old, and at least 45% are students (Teragon Insight, 2013). In relation to the offline stratification, the national demographic spread shows that there are 1.04 males for every female in Nigeria and a significant proportion of the population is comprised by young people between the ages of 15 and 35 years old, with the median age being 19 years and three months (NBS, 2018; Teragon Insight, 2013).

The results presented in Table 1 show that the respondents are well exposed to human rights issues posted on the social media in the forms of videos and written stories, and they have acquired relevant knowledge on the issue as a result of their exposure. Based on the results, many of the respondents usually see videos/written stories concerning human rights violation posted on the social media, they have also acquired relevant knowledge on human rights issues through the social media. However, many of the respondents do not belong to human rights advocacy groups/chat rooms/pages on the social media and only few of them usually receive requests on the social media urging them to append their signatures to online petitions against cases of human rights violations in Nigeria.

Table 1

Exposure to human rights advocacy messages posted on the social media

	ITEM	Mean	SD
1	I do come across videos/written stories concerning human rights violation posted on the social media	4.12	1.04
2	I have received requests on the social media urging me to sign online petitions against human rights violation in Nigeria	2.83	1.54
3	I am a member of human rights advocacy group/ chat room/page on the social media	2.45	1.38
4	I have acquired much knowledge on human rights issues through the social media	4.15	1.10

Data in *Table 2* indicate that most of the respondents participate in human rights advocacy through discussions on social media platforms, sharing/retweeting/rebroadcasting videos/written stories, lending their voices to condemn cases of human rights violation, and commending advocates of human rights. However, despite the respondents' wide participation in human rights advocacy efforts using the social media, majority of them seldom create/initiate written/video story concerning human rights issues using the online platforms.

Table 2

Ways of participation in human rights advocacy using the social media

	ITEM	Mean	SD
1	I participate in the discussion/advocacy of human rights issues using social media platforms	4.16	0.83
2	I have created/initiated a written/video story concerning human rights issues using the social media	2.58	1.12
3	I share/retweet/rebroadcast written/video stories concerning human rights violation using the social media	3.19	1.04
4	I have condemned a case(s) of human rights violation in Nigeria using the social media	3.95	1.14
5	I use the social media to commend advocates of human rights development in Nigeria	4.21	0.63

Table 3 shows that the respondents perceive the social media as potent tools for promoting human rights advocacy efforts in Nigeria; hence, they also feel compelled to act when exposed to such (human rights advocacy) issues on the social media.

Table 3

Perception of the social media as effective tools for human rights advocacy

ITEM		Mean	SD
1	I feel a compulsion to act after seeing stories concerning human rights violation posted on the social media	3.98	1.08
2	Social media are effective means of advocating human rights development issues	4.39	0.87

We conducted a series of bivariate analyses to determine the various demographic and psychographic factors associated with the use of the social media for human rights advocacy efforts in Nigeria. Results of the Spearman's Rank correlation analysis presented in *Table 4* show that gender, education, exposure to human rights issues on the social media and the perceived effectiveness of the social media are some of the factors that are significantly associated with public deployment of social media tools in human rights advocacy efforts. However, participation in human rights promotion activities was not significantly associated with respondents' age and employment status.

Table 4

Correlation matrix between variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Gender	–					
Age	.211	–				
Education	.314	..366*	–			
Employment status	.232*	.428**	.624**	–		
SM exposure	.241*	.222*	.283*	-.418	–	
Perception of SM	.283**	.331	.454**	.235	.463**	–
Participation in Human Rights Advocacy	.528*	.423	.674**	-.148	.421**	.753**

Correlation is significant at <0.01 and <0.05 levels (2-tailed).

1 = Gender; 2 = Age; 3 = Education; 4 = Employment status;

5 = Social media exposure; 6 = Perception of Social Media

Discussion

The unprecedented popularity of the social media has opened greater opportunities for a wider section of the society to be actively engaged in human

rights promotion efforts. Our study attempts to provide answers to how the social media encourage community-wide engagements in the advocacy for human rights protection and promotion in Nigeria, thereby shifting focus from the sole reliance on the mainstream media for human rights promotion activities. First, this research showed that many Nigerians are adequately exposed to issues of human rights violations and advocacy in the forms of videos and written stories. Essentially, this appreciable level of exposure was made possible through the various social media platforms; thus, corroborating previous studies (Fafoyin, 2011) which posit that social media tools are critical for promoting access to and utilization of key services that aid the fulfillment of human rights, particularly when they are appropriately deployed. From our results, majority of the respondents agreed that the social media have enabled them to acquire relevant knowledge on human rights issues, although only a few of them seem to have joined human rights groups on the various social media platforms. No doubt, knowledge and awareness are essential to the quest for social development, and the social media seem to have provided these essential elements to users in Nigeria, thereby equipping them for the task of human rights promotion and advocacy.

Observably, the appreciable level of awareness on human rights issues, made possible by the social media, has an analogous level of participation in human rights advocacy efforts. The findings indicated that the respondents use the social media to participate in human rights advocacy activities in different ways, including active involvement in human rights discussions and debates, denunciation of brazen acts of human rights infringement and commendation of individuals, groups and governments championing human rights development efforts in Nigeria. All these essentially constitute the roles of the mass media in human rights protection (Asemah et al., 2013). Specifically, a large majority of the respondents admitted to being actively involved in the sharing of stories on human rights issues via Facebook, retweeting such information on Twitter and rebroadcasting them on Whatsapp or similar social media platforms. This finding partly supports one of the core assumptions of the Media Systems Dependency Theory which posits that the availability of information resources can influence the cognitive, affective and evaluative domains of individuals and stimulate changes in the way they respond to societal trends (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

However, a vast proportion of the respondents seldom utilize the social media to initiate/create fresh actions on human rights advocacy efforts, although they are actively involved in the sharing of videos and written stories that are related

to human rights activism. This may not have been totally unexpected considering that the respondents were not core human rights activists and, as such, may not be vast enough in terms of knowledge to create new stories and initiate fresh actions on the promotion of human rights. Besides, previous research has also shown that while many social media users tend to frequently engage in general online activities like chatting and non-specific information search, certain online activities, such as content creation, are mainly undertaken by a few users of the Web 2.0 based platforms (Bennette & Maton, 2010).

The study went further to determine the respondents' perception on the effectiveness of the social media as tools for promoting human rights advocacy efforts in Nigeria. According to our results, many of the respondents perceive the social media as potent and effective means of advocating the protection of human rights. Consistent with previous studies (Dunu & Uzochukwu, 2015; Mwilima & Matali, 2018; Zanzoun, 2017), many of the respondents agreed that they felt compelled to take necessary actions after seeing stories concerning human rights violation posted on the social media. This underscores the power of the social media in the mobilization of people and stimulation of social action against societal ills and institutional frailties. Such actions by the public would usually come in the forms of sharing, retweeting, rebroadcasting and reposting messages either to condemn human rights violation or praise efforts to deepen human rights protection in the country.

Finally, our results showed that certain demographic characteristics, such as gender, education, exposure to human rights issues on the social media and the perceived effectiveness of the social media are some of the factors that are significantly associated with the use of the social media for human rights promotion efforts. Nevertheless, respondents' age and employment status are not significantly associated with the use of the social media for human rights advocacy. This suggests that having higher education, being frequently exposed to human rights issues via the social media, and having a positive perception towards the effectiveness of the social media as potent tools for human rights advocacy might index people for the deployment of online platforms in the advancement of social development issues, such as human rights.

Conclusion

A principal target of the study was to fill the seeming gap in knowledge concerning how the social media promote community engagement in social development issues and index users in Nigeria for active involvement in human rights advocacy efforts. One of the practical implications of the present study is its affirmation of

the Web 2.0 based technologies as potent tools for promoting social development issues, such as human rights advocacy. Through the various social media platforms, many people in Nigeria get exposed to human rights related information, and such considerable high level of exposure also tends to have a corollary effect of wider public participation in the discussion and spread of human rights related information, condemnation of human rights violation and commendation of efforts aimed at entrenching the culture of human rights protection in Nigeria.

Thus, conclusion could be drawn that the social media have engendered a community wide participation and engagement of people in efforts aimed at reducing incidences of human rights violation in Nigeria. Another important contribution of the study to practical knowledge is the identification of certain personal and psychographic characteristics like gender, education, exposure to and perception of the social media as some of the factors that are significantly associated with the deployment of online digital technologies for human rights advocacy purposes in Nigeria.

Hence, it is recommended that social media users in Nigeria should sustain their current tempo of involvement in the promotion of human rights issues so as to continually put such issues on the front burner and attract necessary actions from concerned stakeholders in the long run. Importantly, Nigerian netizens should strive for a greater measure of credibility in their deployment of the social media in human rights promotion efforts by avoiding the lure of making unsubstantiated or false claims to human rights breaches. Given the high level of exposure to digitally mediated human rights information, it is recommended that rights activists, groups and organizations should leverage the potentials of the social media to inform and educate members of the public on what constitutes citizens' fundamental rights and their breaches. It is recommended that government should monitor and pay salient attention to social media posts on human rights violations in order to take timely action to nip such abuses in the bud and prevent them from snowballing into national crises.

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Information support of the Eurasian integration: The image of the EAEU in the mainstream media of the member states

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Abstract

Mass media, as the main tool for information support of integration processes of any regional economic association, are designed to ensure the internal stability of the Eurasian Economic Union, without which it is impossible to strengthen its position on the international stage. In this article, through the analysis of news content of the mainstream broadcasters and print and online media of the member states, it was identified, which thematical components of the image of the Eurasian Economic Union, affecting the perception of the young regional association by population, and to what extent they are currently available to mass audience in Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan.

The study showed that the information support of the Eurasian integration, unregulated for five years and transferred to the management of the media themselves, led to that the main topics as of Q4 2019 were: meetings of the

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leaders of the EAEU states, legislative regulation, as well as the prospects for the development of the relations between the Union countries. At the same time, the vast majority of materials are depersonalized information, rather than personalized materials that illustrate the benefits of integration for the public. All this leads to the formation of information apathy to the integration issues both in society and on the part of the journalists themselves.

Keywords

Eurasian Economic Union, Eurasian integration, information policy of the EAEU, image of the EAEU, Eurasian integration in mass media.

Introduction

In the 21st century, the global geopolitical field is characterized not only by globalization and integration trends but also by the ever-increasing competition of the certain states in order to expand the spheres of their economic and political influence. To consolidate their dominant positions, the countries actively use all available mechanisms of influence on domestic and foreign audiences, and mass media is one of the most important tools to achieve the assigned tasks.

However, mass media demonstrate their efficiency not only in terms of providing information support to the policy of states in the implementation of their sovereign interests but also when it comes to information support to the integration processes of regional economic blocs. They are a key element of the system of forming the image of the integration associations, which directly affects the implementation of both the interests of the unions and each of the countries individually on the global stage.

‘Strengthening the international legitimacy of the EAEU is of great importance for the national interests of the Russian Federation in the field of foreign policy, and the coordinated foreign policy of the Union plays an important role in terms of countering internal and external threats to the Eurasian integration project as a whole’ (Meshkova, 2019). However, increasing the effectiveness of countering external and internal threats, as well as increasing the international legitimacy of the EAEU, is possible only under the condition of constant and strategically built information support for Eurasian integration.

Stressing the importance of professional journalism in ensuring information security on the post-Soviet territories (Osavelyuk, 2016; Temirbulatov, 2013; Vartanova, 2019) and the key role of mass media in the Eurasian integration (Galtsina, 2017; Popov, 2015; Vikhrova, 2020), researchers note that without involving citizens in the agenda of the Eurasian integration, the governments

will not be able to ensure the necessary support. In addition to the measures taken at the level of the EEC in terms of ensuring information security as digital security of the integration association from external threats at the level of information and communication technologies (Vikhrova, 2020), the Eurasian integration, like any other significant political or economic project, requires constant and professional information support. As early as in 2015, the director of the Eurasian Communication Center Alexey Pilko stressed that it is the mass media that should act ‘as the engine of the Eurasian integration, using the entire arsenal of modern multimedia journalism’, and that its development depends on them².

Saadat Asanseitova, Deputy Director of the Integration Development Department of the Eurasian Economic Commission, confirms this point: ‘The Eurasian integration provides more and more benefits for businesses and citizens of the EAEU countries. The relevance of the systematic and professional coverage of innovations in supranational legislation is growing, and in this context, it is difficult to overestimate the role of mass media’³.

Scientific novelty and research methodology

The role of mass media in the formation and activation of integration processes of the regional associations has been the object of close interest of foreign scientists for more than two decades (Bijsmans & Altides, 2007; Clement, 2015; De Vreese & Kandyla, 2011; Fetoshi, 2017; Menéndez Alarcón, 2010; Polonska-Kimunguyi & Kimunguyi, 2011, etc.). Arben Fetoshi notes that ‘the role of media in the European Integration process is irreplaceable both in preserving internal cohesion of the EU, and regarding civic awareness and mobilization in enlargement countries’, explaining that the Western researchers have focused on the relationship of mass media, politics and public, since the future of the European project depends on this triangle (Fetoshi, 2017).

Antonio V. Menéndez Alarcón notes that ‘most opinions of the EU are influenced by stories that circulate among the public and images that can be characterized as symbolic experiences, which are mostly diffused by the media’. He concludes that ‘mass media can shape public views and contribute towards creating a framework of reference of the European Union’.

² PILKO, A. Stop talking about integration. *RIA Novosti*, 28th May, 2015. Available from: <https://ria.ru/20150526/1066585015.html>

³ *Eurasian Economic Commission (2019)*. The EEC is interested in greater transparency of integration. Available from: <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/nae/news/Pages/29-04-2019-4.aspx>

Under these conditions, M. Latzer and F. Sauerwein emphasize that policy jointly bears the responsibility for the emergence of the European public sphere and the democratization of the European Union – through institutional reforms and rapid response, mass media – through attention, criticism and control, and citizens – through interest and participation (Latzer, 2006). At the same time, the researchers define mass media as a connecting element and infrastructure that determines the rules and conditions of the processes of ‘transnationalisation and Europeanization’ of the sovereign EU states in the context of a growing number of cross-national disagreements (Latzer, 2006). ‘Media influence on support to the European integration by society, as well as on building of a European identity is an undeniable fact, recognized by the researchers in the field of communication’, V. Triga and K. Vadratsikas (2016–2018) emphasize, analyzing the impact of the EU media representation on the population of the EU countries.

There are some disagreements among the researchers regarding the formation of the so-called European identity, as well as the definition and functioning of the European public sphere. For example, Clement (2015) believes that despite the creation of pan-national governing structures in Europe, this did not affect significantly the perception of the citizens of their identities, and Polonska-Kimunguyi and Kimunguyi (2011) note that the European identity concept was introduced ‘top – down’, which forms the relation of the integration processes with the will of the political elites, but not with the desire of people. Clement (2015) and Kandyla and De Vreese (2011) emphasize that the current supranational public sphere lacks such key components as linguistic homogeneity and common media. However, they are sure that the formation of a European public sphere can be achieved with the help of ‘increased presence of European issues and actors in the national news media and the evaluation of those from a European rather than a national perspective’ (Kandyla & De Vreese, 2011).

However, despite the above differences, E. Eriksen formulates the most important function of mass media in the European space: they allow not only information to reach every EU resident, regardless of social status, language or location, but also to get feedback – ‘hearing the voice of Europe’, to adjust the integration process of certain countries (Eriksen, 2000).

In the European Union, where since 1995 under the leadership of the European Commission in cooperation with the authorities of various territorial levels, as well as the European Center for Journalism in Maastricht, thematic educational events are regularly held to prepare journalists to cover integration

topics, a breeding ground for research has formed for more than 2 decades. But the issues concerning the role of mass media in coverage of the processes of the regional integration are of interest not only to the EU media researchers.

The representatives of the research community of the least integrated region of the world – Africa – are also actively engaged in assessing the impact of mass media on the efficiency of the integration processes. The works on media support to the regional integration of the States of the East African Community, as well as problems of cooperation between the countries of the African Union and its blocs are of particular interest (Didiugwu, 2014; Mang'era, 2014). 'The only true path for Africa is a single political, cultural and economic voice. And this becomes clear due to the success of the European Union' (Didiugwu, 2014). 'The regional integration in Africa is increasingly being identified as an essential component of economic and political development; mass media, on which all efforts are based, should be perceived as the most important agent of this mission. Their role cannot be overestimated' (Didiugwu, 2014). But if the key issues for these researchers are to identify and find solutions to such regional issues, preventing the forming of the regional agenda, as problems of general underfunding of the sector, low level of technical equipment of enterprises and wages and total control of media companies by national governments (Churchill, 1991; Didiugwu, 2014; Mang'era, 2014; Tettey, 2001), then for the European scientific community, the priority is currently the analysis of news media content in order to identify the relationship between the national and European contexts.

This trend is related to the fact that at the early stages two main ways of development of the European public sphere were identified (Gerhards, 1993):

- creation of an international European-wide public sphere based on a unified system of mass media;
- Europeanization of national public spheres through thematization (coverage of the European topics in national mass media and assessment of them from a supranational point of view, rather than through a 'national prism').

However, with the growing practical importance of this issue, these criteria were partially reformulated, specified and supplemented by such requirements for transnationalization as synchronization and interaction. In the papers of modern researchers, the view prevails, that the emergence of a European-wide public on the basis of a unified media system is much less likely than the Europeanization of the national communities (Eilders, 2003; Pfetsch, 2008). Therefore, the current empirical research focuses on the coverage of the

European Union in national media (Bruter, 2005; Kevin, 2015; Lohner, 2011; Pfetsch, 2008). Taking into account the absence of a Eurasian-wide media infrastructure, as well as barriers to the creation of a trans-border public sphere, due to the peculiarities of the development of the national media systems of the FSU states (Temirbulatov, 2013; Vartanova, 2014; Venidiktov, 2016), this approach is reasonable to apply when analyzing the media support to the integration processes in the Eurasian Economic Union.

But if, in the theoretical formulation of the question, it is acceptable to rely on certain theses proposed within the studies on the information policy of the CIS countries (Hradziushka et al., 2020; Kalyuga, 2016; Popov, 2015; Strugovets, 2011) and some aspects of the formation and the coordination of its information space (Poddubskaya, 2018; Temirbulatov, 2013; Vartanova, 2019) and theoretical studies that are directly relevant to the subject of the EAEU media space (Galitsina, 2017; Venidiktov, 2016; Vikhrova, 2020), the empirical research on the proposed topic is practically absent today.

Do the mainstream media of the Eurasian Economic Union countries contribute to the spread of integration sentiments and ideas among the citizens? Do they ensure that the information space is filled thematically and quantitatively enough to ensure that the Eurasian agenda is anchored in the national information spaces, and that integration within the EAEU is supported by the public? In the context of attempts to destabilize the geopolitical situation in the region and the growing information confrontation, these research issues both do not lose their relevance, but also become particularly important. The answers to them can help to build a more efficient information policy within the region that can directly influence the further development of the post-Soviet space.

The purpose of this study is to identify thematic dominants in the coverage of the Eurasian integration by mainstream social and political media in Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan.

In this regard, the following tasks were formulated:

- by means of frequent and thematic analysis of the news content of the leading TV channels, as well as print and online media of the member states, to identify which components of the image of the integration association that affect the perception of the EAEU by the population of the countries, and to what extent, are offered to the audience;
- to create a classifier that provides a comprehensive view of the thematic structure of the Eurasian agenda formed by the media of the participating states;

- based on the results obtained, it is necessary to assess the present role of mass media in consolidating the Eurasian agenda in the information space of the participating states.

As part of the study, the materials of news programs, sections/blocks for the period from October 1 to December 31, 2019, of the mainstream social and political mass media of the EAEU countries were analyzed:

- 5 leading TV channels of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan.
- 5 leading print media in Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan.
- 5 leading online media in Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan.

The study period was Q4 2019, as it is not only sufficient, but also representative from the point of view of the formation of the thematic agenda. From October 1 to December 31, there were no events that had a significant impact on it or distorted it for a long time, as it happened, for example, in the second half of Q1 and Q2 2020, when COVID-19 became the main newsbreak for the vast majority of the social and political media.

1. The frequency of references to the EAEU in the news programmes, sections and blocks of the analyzed media was assessed. Each topic within one day was included in the calculation once.

Explanation:

- a. If the identical item about the meeting of the EAEU leaders on December 20 was repeated in 3 news releases of Belarus 1 TV channel repeated, the number of mentions = 1. But if the story was repeated in the weekly programme, it was included in the calculation for Sunday again.
 - b. If the topic of the EAEU summit in the afternoon cast on December 20 was covered as general, in order to inform about the meeting, and the plot of the evening cast was specified (dedicated to one of the topics discussed during the EAEU meeting), the total number of mentions = 2.
1. The main topics in connection with which the EAEU is mentioned in the analyzed media, as well as the share of the materials related to each of them, were identified and classified. Based on the results obtained, a corresponding thematic classifier was created for each type of media.
 2. On the basis of the final data, a single classifier was developed that illustrates the thematic content of the Eurasian agenda in the national information space at present and the volume of the relevant materials.

The EAEU in the news content of TV channels of the Union countries

Despite the increasing role of online media and social media in the formation of the national agendas of the EAEU countries, television remains one of the leading types of media in the post-Soviet states. The news content offered to the audience by the leading national news channels has a significant impact on its perception of the surrounding reality. Especially when it comes to information related to the political and economic situation in the country and the world.

About 96% of the Russian population has at least one TV at home, and 50% to 65% of citizens watch it every day⁴. At the same time, it should be noted that of five countries of the Union, the most rapidly declining performance of television audience and the outflow of advertising budgets to the Internet are observed in Russia. The average weekly television audience in Kyrgyzstan is 92.6% of the population, and over 60% of citizens still use it as the main information source⁵. Despite the fact that in Kazakhstan the share of the audience that prefers to receive news information from Internet resources has increased from 28% to 59% over the past five years, television is still the most preferred type of media (Alinbekova, 2019).

Currently, the number of references to the Eurasian Economic Union in the news programmes of the leading TV channels of the Union is insignificant. The total number of news items for the IV quarter of 2019 is presented in *Table* . The average figure for the leading Russian TV channels is 2.6 news per month, for Kazakhstan – 3.6, for Kyrgyzstan – 0.9. The indicators of the mainstream TV channels of Belarus ('Belarus 1') and Armenia ('N1') are slightly different: 78 and 66 items for the Q4, respectively. But against the background of the 'zero' indicators of 'Belarus 2' and 'Belarus 3', as well as the low indicators of other Armenian TV channels confirming the overall picture, these parameters do not have a significant impact on the overall statistical picture. The average figure for Belarus is 10.5, for Armenia – 8.3 news items per month.

In the analysis of the monthly ratio of the number of news TV stories of the EAEU TV channels, it becomes obvious that the months of events with the participation of the heads of the member countries show the highest quantitative indicators. For example, the meetings of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council were held on October 1 in Yerevan and December 20 in St.

⁴ Television in Russia in 2019. Rospechat report.

⁵ Media preferences of the population of Kyrgyzstan. Available from: <https://soros.kg/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Otchet-Mediapredpochtleniya-naseleniya-KR-8-volna.pdf>

Petersburg. As a result, in October on the Russian TV channels there were 14 of 39 videos dedicated to the EAEU in the context of this event, and in December there were 17 of 39 videos on the Russian TV channels. In their turn, in October the journalists of Armenian TV channels offered the audience 57 thematic news stories out of 124, which fell at Q4, and the number of December news segments also significantly exceeded November poor for such events. Similar figures are reflected in the statistics of Kazakhstan.

However, despite the opportunities that TV audience coverage still provides and the declared interest of the authorities in the promotion of the Eurasian agenda at state levels, the average number of newsbreaks for Q4 2019 for any of the considered blocks of the national TV channels does not exceed ten.

Table 1

Frequency of references to the EAEU in the news programmes of the TV channels of the Union countries, Q4 2019

Russia		Belarus		Kazakhstan		Armenia		Kyrgyzstan	
TV channel	Number of items	TV channel	Number of items	TV channel	Number of items	TV channel	Number of items	TV channel	Number of items
1 TV	9	Belarus 1	78	Khabar	8	N1	66	KTRK	4
NTV	9	Belarus 2	0	Khabar 24	26	Shant	26	World	1
Russia 1	9	ONT	45	Atameken Business	11	Armenia	15	NTS	3
TV Center	5	STV	34	KTK	3	Kentron	12		
6 Channel	7	World	27	Eurasia	6	Fifth Channel	5		

The thematic structure of the ‘Eurasian news content’ of national TV channels is also limited. ‘Meetings of the leaders of the EAEU Member States’, as well as ‘Prospects for the development of relations between the countries participating in the integration association and strengthening ties with external partners’ are the thematic dominants in the news blocks of TV channels of Armenia, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Belarus (*Table 2*).

Table 2

Thematic structure of the news content of the TV channels dedicated to the EAEU, for October 01, 2019, to December 31, 2019.

Subject matter	Per cent that the subject matter has in the total volume of news content of TV channels dedicated to the EAEU				
	Russia	Belarus	Kazakhstan	Armenia	Kyrgyzstan
Meeting of the leaders of the EAEU States	49.2	48.5	13.4	40.6	25.0
Prospects for the development of relations between the countries of the integration association, as well as strengthening ties with external partners	17.8	14.2	51.0	23.1	12.5
Legislative regulation	17.4	7.8	23.5	20.8	50.0
Certain statements and pronouncements of the leaders of the EAEU States, comments and assessments of experts	15.6	29.5	12.1	14.1	0
Personnel appointments in the institutions of the EAEU	0	0	0	1.4	0
Mutual trade between the EAEU States	0	0	0	0	12.5

In the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, coverage of the issues related to legislative regulation comes to the fore. It must be emphasized that despite the fact that all members of the research group worked on the territory of their states independently from each other, the thematic range for 4 of the 5 analyzed national TV channels turned to be one, that on the one hand, facilitated the creation of the classifier and grouping of newsbreaks unified for all countries, and with another – is an illustration of the critical limitations of the contexts in which the topics the young regional association is covered.

Only Kyrgyzstan has highlighted the thematic block of materials “Mutual trade between the EAEU States” different from other countries since the number of media materials offering the audience news about statistical data and other indicators describing the dynamics of mutual trade between the member countries is significant in this country.

But if we consider this block, which Kazakhstan has allocated to a separate group based on the inclusion of only statistical data on trade turnover presented by the media as part of the segments ‘Comments and assessments of experts’ and ‘Prospects for the development of relations between the participating countries’, the picture becomes even more gloomy.

When comparing the topics of media content about the EAEU on TV channels, we can note the predominance of the block ‘Meetings of the leaders of the EAEU States’ and ‘Individual statements and statements of the leaders of the EAEU countries, comments and assessments of experts’ on TV in Belarus (up to 50.2% of the total number of materials) and Armenia (up to 50% of the total number of materials). The TV channels of Russia and Kyrgyzstan have almost the same indicators for all the designated topics. The situation on TV in Kazakhstan is interesting: on 4 out of 5 TV channels considered, the coverage of the topic ‘Prospects for the development of relations between the countries participating in the integration association, as well as strengthening ties with external partners’ reaches 66.68%, which is almost twice the average indicators of other countries. This is due to the position of the state: the inviolability of political sovereignty and the promotion of their own national interests within the framework of the EAEU.

The EAEU in the news content of print media

The role of print media in the formation of national agendas in the EAEU differs from country to country. While the Russian print media are rapidly losing their audience year after year, entering 2020 with indicator of 71% and yielding to radio (86%)⁶, newspapers in Belarus are trying to adapt to digital formats and do not always efficiently cope with competition with social media, which quickly adopted the role of the main sources of information for the population amid the political crisis. At the same time, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are in the ‘transitional period’ distinctive for Belarus in 2017, when the consumption of print and online media content is almost equal, although significantly inferior to the popularity of television.

The number of news items of print media of the countries that cover the events related to the Eurasian Economic Union, as well as mentions of the regional association, exceeds the number of TV channels offered to viewers, but is also insignificant and insufficient to form a media portrait of the EAEU and consolidate it in the minds of the public (*Table 3*). The exception is ‘Rossiyskaya

⁶ Press 2020. Available from: https://mediascope.net/upload/iblock/4a3/Mediascope_Publishing_Expo_2020.pdf

Gazeta', which is the official print media of the Government of the Russian Federation. One should note that the publication, which has the status of the official publisher of federal documents, also offers infotainment materials. They are unique in terms of coverage of the Eurasian topics, which are absent in other publications of the Union countries. Their number is insignificant (2 articles out of 160), but amid the absence of similar materials in other print and online media of the states (the only exception is BelTA), this fact deserves special attention of the researchers.

The average number of thematic items for Russian print media is 19.8; for Belarusian – 8.3; print media of Kazakhstan – 13.9; Armenia – 5.5; Kyrgyzstan – 0.7.

Table 3

**Frequency of references to the EAEU
in the news content of the print media, Q4 2019**

Russia		Belarus		Kazakhstan		Armenia		Kyrgyzstan	
Print media	Number of items	Print media	Number of items	Print media	Number of items	Print media	Number of items	Print media	Number of items
Vedomosti	36	SB. Belarus Today	52	Vremya	64	Haykakan Zhamanak	40	Komsomolskaya Pravda in the KG	2
Kommer-sant	42	Respublika	22	Egemen Kazakhstan	11	The Zho-ghovurd	16	Kyrqyz Tuusu	0
Izvestiya	59	Narodnaya Gazeta	8	Kursiv	84	Aravot	22	Aziya News	0
Rossiyskaya Gazeta	160	Selskaya Gazeta	6	Liter	26	Past	4	Zhany Ordo	0
Komsomolskaya Pravda	0	Zvyazda	37	Express-K	23	Zhamanak	0	Super Info	0

The number of contexts in which the subject of the EAEU is covered, as in the case of TV channels, is limited, as is the case with TV channels. The print media of the Russian Federation primarily focuses on the issues related to legislative regulation. Journalists of Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, and Armenia build the Eurasian agenda around the meetings of the leaders of the Union member states, and the

print media of Kazakhstan are based on newsworthy related to the prospects of the development of relations between the countries participating in the integration association (*Table 4*).

Table 4

**Thematic structure of the news content of the print media,
from October 01, 2019, to December 31, 2019.**

Subject matter	Per cent, which the topic occupies in the total volume of news content dedicated to the EAEU in print media				
	Russia	Belarus	Kazakhstan	Armenia	Kyrgyzstan
Meeting of the leaders of the EAEU States	5.8	42.8	8.6	36.9	50
Prospects for the development of relations between the countries of the integration association, as well as strengthening ties with external partners	27.5	8.5	41.9	18.9	50
Legislative regulation	48.4	14.4	44.5	8.4	0
Certain statements and pronouncements of the leaders of the EAEU States, comments and assessments of experts	18.3	34.3	5.0	32.3	0
Personnel appointments in the institutions of the EAEU	0	0	0	3.5	0
Mutual trade between the EAEU States	0	0	0	0	0

The EAEU in the news content of online publications

Only the registered online media of the member states are reviewed within this study, but it should be noted that social media greatly affect the information space of the states and the Eurasian agenda. In particular, Telegram channels are popular with the audience of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus.

In addition to the data presented in Table 5, it should be noted that the average monthly index of the frequency of references to the EAEU by the leading online publications of the countries varies from 1.6 to 33. (The average indicator for the leading Russian online media is 15 items per month, for Belarusian – 30.3; for Kazakhstani – 6.5; Armenian – 33; Kyrgyz – 1.6.)

Table 5

**Frequency of references to the EAEU in the news content
of the online media, Q4 2019**

Russia		Belarus		Kazakhstan		Armenia		Kyrgyzstan	
Online media	Number of items	Online media	Number of items	Online media	Number of items	Online media	Number of items	Online media	Number of items
360 tv	23	BelTA	296	Inform-bureau	11	Newsarmenia.am	68	Kaktus.media	3
RBK	74	Tut.by	63	Tengri-news	38	News.am	110	24.kg	14
Gazeta.ru	18	Onliner.by	17	Today.kz	11	Shamshyan.com	19	Kabar.kg	1
Lenta.ru	57	Naviny.by. Belarusian news	58	Matrix.kz	17	Mamul.am	53	Aki-press.org	1
RT	53	Nasha Niva	21	Zakon.kz	21	Sputnik Armenia	245		

It should be noted that along with the leading online media in Armenia, Sputnik news agency's website was included in the sample, as according to media researchers, 'it largely shapes the opinion of the Armenian mass audience about the EAEU', and at that this involves both the population preferring the media in Armenian, as well as in Russian.

Despite such a significant gap, even the indicators of the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Belarus cannot be called sufficient to fill the online news media with thematic content. The thematic structure duplicates the situation with the news content of the national TV channels and print media: the thematic spectrum is limited to the above-mentioned contexts (*Table 6*).

Table 6

**Thematic structure of the news content of the online media,
from October 01, 2019, to December 31, 2019**

Subject matter	Per cent, which the topic occupies in the total volume of news content dedicated to the EAEU in online media				
	Russia	Belarus	Kazakhstan	Armenia	Kyrgyzstan
Meeting of the leaders of the EAEU States	5.4	37.5	8.4	28.4	0.0
Prospects for the development of relations between the countries of the integration association, as well as strengthening ties with external partners	34.1	39.2	38.9	24.6	16.6
Legislative regulation	44.9	6.9	43.0	9.9	5.6
Certain statements and pronouncements of the leaders of the EAEU States, comments and assessments of experts	13.5	14.5	9.7	33.4	0
Personnel appointments in the institutions of the EAEU	2.1	1.9	0	3.7	0
Mutual trade between the EAEU States	0	0	0	0	77.8

Table 7 presents combined thematic structure of the Eurasian agenda in national information spaces. Content analysis of TV channels, print and online media, viewed through the prism of national strategies and expectations regarding the role of the Eurasian Economic Union, allows us to better understand the positions of the participating states in relation to regional integration.

Table 7

Thematic structure of the Eurasian agenda in the national information space for the period October 1, 2019, to December 31, 2019

Subject matter	Per cent of media in which it can be found					Per cent that the subject matter takes in the total number of media publications about the EAEU				
	Russia	Republic of Belarus	Kazakhstan	Armenia	Kyrgyzstan	Russia	Republic of Belarus	Kazakhstan	Armenia	Kyrgyzstan
Meeting of the leaders of the EAEU States	78.6	100	100	100	37.5	21.1	42.9	10.14	29.1	15.0
Prospects for the development of relations between the countries of the integration association, as well as strengthening ties with external partners	78.6	100	100	100	50	26.4	20.6	43.92	24.7	17.8
Legislative regulation	85.7	85.7	86.67	92.9	50	36.1	9.7	37.02	12	27.5
Certain statements and pronouncements of the leaders of the EAEU States, comments and assessments of experts	64.2	100	93.33	92.9	-	15.6	25.5	8.92	31	-
Personnel appointments in the institutions of the EAEU	7.1	60	-	64.3	-	0.8	1.3	-	3.2	-
Mutual trade between the EAEU States	-	-	-	-	62.5	-	-	-	-	39.7

When TV and online media, using their inherent advantages (image and speed of perception of information), demonstrate, first of all, the positive aspects of the integration processes of the Eurasian space, oppositely the situation in the print and online media of some post-Soviet republics is not so bright. It is not a matter of a relatively small number of published materials, but rather of highlighting the problems of integration and their impact on the promotion of their own national interests within the framework of the EAEU. For example, the mass media of Kyrgyzstan emphasizes that the reasons for the country's participation in the Eurasian Union are solely to ensure conditions for the country's economic growth, access of Kazakh products to foreign markets (the EAEU or third countries, using the EAEU countries as intermediaries), and attracting investment. At the same time, some dissatisfaction was noted when comparing the market volumes of the Customs Union of Russia and Belarus and the inflow of goods from these countries to Kazakhstan. Kyrgyzstan also pays great attention to the prospects of mutual trade of the EAEU member states. Therefore, as part of the content analysis, we identified a separate set of materials 'Mutual trade between the EAEU countries', separated from the segments 'Comments and assessments of experts' and 'Prospects for the development of relations between the EAEU member states'.

It is noteworthy that the opinions of individual independent experts are mostly negative or focused on a careful comparison of the positive and negative aspects in the EAEU.

At the same time, the media actively cover legislative initiatives aimed at forming one of the main principles of the development of the internal market of the EAEU – the elimination of barriers to mutual and equal access of national producers to the internal markets of the member States of the integration association. This work should be carried out more actively by the journalists of the EAEU countries, explaining the benefits of integration for national economies.

As it was repeatedly emphasized in the speeches of the heads of the EAEU member States, political figures, and various experts during the study period, the EAEU is aimed exclusively at economic integration. There are clear limits to the development of the EAEU: the firmness of political sovereignty, consensus at all levels of integration, and a pragmatic approach. For example, in the print media of Kazakhstan, special attention was paid to the introduction of a single currency on the territory of the EAEU.

Based on this, we can state that at the moment there is no consensus in the expert community of the EAEU countries about the integration prospects of

the association. But still, upon the discussion of some general issues, including political, social, and economic ones, we can talk about the prospects for the future.

The mass media should better cover the progress and solution of integration problems and the prospects for participation in the EAEU. This will help to achieve the interest of a large part of society in the development of the EAEU association.

Discussion

Despite a number of studies containing both a theoretical justification for the need for information support to integration processes in the Eurasian space (Vartanova, 2019; Vikhrova, 2020, etc.), as well as a practical evaluation of its impact on the success of other regional projects (Kandyla & De Vreese, 2011; Triga & Vadratsikas, 2016–2018, etc.), the results obtained from the content analysis demonstrate that at present the media's activities on the information support of the Eurasian integration can be assessed as unregulated, unstimulated (in the sense of unmotivated) from outside and inefficient. The frequency of mentions of the EAEU by the leading media of the member states is extremely low (the average monthly indicator for TV channels of the countries – 5 news, for online media – 17 materials), and the number of contexts, which cover the topic of the young regional association, does not exceed five in the most states of the Union. Meetings of heads of state, prospects for the development of relations of the member countries and strengthening of ties with external partners, legislative regulation, as well as official statements of the leaders of the EAEU countries make up over 90% of the thematic agenda of the Union states.

In order to fill the national information spaces with content aimed at the promotion of the integration ideas among the population, it is reasonable to develop and implement certain elements of a unified information policy in the space of the Union. At the current stage, the EAEU is far from creating and supranational regulation of a unified information space, but even today the logic of the performance of the coordinated information policy can be built on the principle of joining of different participants around the specific projects, including those focused on the improvement of the efficiency of information support for the integration processes. The projects can extend to different territorial levels – regional, national or Eurasian, but coordinating such work at any of them requires a clear understanding of the logic of the performance and careful preliminary study of the media systems of each state.

Despite the fact that today the countries are united by access to the Internet and information and communications technology (ICT), which greatly facilitates information exchange, media systems of the states have developed independently for a long time. Until 1991, the media and journalism of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia were built on the basis of similar funding principles, editorial standards and organization systems. But three decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the media systems of each state present completely different models, the coordination of which requires a detailed study of the features of their elements, and, therefore, additional research, which can follow this work.

The importance of the integration processes of the EAEU on the agenda in the mass media is much broader than it seems to many researchers. The four blocks of topics identified in the content analysis – ‘Meetings of the leaders of the EAEU States’, ‘Prospects for the development of relations between the EAEU countries’, ‘Legislative regulation’ and ‘Individual statements of the leaders of the EAEU countries’ – are basic, but each of them can be divided into sub-topics for more detailed research. For example, in the content analysis of the information space of Kyrgyzstan the topic ‘Mutual trade between the EAEU countries Personnel assignments’ is presented. In Kazakhstan, which sees only economic integration in the EAEU, media materials are studied through the prism of national plans and development programs of the republic (Khasenov & Kenzhalina, 2019).

At the same time, there is a violation of the very idea of uniting countries in the Eurasian Union, in which the public, due to the insufficient coverage in the media, is poorly interested. Overcoming this limiting factor can be compensated by a well-thought-out state information policy in each of the countries, which should focus the media on the strategic needs and interests of society within the framework of the EAEU. At the same time, it should be remembered that the publication of materials about the EAEU is designed to provide not a dry statement of facts about the formation of an integration association, but freedom for creativity and continuous personal and professional development of journalistic personnel and the existing pool of experts on the EAEU issues.

Another obstacle to informing the public about the Eurasian Union is the traditional mass media industry. The speed of communication is dictated by new media. However, reading print media or watching TV in real time makes the consumption of information unavailable at the speed of communications. As a result, it is extremely difficult to form a reliable picture of the integration processes within the Eurasian Union. For comparison: the maximum frequency of mentions of the EAEU in news programs on Russian television in the study

period was 9 (the maximum number), in print – 160, in online media – 74; in Kazakhstan – 28 materials on TV, 110 – in print and 38 – online. The largest volume of content about the EAEU is shown by the online media of Belarus – 296 materials for the fourth quarter of 2019.

The example of Belarus proves that new media are becoming a truly effective tool for popularizing the Eurasian space. However, in this case, verification of the published information becomes a problem.

Having enormous opportunities to form the public's understanding of the events taking place in the EAEU member states, the mass media can not only inform about the existing or prospects for the development of national economies within the Eurasian Union, but also influence the public discourse on integration, strengthen or, conversely, reduce the cohesion of the EAEU population.

Currently, the media space of the Eurasian Union remains on the periphery of attention for both state institutions and the scientific and academic community.

The definition of the prospects for information support of the Eurasian integration is truly relevant, since the EAEU is only at the stage of forming a self-sufficient economic system.

The convergence made it possible to erase the previously existing traditional division of the mass media into print and electronic media, as well as information carriers. Not limited by state borders, the mass media becomes more vulnerable to the spread of unacceptable content, a planned flow of destabilizing information, including information wars. These concerns lead to the need to develop a certain image of the Eurasian Union not only globally, but also in the foreign information space.

In particular, the growing role of the Telegram messenger in the media space remains insufficiently studied in the Eurasian space. For instance, in Belarus, in 2020, the popularity of the Telegram messenger has significantly increased not only as a source of news information but also as a means of communication and self-organization in a political crisis. We believe that the most advantageous model is the one in which the media emphasize different ways of interacting with the audience.

The content analysis of the mass media and the identification of the main thematic focus of the media content of the EAEU member states allows us to state that the integration space not only lacks a uniform information field, following the example of the European Union, but also the journalists themselves are not interested in an effective response to the ongoing changes at the national level.

In view of the information vacuum identified in the study and observed in practice within the Eurasian Economic Union, the issue of creating a content base to build the image of a young regional union on the global stage deserves special attention. In this regard, a scientific analysis of the EAEU image elements, spontaneously forming in foreign information spaces, is deemed necessary.

Conclusion

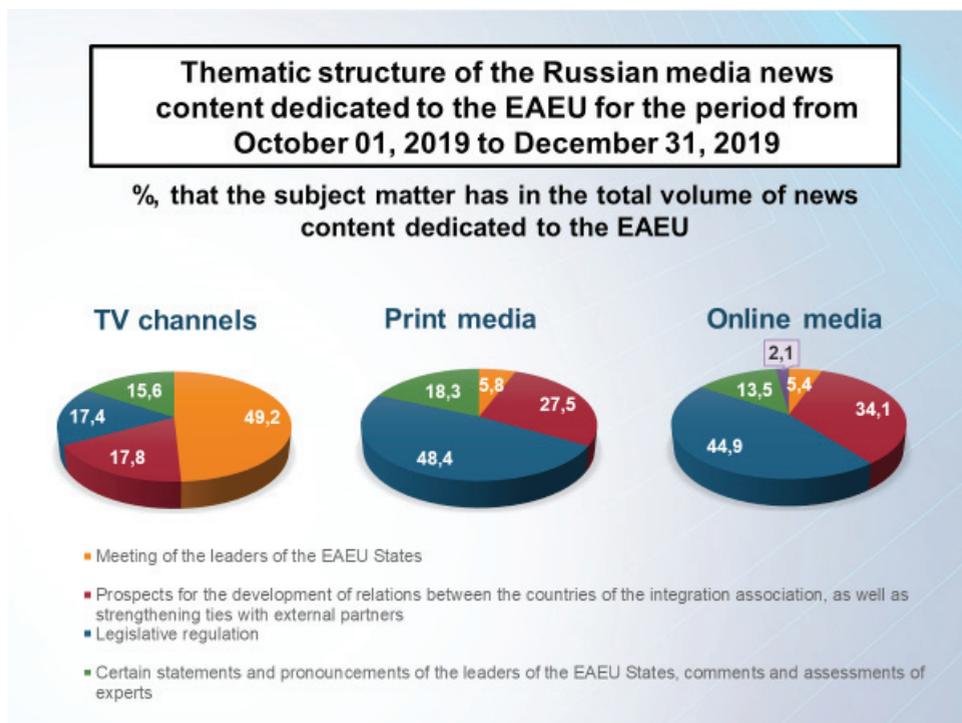
Shortly after the formation of the Union itself the media resources faced the problem of covering the activities of the Eurasian Economic Union. The importance of working in the information space to create a clear and positive image of the EAEU in the media is noted by both researchers, to which the authors of this work refer, and officials. However, despite numerous discussions, at the moment the coverage of the activities of the EAEU in the member states is characterized by unsystematic and relatively weak activity: the Eurasian integration has not been able to become one of the main topics of the social and political agenda in any of the member states of the Union. As spectacular examples it can be noted, that the EAEU's recognition among Russian citizens has increased by only 10%⁷ over the years of existence, and Google Trends show that in all member states of the Union in terms of popularity the EAEU is consistently inferior to the Commonwealth of Independent States and is in popularity closer to the CSTO (and in Armenia it is inferior at all). The generated information vacuum is successfully filled by the opposition media, which promote the negative paradigm of consideration of the EAEU, seeing it as an instrument of new colonialism on the part of Russia.

The results of the study demonstrate that today the frequency of references to the EAEU by the leading media of the member states is low, and the number of contexts in which the topic of the young regional association is covered, is limited (*Fig. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5*).

⁷ Eurasian integration: forms, goals, and consequences. // VCIOM (All-Russia Public Opinion Research Center) URL: <https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/evrazijskaya-integracziya-forma-czeli-i-posledstviya> (access date: May 20, 2020)

Figure 1

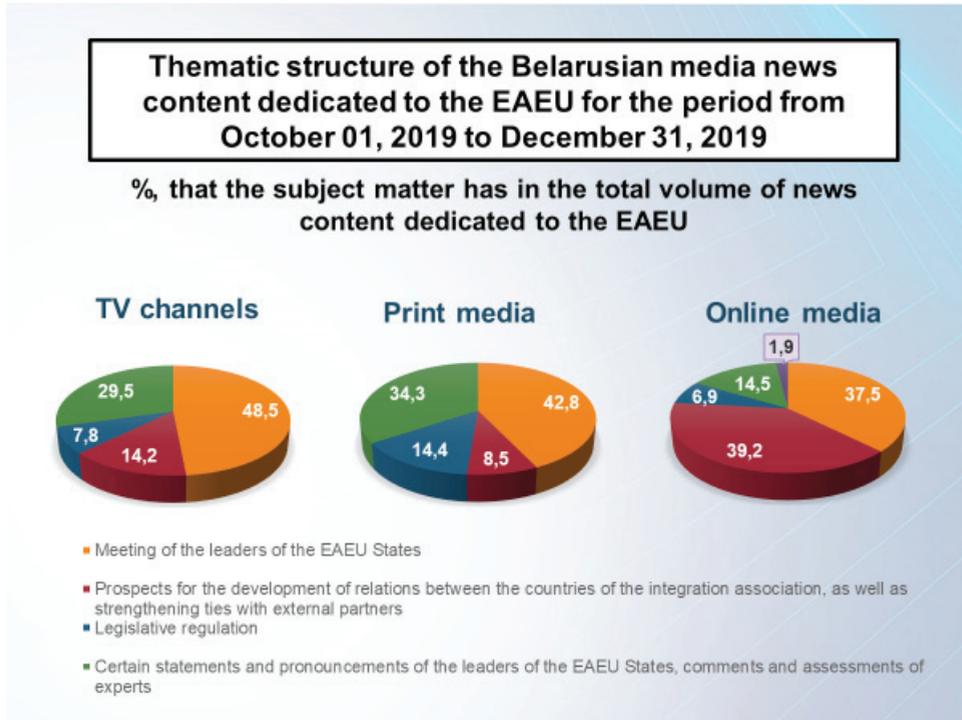
Thematic structure of the Russian media news content dedicated to the EAEU for the period from October 01, 2019, to December 31, 2019.



Source: The diagrams are prepared by the authors based on the data obtained during the study.

Figure 2

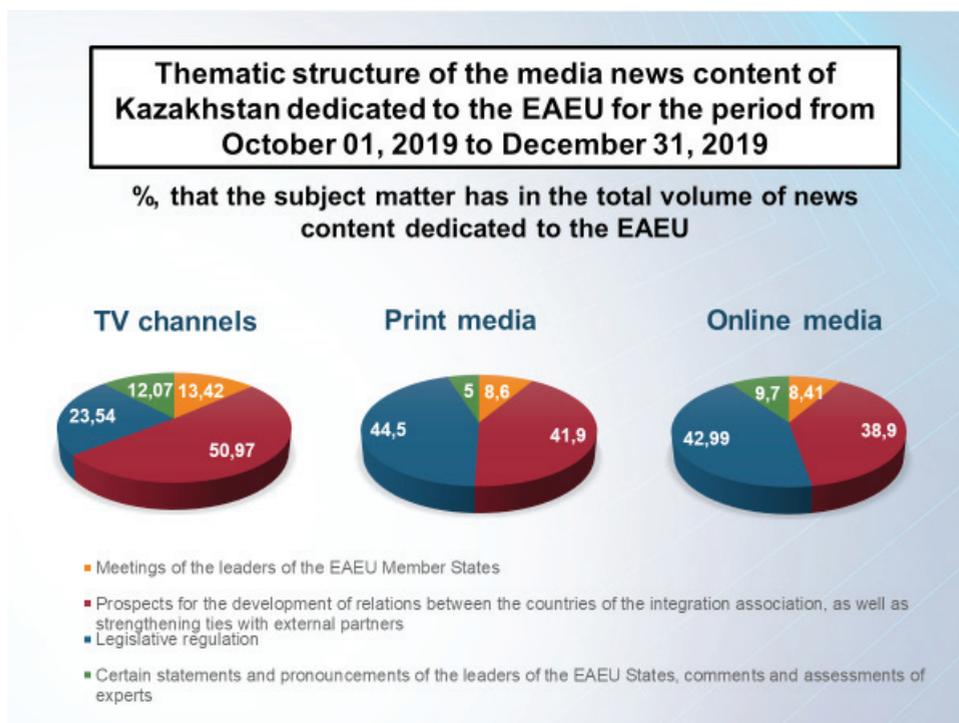
Thematic structure of the Belarusian media news content dedicated to the EAEU for the period from October 01, 2019, to December 31, 2019.



Source: The diagrams are prepared by the authors based on the data obtained during the study.

Figure 3

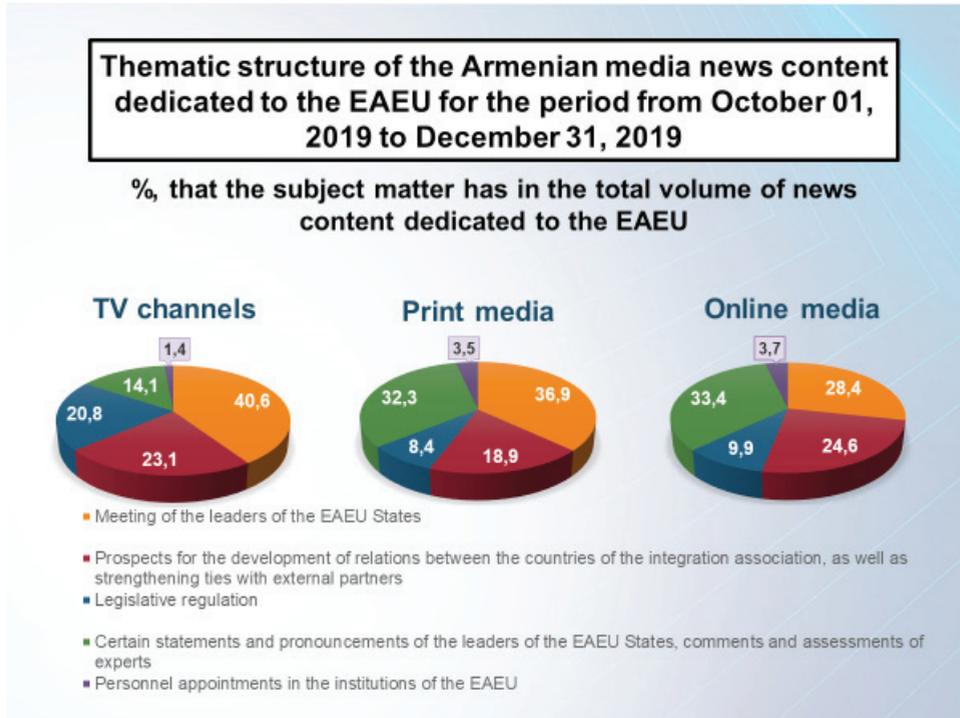
Thematic structure of the media news content of Kazakhstan dedicated to the EAEU for the period from October 01, 2019, to December 31, 2019.



Source: The diagrams are prepared by the authors based on the data obtained during the study.

Figure 4

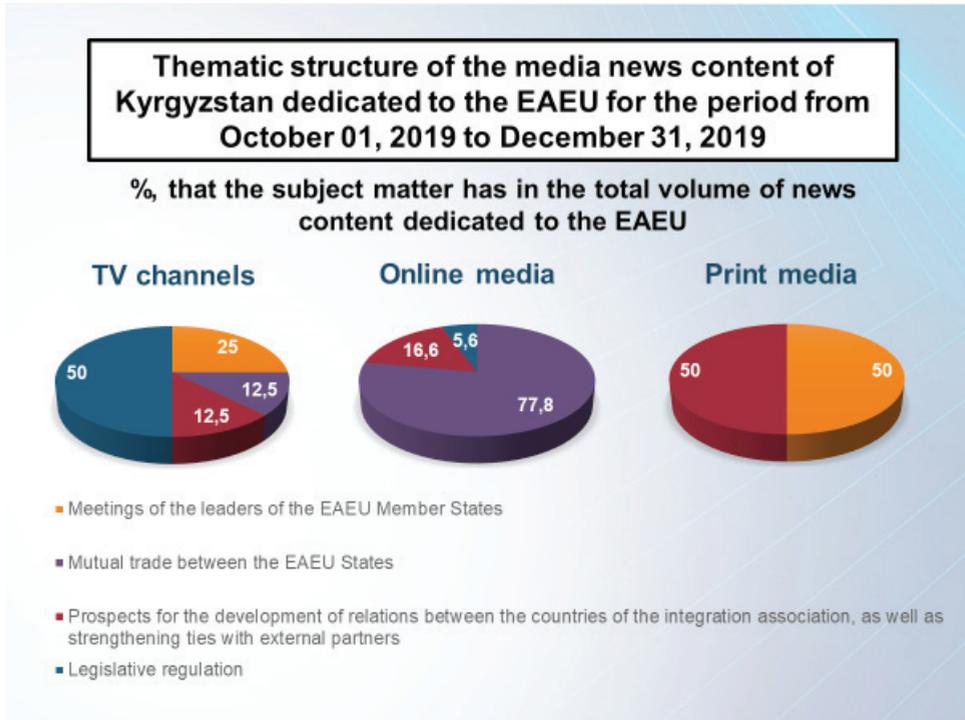
Thematic structure of the Armenian media news content dedicated to the EAEU for the period from October 01, 2019, to December 31, 2019.



Source: The diagrams are prepared by the authors based on the data obtained during the study.

Figure 5

Thematic structure of the media news content of Kyrgyzstan dedicated to the EAEU for the period from October 01, 2019, to December 31, 2019.



Source: The diagrams are prepared by the authors based on the data obtained during the study.

Since the Eurasian Economic Union is primarily an economic integration association, the results of its development and work should be of interest to citizens as the main consumers of goods and services. However, coverage of events related to the Union is currently formal. The main topics of the common information space of the EAEU countries as of Q4 2019 were:

- prospects for the development of relations between the countries of the integration association, as well as strengthening ties with external partners – 26.7%,
- legislative regulation – 24.5%,
- meetings of the leaders of the states of the integration association – 23.7% of all news items of the mainstream social and political media of the participating countries,
- certain statements and pronouncements of the leaders of the EAEU States, comments and assessments of experts – 16.2%.

Another 8.9% of the news items of the mainstream social and political media of the participating countries were related to personnel changes and statistics of mutual trade between the countries, which are actively covered in Kyrgyzstan.

At the same time, the authors of the study note that the vast majority of the items in this small thematic spectrum are depersonalized information, but not personalized materials that clearly illustrate the benefits of the Eurasian integration for general public. All this leads to the formation of information apathy to the integration issues both in society and on the part of the journalists themselves.

The results of the study demonstrate that at present there is an urgent need to find efficient methods and incentives aimed at the promotion of the activities of media in order to solve the above-mentioned issues. Without the development of a set of measures aimed at improving the quality of information support, the EAEU risks to have an image of an interstate structure that has no practical significance, the results of operation of which do not affect the quality of public life. This, in its turn, can have a significant negative impact on the viability of the regional association, despite all efforts of the institutions of the Eurasian economic integration and many years of systematic work carried out by the governments of the participating states.

This situation is representational not only for the 'locomotive of Eurasian integration', but also for any other regional association represented on the global geopolitical map because in the 21st century, the success of the integration projects is determined not so much by the geo-economical potential, but by the public sphere formed by mass media of the participating states. This also confirms the concern of the Western researchers that in the periods relatively quiet for the European Union (Bijsmans & Altides, 2007), the characteristics of the integration association policy do not correspond to the formats of media materials, since they mostly include 'technical details' that do not have a serious impact on the national policies and, therefore, are not of interest to the mass audience.

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List of references should include only publications cited in the article. Citations in the text should be accompanied by round brackets containing last name(s) of the author(s), year of publication and page(s). Example: (Johnes, 2008: 115).

The manuscript should be typed in 1,5-spacing on one side of the paper only, using Times New Roman 14 font. Margins are 2 cm on all sides. Tables and figures (illustrations) should be embedded into the text.

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