World of Media

Journal of Russian Media and Journalism Studies

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Journal of Russian Media and Journalism Studies
Issue 1, 2023

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LEAD ARTICLE

Towards a multipolar communication international scholarship?

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Abstract

There has been mounting evidence in recent years that the world is shifting toward a more multipolar global order. From an economic perspective, for instance, non-Western countries have an increasing share of the world's wealth. Still, the unipolar logic remains dominant in at least one domain: international scholarship. Theoretical and political perspectives that originated in the United States and, secondarily, Western Europe have typically received universal recognition. Why does this happen? This article approaches this problem from four different angles: Where does the academic unipolar order originate from? How does the unipolar order actually work? What institutions and practices support it? What challenges does the academic unipolar order present for scholars working outside the West? What is the concrete political impact of the academic unipolar order?

Keywords

Unipolarity, multipolarity, international scholarship.

There has been mounting evidence in recent years that the world is shifting toward a more multipolar global order. From an economic perspective, for instance, non-Western countries have an increasing share of the world's wealth. If we take GDP for PPP (purchasing power parity), six out of ten do not belong to the Western world: China (the first), India (the third), Japan (the fourth), Russia (the sixth), Indonesia (the seventh), and Brazil (the ninth). Initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative contribute to shifting the center of the economic world from the Euro-American Atlantic axis to Eurasia. The rise of

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the BRICS group, which includes Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, in the international relations arena appears to be evident, as several countries, including Argentina, Iran, and Algeria, have expressed interest in joining the group. Regional initiatives also gained ground recently. The enormous military superiority that once allowed the United States to claim for itself the role of "police of the world" does not exist anymore.

Still, the unipolar logic remains dominant in at least one domain: international scholarship (Shi-xu, 2014). Theoretical and political perspectives that originated in the United States and, secondarily, Western Europe have typically received universal recognition. Otherwise, the status given to the knowledge produced in other parts of the world is local, according to the best hypothesis (Sugiharto, 2021). For sure, many scholars have made the case for the necessity of de-Westernizing communication research (Curran, & Park, 2000; Waisbord, 2022; Waisbord, & Mellado, 2014). Nonetheless, the concrete impact of these claims is currently quite limited. Why does this happen? This paper aims to provide an answer to this question by addressing the following questions:

1) Where does the academic unipolar order originate from?

2) How does the unipolar order actually work? What institutions and practices support it?

3) What challenges does the academic unipolar order present for scholars working outside the West?

4) What is the concrete (political) impact of the academic unipolar order?

Where does the academic unipolar order originate from?

Let's begin from the start: What are the origins of the academic unipolar order? An easy way to answer it is by putting the blame on the global-scale colonization process led by Western European countries. Imperialism was strongly detrimental to most societies on Earth. From the perspective of our argument, one of its most important characteristics was to delegitimize the knowledge of societies existing outside the West, a process that Boaventura Souza Santos (2018) called Epystemicide. Still, Imperialism was not unipolar in any manner. The Partition of Africa by Western European countries, which began in the 1880s, was by no means motivated by a common project shared by these countries. On the contrary, it was primarily the result of their rivalry. They competed for African resources, such as land, minerals, and a very cheap workforce, in order to reinforce their own economic and political interests. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, social sciences were very diverse,

although exclusionary regarding most of the world. France, the United Kingdom, and Germany developed their own traditions of thought, that were very different from each other in their theoretical and methodological approaches.

The roots of the unipolar academic order are much more recent. Here, we will look at how this has affected communication studies in particular. In this field in particular, the origins of unipolarity precede by decades the rise of the 'new global order' organized around the United States. Recent literature has underlined the role that certain agents have performed in 'weaponizing' the social media as a means of disinformation, propaganda, and harassment of political adversaries. Communication studies have been a weaponized discipline since their inception in the 1940s. Not to mention that communication was born in America and has remained so for decades (Glander, 2000; Simpson, 1996).

The origins of communication studies relate to the lessons that U.S. officials learned from World War I, especially the importance of mass propaganda as a military resource. Communication studies attempted to discover ways to use emerging electronic mass communication means as social control resources (Simpson, 1996). In other words, as a means for propaganda – although U.S. scholars very rarely use this term for describing their own country; rather, they employ it for describing adversary countries. At that time, the main funding for communication research came from the military, intelligence services, the State Department, and private founding agencies such as the Rockefeller Foundation. These origins had a deep impact on the features that communication assumed as a discipline. It developed a more practical than theoretical bias, focused more on a psychological than a sociological approach to communication, relied mainly on empiricist/behaviorist methodologies.

From a political standpoint, communication studies became an extension of the interests of the political elite in the United States. The book *Four Theories of the Press*, once considered the classical work in comparative political communication, provides a powerful illustration about how this happened. It was written by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm and first published in 1956, at the height of the Cold War. The work proposes a four-term classification of the manner in which the media relates to politics around the world. Two of them refer to abstract principles: liberalism and authoritarianism. The other two refer to the two global superpowers existing at that time: social responsibility model (the United States) and the Soviet Communist model (the Soviet Union).

Four Theories of the Press became a best-seller and influenced academics around the world. Yet, the trajectory of the authors of the book and their institutional ties are still more important than the book itself. The case of Wilbur

Schramm is remarkable in this regard. In 1950, the Armed Forces sent him to Korea – during the war – to interview anticommunist refugees and analyze the United States' psychological operations in the war. His studies were later published in Public Opinion Quarterly and in a popular leaflet called *The Reds Take a City*. His work proved essential for legitimizing communication research knowledge that originated as psychological warfare techniques developed for the United States armed forces. During the following two decades, he helped to build an institutional network that established the academic pattern for the field. Different from other academic areas, the center of this system was not occupied by prestigious universities, but by a network organized around Michigan State University (Glander, 2000). This network gained enormous influence in the global arena. For instance, it has been hegemonic in the International Communication Association (ICA) and on editorial boards of the most influential communication journals (Demeter, 2020).

During the Cold War era, the United States attempted to promote their own model of the free press as being universal, but this effort did not work. In most parts of the world, the print media was closely associated with political parties, and broadcasting was in the hands of public or state-owned outlets. At that time, the U.S. model of media was more of an exception than the general rule. It was only in the 1990s that communication began to become a truly international discipline. This happened in the wake of the neoliberal globalization process led by the United States in association with international financing institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. In this context, U.S. theories and institutions finally acquired global status. The 1990s witnessed the rise of U.S. based global media, such as CNN and MTV, and fostered the rise of U.S. centered international scholarship.

How does the unipolar order actually work?

The global academic order that emerged in the last decades of the past century is based on three core principles: 1) academic ranking systems, 2) networking, and 3) funding.

Rankings are important pillars of the global neoliberal order. Their importance stems from the neoliberal notion that market competition should provide a normative model for all spheres of social life. The prime subject of the rankings is economic performance. Rankings measure freedom of the press, corruption, and the quality of democracy, among many other phenomena. They are essential pieces in the dynamics of the distribution of resources and prestige across the world. Typically, rankings are carried out by privately owned

companies or non-governmental organizations, and the criteria they follow are not transparent. Rankings are essentially black boxes. This puts a lot of power in the hands of the ranking agents.

Academic rankings categorize various subjects based on a variety of criteria. They measure the prestige and productivity of universities, departments, academic journals, and individual scholars. Val Burris (2004) once referred to the U.S. sociology faculty rankings as an academic caste system. The positions of the departments have remained remarkably stable across time and have little to do with academic productivity. Instead, he found that the main criterion for classification refers to where the professors of a given department are hiring from. The top five departments exchange professors with each other. The twenty following departments hire from the top five and exchange employees with each other, and so on. Fourcade, Ollion, and Algan (2015) found a similar logic working in the field of economy.

Academic journal rankings have a particularly big impact on global scholarship dynamics. They accomplish this by creating artificial scarcity in an environment characterized by an enormous supply of information. Let us explain this briefly. The rise of digital media in the 1990s was initially saluted as having the potential to democratize communications, and this applies also to scholarship. Once online, journals could be read by anyone with internet access. Yet, the academic journals' ranking logic opposes this democratizing potential as it selects a very limited number of journals as being worth publishing in.

Consider the case of communication studies. The most prestigious ranking of their journals in the world is Clarivate's Journal of Citation Reports (JCR). The index classifies the journals according to their impact factor. The manner in which Clarivate calculates this impactor factor is not transparent, but this is not the main problem. The real problem is that JCR covers only a very small proportion of communication journals existing in the world. By doing this, JCR renders invisible (or at least less visible) the huge majority of these journals, simply because they are not evaluated. The citations that count for measuring the impact factor belong only to 'prestigious journals', too. These journals are by no means representative of the diversity of world scholarship. Almost all are published in English and belong to a handful of commercial publishers that work on the basis of a paywall system.

It follows that impact factor rankings do not reflect qualitative differences existing between journals but, otherwise, create them. Prestige is in large measure a self-fulfilled prophecy working on a circular schema. Prestigious scholars want to publish in prestigious journals, and by publishing in them, they

make these journals prestigious. Even more important, prestigious journals make prestigious scholars. A well-known effect of this logic is the 'Matthew Effect'. In short, scholars tend to cite well-cited scholars. Impact factor ranking systems help to assure that scholars working in the United States and other Western societies will be well-cited scholars.

This brings us to the second principle, which is *networking*. The relations between prestigious institutions and scholars – as defined by the ranking system – create the center of the global academic system. This happens through different means. One example is international organizations. The presidency of the ICA has been for a long time in the hands of scholars affiliated with or with educational ties to Michigan State University. ICA is very U.S. centered, too, with respect to national affiliations. In a 2016 article, Wiedemann and Meyen (2016) found that 86 of the 112 distinguished ICA members were from the U.S. Germany comes in a distant second place, with four distinguished members.

The editorial boards of academic journals are another core institution in the logic of the network. Several works have described in detail the asymmetries existing between countries and institutions in their representation in JCR-evaluated journals in Communication. Almost 58% of the editorial board members worked in institutions in the United States. Roughly three-quarters of them are in the five anglophone countries (plus the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand). Approximately 90% live in the Western World. China, India, Eastern and Central Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean each respond, with one percent of the total. Still, the asymmetries are even more remarkable when we look at the universities' share of the editorial board membership. The University of Texas and the University of Wisconsin had 92 members each. Latin American and the Caribbean had 50, and China and India taken together had 42. Only five countries (besides the United States) have more members on the list than this: United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands. From the 20 universities with more editorial board members, only one is not located in the United States (Albuquerque; Oliveira; Santos Jr., & Albuquerque, 2020).

The practical result is that it concentrates enormous power in setting the scholarly agenda in the hands of a few institutions. Let me present a concrete example: The University of Texas has nearly twice as many editorial board members as all of Latin America and the Caribbean combined. The University of Texas also has a Center for Latin American Studies. Concretely, this means that scholars belonging to this university have disproportional power in setting the scholarly agenda about Latin America. In consequence, scholars from Latin

America may feel compelled to study at the University of Texas to have access to 'world class' knowledge about their own region.

To understand how this power works, we must consider the third element: *funding*. Western-centered global networks cannot work without financial resources. But who provides these resources? What are the motivations behind academic funding? The answers to these questions are too complex to be satisfactorily answered in this paper. Many different types of agents donate funds for academic research for many different reasons. Still, there is an aspect that should be highlighted here: research funding often goes hand in hand with interests in promoting certain agendas and worldviews. A very illustrative example refers to the rise of the behaviorist tradition in political science in the United States. This tradition did not exist until the 1950s, but within a decade it became hegemonic in the country. What happened during this interval? The Ford Foundation invested massive resources to ensure that scholars committed to this worldview were hired by the most prestigious U.S. universities (Seybold, 1980). Another example refers to the role played by the *National Endowment for Democracy* (NED) in promoting the U.S. political view. It was created during the time when Ronald Reagan was ahead of the U.S. presidency, in 1983. One of these initiatives NED promoted was the creation of the *Journal of Democracy*, a scholarly journal that is ranked by Clarivate (Christensen, 2017). In its manifesto, the *Journal of Democracy* presents its main purpose as being 'to unify what is becoming a worldwide democratic movement' (Diamond & Plattner, 1990: 3).

Taken together, these three core principles sustain a dynamic that contrasts a few academic centers with a vast periphery. This happens for different reasons and through variegated means. One is boosting the 'gravitational' power of the central institutions. As the rules of the game provide these institutions with more visibility, scholars from around the world feel tempted to move there to pursue an 'international career'. From the perspective of these scholars' native countries, this movement results in a 'brain drain', which reinforces even more of these inequalities. Another consequence is the so-called 'Mathew Effect': scholars who have more citations tend to be even more cited. Therefore, by defining what journals are 'world class' and controlling them through institution-based networks, the scholars from the countries in the center practically assure their hegemony vis-à-vis the rest of the world.

What challenges this order present for scholars working outside the West?
The third question that arises here is: What challenges for scholars working outside the West result from this academic unipolar order? Here,

we will mention only a few problems, referring to: 1) scholars' access to the international 'prestigious' literature in communication research; 2) scholars' opportunities to make their own perspectives visible in the international arena; 3) the international division of academic labor, which attributes them with minor roles in comparison to their Western colleagues; 4) the manner in which this situation pressures these scholars to move to Western institutions in order to obtain international visibility.

Access to the literature published in the 'prestigious' journals presents a first major problem for most scholars working from outside the West. This happens because most of these journals are published by commercial publishers, and readers must pay to have access to their articles, which is not cheap. A single article costs a few dozen dollars. To be sure, not all readers must pay for it. Rich universities usually have financial agreements with the major publishers, allowing their faculty and students to access this content for free. This results in a major distortion: scholars who have fewer financial resources are those who must pay for access to the 'prestigious' articles.

This system provides the publishers with the best of two worlds. On the one hand, it relies on the non-paid work of scholars. They work for free, both as authors and as reviewers of articles written by other scholars. They are supposed to do so as a part of their professional commitment to the common good. Working for free is a practice that takes its meaning from the idea that science is a vocation. On the other hand, from the perspective of the commercial publishers, it is strictly business. An excellent business, to be sure, as a handful of commercial publishers dominate almost entirely the market of the 'prestigious' scholarly publishing. The twisted nature of this model is illustrated by the fact that sometimes scholars who worked as article reviewers do not have access to them after their publication.

A second problem refers to the difficulty that scholars outside the West experience in publishing in the 'prestigious' journals. This is a well-documented problem. In 2005, Edmund Lauf (2005) demonstrated that the publishing in journals ranked in the Journal of Citation Reports was dominated by Western anglophone countries, and the United States in particular, as scholars based in the US had 66,2%, those based in the UK had 13,2%, Canada had 3,4%, Australia had 3,2%, and New Zealand had 0,6%. Taken together, these five countries contributed to 86,6% of the articles published in these journals. Interesting enough, Lauf, a German scholar himself, is not primarily worried about the misrepresentation of the societies located outside the West. All non-anglophone countries fall into the same category. In 2018, Marton Demeter

(2000) found that patterns remained considerably stable if we consider the Global North/Global South divide. In both cases, the Global North had 94% of the contribution in these journals. Still, there were changes inside the Global North group, as the United States lost space to the benefit of Western European and 'advanced' Asian countries.

This does not happen because the intellectual production is necessarily better than that from other parts of the world, but for institutional reasons. We have already described the asymmetries existing with respect to the editorial membership, both with respect to the representation of countries and universities. Apart from this, other data demonstrate an institutional bias towards the West: 1) all of the publishers represented in Clarivate's sample are from Western countries; 2) 96% of the editors in charge of these journals are from Western universities; and 3) 80% of the reviews in these journals were written by Western scholars (Demeter, 2020).

Additional factors hamper the access of scholars working outside the West. One of the most important among them is the use of English as a lingua franca (Suzina, 2021). This requirement is particularly challenging in very text-based disciplines such as communication (in contrast to mathematics, physics, or biology). Language is, after all, a cultural device. Thus, international communication scholarship approaches its subject from the anglophone cultural perspective. To make things worse, reviewers often require the authors of manuscripts to master 'native English'. Academic norms, which originated in the West – are taken for granted in the international scholar circuit – also provide a barrier for scholars from other parts of the world.

The same goes for the research methods. A recent example refers to the recent debate on open science, published in the *Journal of Communication*, following the publication of the article *Agenda for Open Science in Communication*, authored by Tobias Dienlin and his colleagues (2021). In this case, open science had to do with a policy of transparency regarding the research data. In the following issue of the same journal, non-Western scholars argued that this was Western-centric, for two main reasons. First, it ignored the non-Western tradition of open science, which has to do with access to science. Second, this conception raises the standards for an article being considered fit to publish and may become an additional resource for misrepresenting non-Western scholarship (Oliveira et al., 2021).

The last problem refers to relevance. Studies about countries located outside the West are much more likely to have their relevance questioned by reviewers

in international 'prestigious' journals. One anecdotal example: a colleague submitted a manuscript to a 'prestigious' journal, and it was rejected in the desk review phase under the argument that another article on Brazil had been published recently. Needless to say, this journal publishes articles on the United States in every single number.

Another structural challenge faced by scholars working outside the West refers to the unwritten norms governing international cooperation. Very often, these scholars face intense pressure in their own countries for 'internationalizing' the results of their research (as, contrary to what happened in the West, their international status is not taken for granted). Given the existence of structural barriers hampering their participation in international forums, the most viable alternative for these scholars is to attempt to become part of West-centered scholarly networks. This usually happens through participation in multinational comparative projects. Not all participants in these projects have comparable status, however. Western scholars are almost always in charge of developing the theoretical and methodological frameworks for these projects, while non-Western scholars are limited to providing empirical data about their home countries (Alatas, 2003).

An additional manner to acquire international visibility is available for non-Western scholars. They can move themselves to 'prestigious' universities located in the Western 'center' and develop an international career working for them. From a strictly individual perspective, this move may surely be satisfactory, but from a broad perspective, it only contributes to aggravating the uneven distribution of power and prestige in global scholarship. For the peripheral countries, the consequence of this is a 'brain drain', the loss of some of their brightest minds to the benefit of the center. As Alatas (2000) correctly puts it, the current model of academic mobility is one of the key traits of academic imperialism.

What is the concrete (political) impact of the academic unipolar order?

The asymmetries existing in global scholarship have very concrete political consequences. This occurs because the academic international structure concentrates in a few hands the power to define authoritatively what reality is. Here, we will focus on one example, which refers to the regime-type classification usually employed by comparative journalism and political communication studies. Numerous studies employ the same basic regime-type, Stage of Democracy Development (SDD), as the basis for their analysis. In short, this model divides the societies existing in the world into three categories:

1) established democracies; 2) transitional democracies, and 3) authoritarian regimes (Albuquerque, 2022).

This model is built on three major pillars: the Enlightenment, Colonialism, and the Modernization Project. The Enlightenment provides the basic intellectual framework for the model: the belief that societies evolve towards a more civilized state over time and that this evolution follows a single path. Accordingly, it would be possible to classify the existing societies as being comparatively more or less civilized. The Colonialism and Modernization projects provide historical context for the global impact of Enlightenment ideas. Colonialism was the darker side of the Enlightenment, as Mignolo (2011) put it, as it associated 'civilization' with the Christian Western nations, while at the same time labeling 'barbaric' all other societies existing in the world. In this model, the distinction between civilization and barbary was grounded essentially on race.

Otherwise, the modernization project emerges from the ruins of colonialism in the second half of the 20th century, led by the United States. Worried that the new independent countries could be attracted to the orbit of the Soviet Union. The Modernization Project proposed to these countries that they could also modernize if they followed the steps of the United States. In this model, the countries were classified according to their level of modernization (Baber, 2001). The exact same logic is reproduced in the SDD model. In both cases, modernizing is a never-ending process for countries located outside the West. Developing countries have been developing for decades. Something similar happens with the SDD model, as the 'transitional democracies' never evolve to the status of consolidated democracies.

It is important to say that the SDD model is not only a descriptive model. It is also prescriptive. The consolidated democracies (that is, the West) are supposed to lead the other societies to a better order, and this has very concrete consequences (Albuquerque, 2022). Numerous military operations led by the United States since the 1990s have been justified under the excuse of 'promoting democracy' abroad. Examples include the 'humanitarian bombings' in Serbia, and the labels 'Enduring Freedom' and 'Iraqi Freedom' given respectively to the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq (Barker, 2008). Additionally, this model has provided an ideological excuse for numerous initiatives aiming to promote 'regime change' in other countries, which rely mostly on soft power rather than military muscles (Robinson, 1996). A variegated set of institutions – the U.S. government, private foundations, social media platforms, and not less important, U.S. universities – have interfered in the internal politics of other countries under the alibi of fighting authoritarianism.

Conclusion

What does this mean? Recent literature in communication is full of calls for de-Westernizing international research. The unspoken premise behind these calls is that the under-representation of views from scholars located outside the West is a side effect of the late development of communication in their societies. This paper offers an alternative view in this respect: the exclusion of non-Western scholars from the international debate is not accidental. It is the logical consequence of a system designed to concentrate the power to define what reality is in the hands of a few. The ability to define what 'reality' is results in a tremendous political power. It establishes the basis of moral hierarchies and provides an excuse for certain countries to meddle in the internal affairs of others.

What can be done to fight this system? The first step is to recognize that it has an institutional basis. Therefore, it is necessary to develop alternative institutional infrastructure to allow alternative views to emerge in the international scenario. Concretely, this means: 1) reinforcing local universities as alternative places for building international scholarly perspectives; 2) reinforcing local journals as vehicles for distributing alternative views in the international scholarship; 3) reinforcing ties between non-Western scholars and institutions, as a means for building alternative academic circuits; 4) BRICS group can provide a basis for such an effort.

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ARTICLES

Reality and virtuality of the mass media space

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Abstract

The paper explores the concepts of media space, mass media space, information space, and virtual reality. In this paper, we consider different approaches to the concepts, describe the logic of the sequence of appearance of the phenomena of information, media and mass media space and reveal their common features and distinctive characteristics. Along with such new characteristics of the media space as digitalization of information, fragmentation of the media space, specialization of the audience, and hypertrophied socio-cultural significance, we distinguish virtualization of the mass media space as one of the dynamic characteristics. We consider virtualization as a means of representing the world in other dimensions and planes and as a means of orientation in the surrounding world. The final part of the paper is devoted to the consequences and capabilities of virtualization of mass media space and to the concept of virtual reality. The analyzed material of scientific developments allows us to conclude that virtual reality is a reality, ontologically grounded by a person's desire to create an alternative world, manifests itself here and now, mainly signally, unlike the virtual reality of art, radically changes the space-time continuum and has orientation much broader in terms of impact.

Keywords

Experts in the field of mass media research argue that modern society is not only permeated with media communications, but also significantly shaped by them, so it is quite natural that social reality acquires the quality of media reality. The result of representation of physical and social space through media is the

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mediatized 'sense of place', which is based on different criteria of evaluation and perception that determine various aspects of its manifestation: 'social' (when a person appreciates primarily social relations and connections set in the place given), 'instrumental' (when a place is evaluated in terms of job opportunities, entertainment, standard of living), 'nostalgic' (the image of a place is related with past experiences), 'theatrical' (a place is perceived as a stage on which the drama of live unfolds), 'environmental' (when esthetic experience and the sense of union with nature are important), etc. All of these understandings and shades of feelings that 'inhabitants' of precise places have in their everyday life may be strengthened and directed by media communications (Nim, 2011).

The semantic precursors of the term 'media space' were the phrases 'information space', 'information field', 'information environment'. In 1986, Appadurai proposed a theory of the structure of modern society in the form of a construct of 'imaginary worlds', a socially constructed community imagined by people who perceive themselves as part of it. Besides, he identified five levels of this imaginary, virtual space: ethno-space formed by global streams of people: tourists, labor migrants, refugees and displaces people; media space or media landscape formed by media and new media; techno-space formed by technologies available for the society at the moment; financial space made by cash flows; space of ideas consisting of state ideologies and usually opposing ideologies of social movements (Shcherbakova, 2016). According to Appadurai, media landscape is a kind of a 'superfluid substance', which permeats the society and is an integral part of the everyday life of the community. As a result, mass communication media turn to the decisive factor of the abstract lie of people in the modern world.

With the growing popularity of media studies, the terms 'media environment' and 'media sphere' appear, denoting a set of conditions in the context of which media culture functions, 'a set of information-communicative means, material and intellectual values developed by mankind in the process of cultural and historical evolution, contributing to the formation of public consciousness and socialization of an individual' (Kirillova, 2005). Media culture through the mediation of mass communications connects a person with the world around them and, according to Kirillova (2005), includes the culture of information transmission and the culture of its perception. At the same time, the above-mentioned definition of media culture covers in the institutional aspect the term of media space (Simons et al, 2021).

In Russian sociology, the term media space in its most general form is used to identify the media system or media picture of the environment, meaning a set

of media texts. Media space is also positioned as a special reality, which is part of the social space organizing social practices and ideas of agents of the system of production and mass information consumption.

Nim writes about the diversity of approaches to the study of media space, defining: 1) text-centric approach, in which the media space is considered as a set of all media texts, namely 'discursive' space; 2) structural approach, i.e. media space is a system of mass communication media, a social field; 3) territorial approach, when media space is characterized as a media market or information space of a region, city, country; 4) technological approach, in which media space through modern technologies acquires the status of 'virtual' reality; 5) ecological approach, i.e. media space is a habitat permeating all the social spheres (Nim, 2013).

According to the researcher, such a variety of approaches indicates quite fruitful attempts of conceptualization of media space, though there is no sociology of media space as a research program yet. Of course, the list of approaches to media space research is not exhaustive. Many terms widely used in journalism at first, then gradually move to academic publications. The term 'media space' has not become an exception. Though in English literature the term 'media space' started to be used in the 1980s in works by Stults and Harrison to identify 'digital environment in which groups of people can work together even if they are not in the same place and at the same time' (Shults, 1986). If the category 'information space' was widely used in last 10–15 years of the last century, the term 'media space' became widespread both in journalistic and scientific literature only at the beginning of the present one. Despite the wide use of the category 'media space', it meant all the space of information use and, in fact, it repeated the meaning of information space.

It is important to mention that in different speech contexts, the phrase 'information space' is currently used to identify various types of sets: texts (in the broad meaning), transmitted and stored information, data in any professional sphere or in the sphere of social activity, messages circulating in the society this or that way, etc.

At the same time, it would be incorrect to identify the media sphere with the information space when dealing with it. It seems quite significant, based on theoretical developments devoted to information space, to reveal the features and specific characteristics of mass media space, which in modern conditions is an independent phenomenon. Sidorskaya (2021) writes about it discussing the variants of media space: 'If the media space is perceived as a media system – both traditional and new, then it is worth considering this phenomenon as a

part, a segment of information space – based on what is collected, processed, produced, interpreted and disseminated in the media space by print and digital media'.

Monastyreva (2017), having reviewed the context use of the term 'media space', came to a number of conclusions that are considerable for studying of this phenomenon. First, the term 'media space' is interdisciplinary in nature, since on the one hand, the contemporary media space is studied by very different specialists – journalists, educators, sociologists, political and cultural scientists, lawyers, psychologists, but on the other hand – the media space itself serves as a platform for functional expression of various social spheres. Second, in many cases, the term 'media space' is used without realizing and even scientific representation of the essence of the reflected phenomenon. Third, this is synonymous use of other categories or unconscious substitution of some by others that differ both 'vertically' and 'horizontally': 'information space', 'media space', 'media environment' that embrace each other or function as segments of the media space – 'educational media space', 'regional media space' and others.

In our opinion, it is the most promising and reasonable to approach to study the media space comparing it with other types of 'spaces'. This can be done by comparing the information, media and mass media spaces. In fact, the media space is one of the most important components of the information space. Omelin (2003) suggests quite a simple scheme demonstrating the state of media space in the information space. The author considers the correlation of a particular – media space with information space as the whole in the frames of the same geographical boundaries, but he also includes the space of mass communication into the scheme. That is, the information space appears to be the widest phenomenon that includes the space of mass communication and an even smaller media space.

Moreover, he understands the media space as 'a set of subjects of the media sphere (individuals and communities), texts transmitted by them (this process is considered as communicative – purposeful dissemination of information that serves a reason to an action) and the collective addressee perceiving these texts – mass audience both targeted and the widest' (Omelin, 2003: 35-36).

The addressee of a message within the information space can be not only the mass audience, but also a group and an individual. In the context of the media space, the object of dissemination of information is only the mass audience, moreover, the process of transmission information itself turns to be indirect, technical 'mediators' are needed between a sender and an addressee. Thus, the space of mass communication is not equal to the information space in general.

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Discrepancy in understanding of categories 'media', 'mass media' and their interpretation provides a formal key to the main understanding of the media and mass media space. 'One of the definitions of the term "media" ("mass media", (mass) communication media) tells that these are technical means of creation recording, copying, circulation, storage, dissemination, perception of information and its exchange between the subject (author of a media text) and the object (mass audience)' (Kozhevnikov, 2010: 32). As we can see, the term of media is used similarly to both media and mass media. Perhaps, for everyday use, differences in the terms of media and mass media are not considerable and they can easily substitute each other. However, for the academic use, these categories have differences, and sometimes crucial, if it refers to characteristics of features of the phenomena and processes in which these phenomena are involved.

Svitich (2013) mentions that 'the Russian term 'SMI' usually correlates with English mass media or media, but in this form it acquires a broad interpretation. Mass media then include not only periodicals, TV, radio, Internet, but also cinema, sound recording production, pocket editions, photography, and even cable nets.' The researcher highlights: 'Mass media imply means and technologies that are intended for communication with the mass audience' (Svitich, 2013: 32).

Thus, we can tentatively conclude: 1) the concept of 'SMI' is similar to mass media, that is why, when substituting this Russian term, one should use the term 'mass media', not 'media'; 2) media, unlike mass media, embrace a wider range of phenomena and it is naturally that mass media space has its own features, though it may seem as part of media space.

The space of mass communication is not limited by media space. For example, though data sets stored in public libraries are included into the space of mass communication, they are not part of the media space.

Researchers argue that media so far cannot be understood only as a sphere of journalistic activity. Convergence layer going far beyond journalism is 'the media space in which all the types of social communications are carried out and information and communicational systems, means, ways of communications, contents are converged (or not converged)' (Convergence in Communications and Beyond, 2000).

According to Leontiev (2010), media space can be understood in a narrow sense as a variety of connections and interactions, as well as gaps and opposition between agents of the field of journalism, and in broad sense — as a form of existence of symbols, symbolic capital and the sphere of its circulation, change, exchange. At the same time, the author insistently warns about wrongfulness of identifying the fields of journalism and media space.

Ponomarev (2008) deduces understanding of the information space, which makes up the set of all messages transmitted by social subjects using technologies and mass communication media, and among them are mass media messages that make up the media space as a field of information space. Thus, one can notice that belonging of media and mass media spaces to the informational one does not mean the identity of these spaces as both institutionally and functionally.

All the diverse assessments and judgements are caused by the fact that the concept of media space has many different meanings. This is where the reasoning of many scientists dealing with this issue begins. For some it is not a closed system of relations between producers and consumers of mass information, for others it is a social system, all elements of which are interconnected and subordinate to the general laws of development of the whole, for the third it is an unordered system of spiritual and value information offering a spiritual and cognitive environment free from dictate, convenient and essential for social decision of individuals, for the forth it is a virtual reality of management manipulating social consciousness, etc.

Noting the difficulty of finding a definition of media space, Dzyaloshinsky (2013: 69) writes: 'Nowadays, the concept 'media space' is apparently used at the same time in the Newtonian sense as a conditional territory on which information and its carriers are placed and where producers and consumers of mass information occasionally come to; and in the Leibniz sense — as a system of relations between certain subjects regarding production, dissemination, processing, and consumption of mass information'. The scientist considers essential to unite these approaches and identify media space as a virtual informational and communicational universe with conditional boundaries, created by participants of media processes, whose relations determine the metrics of the media space.

Yudina (2008: 151) considers the phenomenon of media space in the context of sociological tradition of social space study, that is why it is interpreted as part of social space that represents itself. 'Media space can be positioned as a special reality, which is a part of social space and which organizes social practices and representations included into the system of mass information production and consumption'.

Media system has a special quality, which arises as a result of information production reflecting events and phenomena of the world around, and its consumption. The system re-produces a social human, deepens and develops the relations between an individual and the society, integrates them into the social space. The quality of new system re-produced by the media space is a socialized personality integrated into the social space (Yudina, 2005).

Definition of the mass media space as part of informational space is sufficient only to begin discussion about its essence and substantial characteristics, especially as a particular does not always have all the characteristics of the whole, not talking about the opportunities of multifaceted approach.

Media space can have both physical and 'virtual' geography. Geo-political approach can be effectively used only when considering correlations between information and mass media spaces as between the whole and a particular. It is worth highlighting that media space is not a simple reflection of reality, it is a socially constructed understanding of the world.

It is considered that the most developed is the understanding of media space as a special symbolic sphere of culture. For instance, Appadurai (1997) defines media space as culturally-symbolic space-stream, which is formed with streams of images in the global cultural stream. At the same time, the media space is characterized as fluid, unstable space that serves as the 'building blocks of imaginary worlds' in which people interact.

Kulibaba (2007) considers the media space as a space that has an adapting, socializing and socially integrating function in culture. The scientist especially highlights its role as a channel of spiritual values at the global community level. Here the task of an individual, social groups and the state in general seems important – 'search for drivers in the media space for dissemination of integrating terminal spiritual values'.

While the cultural approach in a meaningful way allows discovering different images, concepts, texts in the information space, the media space includes knowledge, convictions, beliefs and value ideas.

Couldry and MacCarthy (2004) proceed from a logical conclusion: the repletion by digital media in all spheres of life leads to the fact that media and space cannot exist without each other, they are dialectically interconnected and condition each other. The media space itself, on the one hand, is material, because it represents the geographical space of specific structures of power and economy, filled with means of communication. But on the other hand, it is still 'virtuality' as opposed to reality. The dialectic of relationship between space and media in the media space, according to researchers, is such that media create connections between different spaces and times. At the same time, media in space draw a line of separation, generating alienation.

Falkheimer and Jansson (2006) substantiate the need to develop the geography of media communications – a discipline that develops a new theory of media based on the categories of mobility, convergence and interactivity, which require special study.

Mobility is manifested in the mobility of people and media technologies. Technological convergence is manifested in the development of multimedia technologies that allow combining several formats of information presentation (graphics, sound, video, animation) in one means of communication. Cultural – manifests itself in the blurring of differences between print and audiovisual media, mass and high culture, information and entertainment, education and propaganda, between 'texts' and 'goods'. The interactivity of new media not only makes it possible to interact at a distance, it can also manifest itself in the mutual increased 'sensitivity' of producers of goods and their consumers. The production of 'goods-marks' is becoming more and more personalized, aimed at constructing the individual identity of the consumer (Falkheimer, & Jansson, 2006: 9–22).

Adams (2009) defines the following areas of spatial study of communication: study of the geographical location of communication networks, their technical infrastructure and the geometry of the 'stream space' created by transmitting digital or other signals; the analysis of unique communication spaces supported by media; study of the mechanisms by which specific places get their meaning through media; study of the possibility of using various types of media communications in relation to the place and audience. Moreover, the concept of media by Adams is interpreted broadly, it includes not only the media itself (both traditional and new), blogs, social networks, websites and portals, but also all technical means of production, transmission and perception of information.

Versatile approaches to the study of the media space allow us to identify its most significant features, peculiarities and on this basis to develop the most effective ways of using the media space for the functioning of society. Thus, the culturological approach analyzes styles, genres, forms of representation of 'information units', communicative intentions and technologies of their implementation (Orlova, 2008).

Within the framework of sociology (and, in particular, sociology of culture, sociology of mass communication, sociology of public relations), socio-structural aspects of the media space, institutional forms of the mass media, typology of communicators and recipients, social functions of the mass media can be studied.

When studying the mass media space, we use a structural and functional approach, which allows us to detect a dual nature in it, because it has geographical characteristics that are often mistaken for structural and functional (Baychik, 2020). As Taisheva (2010) notes, 'it is possible to overcome 'spatial fetishism' in favor of the characteristics of the subjectivity of the mass media space through

its correlation with normative models based on the functions of mass media. In relation to the mass media space, it is adequate to use as a reference system several normative models representing various functional alternatives: the mass media are simultaneously agents of civil society, the market sphere and national development'.

The most important issue of media space study is the identification of its structure and the characteristics of the main elements. According to Yudina (2008), the modern media space is a system organized according to the network principle. The elements of this space differ in the degree of influence and mass, but they are all interconnected, and changes in one element of the system affect all the others. The researcher proposes to identify in the structure of the media space the main functional systems located in the media space, the subjects of the media space and the relations between the subjects about the functional systems and therefore identifies the following elements in it: mass media, which constitute the material, physical basis of the production and transmission of mass information; social relations of media space agents associated with the production and consumption of mass media; the information symbolic product in the form of which mass information is distributed.

Dzyaloshinsky (2013) proceeds from the fact that 'the basis of the media space is the means of production and distribution of mass information, as well as mass information itself. The subjects producing and consuming mass information, as well as regulating these processes, interact with the media space, but cannot be considered its elements. However, the actions themselves – the production of meanings, regulation, distribution, consumption – are important structural elements of the media space'.

Nim (2013), generalizing and critically considering the main directions of media space analysis in Western media studies, suggests the possibility of distinguishing three dimensions of media space:

1. Mediated space is a physical and/or social space represented through media. The result of 'mapping' of reality are media images and media texts. Mass media are not neutral in portraying reality, but bring certain meanings and essences to the places and events described, encouraging consumers of information to perceive them in a special way. These spaces and places are media representations that reflect and form the ideas and feelings of communication participants in relation to different spaces and places, real and imaginary.

2. A mediatized space is any type of social space (politics, economy, recreation, etc.) involving the use of media and/or experiencing their influence. The distributed media technologies b change the nature and configuration of the

space. The connection and mutual influence of the first and second dimensions of spaces lies in the fact that any mediatized space tends to become mediated, i.e. displayed, but not every mediated space is mediatized.

3. Media space is the material space of mass media networks and streams. The media space is a system of not only mass, but also interpersonal communications carried out with the help of technical means of communication.

Thus, the mediated space correlates with the content, the mediatized space correlates with the sphere of its distribution and consumption, the media space corresponds to the channels of production and transmission of information, i.e. the media themselves and the system of their interrelations. These interpretations of the concept of media space 'do not exclude, but rather, on the contrary, necessarily presuppose each other; they reflect different levels and directions of spatial sociological analysis of media communications'.

Noting the broad and versatile interpretation of the media space, Monastyreva (2017) highlights common points in the views of scientists on its essence: the core of the media space is the mass communication media, in particular the media; the media space, and therefore the mass media, is an active actor in the formation of other types of spaces (social, cultural, educational, etc.).

The study of the organization of the media space forces scientists to turn to its architecture. 'The modern media space is a system organized according to the network principle. This means that there is no vertical hierarchically built management structure and horizontal connections between individual elements prevail. This increases its adaptability, makes it possible to flexibly respond to market demands. System nodes, network organizational units are separate means of mass communication' (Yudina, 2008). The nodes of the system are interdependent, so changes in individual mass media affect the entire media space.

Modern societies create conditions, on the one hand, for the identity of the information and mass media space, and on the other, for their differences. Moreover, both similarity and difference are the result of the same means, factors and circumstances. Thus, technical equipment leads to repletion of the information space, as for the mass media space, in addition to repletion, new technical means allow expanding the circle of the journalistic community, the authors of texts and meanings are those who previously could only claim to be consumers of information.

Yudina believes that since 'the media space is a social system, all its structural elements: TV space, radio space, print space, Internet, etc., are interconnected and obey the general laws of the development of the whole.

In the political media space, a model of convergence of technical devices and professionalism is being implemented on the basis of convergent content creation formats and prerequisites for interaction and interpenetration are being formed already at the level of components of the media system. In a broad sense, convergence can be understood not only as the interaction of phenomena, but also as the interpenetration of technologies, the blurring of boundaries between them, merging. Media convergence is also the merging of a person with modern communication equipment and information technology.

Addressing this topic, Sharkov (2017) considers it a very important task to conceptualize the term 'media space' and the convergence of its elements in virtual space, as well as a clear designation of their role and place in communication studies and, in particular, in political communication.

Since the communicative platform of political activity is increasingly being transferred from traditional media to new media, we can talk about the convergence of heterogeneous communicative practices both as an objective process, and as a distinctive property of the information society, and as a property organically inherent to the system of mass communications.

As a result, the media space is expanding due to the use of non-journalistic media and technologies, in particular: PR, advertising, marketing; merging of communication practices, primarily journalism and PR; coordination of information policies of independent market players, in particular: individual media (as enterprises) and manufacturers of other kinds of products – corporations, industrial enterprises, institutions of science and education, etc.

In the media space, there is a convergence of different media from the standpoint of performing a common task simultaneously at several levels: when collecting and processing information, when using convergent formats for producing content, when interpenetrating competencies inherent to different types of journalistic activity.

Thus, the analyzed material of scientific developments allows us to assert that, despite the identical use both in journalistic texts and in scientific works of the terms 'media space' and 'mass media space', in strictly scientific terms, these categories, as well as the phenomena behind them, have differences, obscuring or deliberately ignoring which leads to significant errors.

The initial position of the discrepancy is the sources that generate them – the media, behind which are all the means of communication in society, and the mass media – exclusively the mass media. At the same time, the reservation should be taken into account that modern technical capabilities, thanks to the replacement of one-way communication with two-way communication, make

it possible to turn mass media into mass communication media. According to Yanglyaeva (2018), 'the direct creators of space and reality are the mass media. It is they who, often invisible to an ordinary person, to a layman, put together a puzzle, which is called built environment, i.e. 'artificially created environment' (environment, space). Today, the mass media, with all the abundance of technical and technological means in their arsenal, can easily transform space and time'.

Therefore, using the best practices in the field of research of spatial organization of information, we believe it is possible not only to describe the logic of the sequence of appearance of the phenomena of information, media and mass media space, but also to identify their common features and distinctive characteristics.

The category 'information space' should be attributed to the philosophical understanding of the fullness of the material world with information as a property of substance and it is advisable to interpret the phenomenon in a broad sense. Oral, visual information transmitted directly from individual to individual is the first stage of the information space in the social environment.

In relation to this broad meaning, in a narrow sense, the information space appears when using means of transmitting social information, starting with signs, sounds and ending with modern media means. In this sense, the information space is considered as a sphere of relations between people and communities about information. Therefore, the concept of information is used here in a functional sense, implying an alienated information product circulating in society.

The end of the XX – beginning of the XXI century was characterized by the repletion of society with the means of information and communication, creating a new qualitative state of the information space – the media space. Thus, the media space is a space in which information circulates based on the use of technical means of transmission. The information of this space is intended both for a specialized audience with the appropriate content, and for the mass. That is, the media space is created by all means working with information. Communication (transmission of information) in society takes place on the basis of all available means.

Mass media space is a space that is filled with information of a mass nature. The sources of information in it are the mass media, consumers are the mass audience. The mass media space is a subsystem of the media and information spaces in which mass information circulates. In the literature, the term 'media space' is often used. However, as we have shown above, the definition of 'mass

media' more accurately conveys the specifics of this phenomenon, which is important in the scientific study of it.

Due to the properties of information, the mass media space has the property of universality, since various areas of public activity find in it a means of realization of their intentions. However, despite the universality of its nature, the mass media space carries in its technological characteristics a national-specific coloring, expressed in the ways of creating, processing, distributing and storing information. Under the influence of the Internet on the traditional mass media, the media space acquires new characteristics.

Firstly, the fact that digital media have become the main suppliers of information allows us to conclude that the new media space, or more precisely, the mass media space, is based on digital technologies (digitalization of information).

Secondly, the fragmentation of the media space with their convergence are two sides of the process of development of modern mass communication media, enhanced by information technologies. The fragmentation of the information space resulted in the allocation of media and mass media spaces in it.

Thirdly, the quantitative increase in the mass media leads to an increase in the consumer's choice of information in the media space. In turn, the result of the diversification of the mass media space is the specialization of the audience, its orientation to specialized media.

Fourthly, being a catalyst for the process of globalization, the mass media space itself has been subjected to its ambiguous impact. 'Globalization trends initiate the processes of revaluation and rethinking of such basic concepts as information, information flow, information field, information resource, information potential. Their hypertrophied socio-cultural significance in comparison with the already familiar technical and technological nature provokes conflicts among the subjects of info-communication interaction, involving representatives of the scientific community in their discussion'.

Proceeding from the fact that the mass media space is a part of the social (informational, media) space, which is covered by one or another mass media capable of creating virtuality, then as the social environment is covered by visual mass media, it is increasingly virtualized. Virtualization is one of the dynamic characteristics of the mass media space as a means of representing the world in other dimensions and planes, but, on the other hand, it is a means of orientation in the surrounding world. The mass consciousness perceives the virtual space created by the media as an analogue of the real space, although in the course of mediatization there is a distortion of reality. However, the mass consciousness, reacting to the informational reality, transfers its reaction to the genuine reality.

Klikushina (2006) notes that the information space acquires for a person the character of a second, subjective reality. Is it possible to agree that 'the part of it that contains information inadequately reflecting the surrounding world, and those of its characteristics and processes that make it difficult or hinder the adequacy of a person's perception and understanding of the environment and themselves, can be designated as "virtual reality"'? It is hardly worth considering such phenomena and categories as the information space and virtual reality as of the same order. If information correlates with virtuality, then space and reality are much less connected, although they touch, because space can have both real and virtual expression.

Virtuality as a subject of study is interdisciplinary in nature. This is quite natural, because the concept of virtuality arises in various social spheres. Unlike elementary particles, which were characteristic of the studies of classical physics, quantum physics began to study virtual particles. In technology, specialists began to use a special type of modeling, which required avoiding the limitations of real space and the possibilities of creating illusions encountered in real practice. Virtual reality is also an environment for obtaining solutions, the implementation of which is faster and cheaper than similar solutions in the physical world. The virtual space has received particularly wide distribution and recognition with the professional and household computerization of society. It was for the designation of special computers that give the user an interactive stereoscopic image that the use of the term 'virtual reality' was proposed.

Undoubtedly, the immersion system of virtual reality provides universal tools for the embodiment of human fantasy. Exactly the tools. But the direction of fantasies, the purpose of their implementation in politics remain outside the brackets of scientific research. In our opinion, it is possible to identify this by referring to the segment of virtual reality that is created with or on the basis of mass media. In addition, it is necessary to distinguish between computer virtual reality and virtual reality created by the mass media. It is not without reason that scientists note that 'a person who cannot express themselves in real life finds refuge in virtual communication, and one who cannot realize themselves in real society plunges into social networks. This opinion leads to a widespread negative attitude towards virtual communication, especially social networks, as a refuge for those who could not find themselves in 'real' life. As to something that moves away from real life, replacing the solution of real problems with a simulation of communication and success' (Volobuev, & Kuzina, 2021).

Turning to the study of the nature of information and its essence, scientists take the concept of being as the starting point of reasoning, understood as

the totality of everything that exists and fixed by the concept of 'reality'. The Philosophical Dictionary (2001: 486) gives the following definition: 'Reality is the existence of things in its comparison with non-existence, as well as with other (possible, probable, etc.) forms of being'.

The material-informational paradigm of reality proceeds from the fact that the real world is formed by three fundamental components: substance, energy and information, which are self-sufficient and represent various types of manifestations of objective reality that exists independently of consciousness or is the result of the activity of consciousness, but exists both inside and outside it. At the same time, information was considered by them as a universal property of substance, its attribute. Therefore, this concept is called the attributive concept of the nature of information.

Scientists have identified the connection of the phenomenon of information with the structure of reality, and on this basis certain generalizing conclusions have been made. First, the structure of reality has the property of dualism, because it simultaneously includes physical and ideal reality. Both of these components objectively exist and interact with each other, having the property of mutual reflection. The ability of physical and ideal reality to reflect each other is their fundamental property, which creates the possibility of manifestation of various aspects of the phenomenon of information. Second, physical reality consists of all physical objects existing in the world, both material and immaterial (for example, electromagnetic, gravitational and other fields), as well as all processes occurring with these objects, their movements and internal changes. Third, the ideal reality includes all non-material objects, systems, processes and phenomena of reality and, in turn, has a certain structure. The information itself is not a physical object, but it belongs to the world of ideal reality. Although for its manifestation information needs objects (or processes) of physical reality, which serve as its carriers. Physical and ideal realities in the world around us are closely interrelated and can have a very significant impact on each other (Kolin, 2007, 2010).

When studying the issues of information in the structure of ideal reality, Kolin distinguishes three of its varieties, which are ontologically different from each other and have the specifics of the manifestation of the phenomenon of information in them. The ideal reality of the first kind arises as a result of the interaction of objects (or processes) of physical reality, manifests itself as a reflection of the properties of some objects (or processes) in the structure of other objects (or processes), exists objectively and independently of consciousness and is not a product of consciousness activity. Subjective ideal

reality of the second kind arises in the consciousness of an individual in direct interaction with physical reality as its reflection or under the influence of ideal reality of the first kind. Objective ideal reality of the third kind is a product of human consciousness activity, but existing outside of it. The intangible sphere of culture, in particular, belongs to this kind.

The proposed generic classification of reality perfectly fits the category of virtual reality, which should be attributed to the ideal reality, although there are some difficulties in determining its belonging to a specific kind. The proposed generic classification of reality perfectly fits the category of virtual reality, which should be attributed to the ideal reality, although there are some difficulties in determining its belonging to a specific kind.

Largely due to the new media, the mass media space has the characteristic of virtuality. The reality directly perceived by a person is primary, and the information that they perceive indirectly, through the means of communication, mass media, is secondary. Though this information reflects reality, a person does not perceive it directly. This is a reality that has gone through the process of mediatization.

There is an opinion that the term 'virtual reality' is used when one wants to emphasize the consideration that the information circulating in the information space does not always reproduce genuine reality (Dazyuk, 1988). From our point of view, this opinion correctly characterizes the process of mediatization, when a full and reliable reflection of reality in virtuality is not achieved.

Both virtual reality (the reality that the media reproduce) and virtual virtuality (unreal, but artificially created virtuality: models, computer games) are the product of media and the content of the media space. 'Every mediated space is a social construct and a cultural phenomenon, regardless of its ontological status. This space is a representation, a media image of places, territories and worlds that can have both a physical and a social nature (and, apparently, mostly heterogeneous), both real and imaginary. Such a space becomes a text that requires a discourse-analysis as a tool for its empirical study, and/or an image – in this case, a visual analysis of media images is necessary' (Nim, 2011).

Virtual reality of the media space appears and manifests itself as a result of the combined impact of a number of factors. One of them is the intersection and interweaving of the knowledge space and the information space.

The fact is that information tools are used to solve various social problems, because it is information that brings new knowledge. But the knowledge space has an inertial character, which makes it difficult to make changes. The dynamic nature of the information space not only contributes, but is also fundamentally

aimed at making changes. Therefore, the change, addition or denial of outdated knowledge occurs through the introduction of information.

Virtual reality of space appears as a consequence of the functioning of mass media. The vast majority of people currently receive most of the information indirectly, through the media or mass media. Events, facts reflected in the information space, and especially their interpretation cannot be adequate to reality due to the impact to which primary information is exposed during mediatization (Labush, & Puyu, 2019).

A personality is drawn into the virtual space due to its very properties. So, in reality, a person observes events from the outside, and with the help of technology, they move to the center of events, and their psyche functions in the mode of impulsive reaction, a person virtually self-presents themselves. Virtual self-presentation can be the realization of what is unattainable in real circumstances. In virtual communication, it becomes possible to express aggressive views, intentions, suppressed aspirations, taboo in reality, satisfaction of forbidden motives, desire for control, power over other people.

'However, in addition to dissatisfaction with real identity, virtual self-presentation can be created for a number of other reasons. The formation of a network identity that differs from the real one can be explained by the fact that people do not have the opportunity to express all sides of their multifaceted "I" in real communication, while network communication provides them with such an opportunity' (Sharkov, 2016: 102). That is, the identity is not replaced, but supplemented.

Virtual space as an illusory space is created through the interaction of individual consciousness and elements (matrices) of the collective unconscious. The virtual space in which political communications are carried out is a political segment that exists as a local socio-cultural space. And the virtual space, no matter how unreal it may seem, is still formed by referring to the original state of consciousness – it is not a physical space, it is a representation of the real, even if the representation itself distorts reality.

Virtual space can replicate the trends of the real world, but it does not always adequately replace it. Social interaction is affected by virtual communication, which has the following features:
- the development of mediated forms of human communication that allow ambiguous identification of communication subjects;
- strengthening the generative nature of communication (self-reproducibility);
- expanding the range of communication on the scale of 'locality of the act – publicity of the act';

- expanding the range of communication on the scale of 'particularity of consciousness – globality of consciousness';
- expanding of the cultural background of communication;
- weakening of the role of tradition in communication;
- strengthening self-referential communication;
- the growing marginalization of consciousness;
- reducing the authority of objective knowledge;
- increasing the authority of conventional knowledge;
- the transition from dialogue to polylogue in finding out the truth;
- blurring the boundaries of thesauri and pluralism of conceptual spaces;
- increasing the discursiveness of knowledge;
- expansion of sources and methods of obtaining and producing information;
- expanding opportunities for socialization and professionalization;
- changing the role of education in society;
- expanding hedonistic opportunities (Kapterev, 2002).

Not all of these features are affected only by the informatization and digitalization of society, but in general they create an objective and full-fledged characteristic of the communication features of the virtual space.

Although the concept of virtual reality is very common, there is no single understanding of it. Two most considerable points of view can be identified. One of them is 'critical', according to which virtual reality is recognized as significantly different from what is usually understood by reality, and then a legitimate question arises about the objective difference between the two realities, as well as about the criteria for the validity of virtual reality objects.

According to the second point of view, virtual reality is not only considered along with objective reality, but is also identified with it.

There is an attempt to justify virtual reality as autonomous and completely independent from objective reality, as evidenced by the fact that virtual reality objects may not have corresponding analogues in the objective world.

In general, virtual reality is considered as an artificial reality, as a reality directly related to computer technology and software. For the user – the subject of virtual reality – it seems to be as real as the world around them.

The mass media create patterns of behavioral, linguistic, and mental personal self-organization. 'These schemes, pictures of sociocultural everyday life are also realities, by coincidence of human existence in the world, no less important for them than the state of the material or natural environment. Media communication transcends the spatial and temporal connectedness of the direct

experience of individuals, and with their uncritical perception, the categories of the apparent can replace the categories of real being. But this secondary experience in the media world is pushed into the existential center and becomes the so-called communicative experience, which is a more relevant equivalent of objective reality. Constructs of common sense and situativeness act as a principle of socialization of the masses. New consensual forms of collective interaction are emerging, based on the transformation of behavioral stereotypes in the process of information interaction of individuals' (Mansurova, 2010).

Virtuality, like all other forms of information origin, has a spatial organization. The features of the virtual space include: intensity, interactivity, immersiveness, illustrativeness, intuitiveness. The intensity of space is related to the fact that in virtual reality the user should actively interact with the environment – receive information and react to its changes. Interactivity is understood as the possibility of dialogue with virtual reality objects, the ability to influence the situation. Immersiveness is determined by the degree of immersion of the subject in the virtual world, which can be verified by a kind of 'dodge test' proposed by Kruger. The authenticity of the virtual world is proved by the instinctive desire of a person to dodge a stone flying at their head, despite the awareness of the unreality of this object. The illustrativeness of virtual reality is manifested in the fact that the information presented to the user is in the most visual and emotional form, facilitating its perception, which ideally occurs not on an intellectual, but on a sensory-emotional level.

Nosov (1997) adds generality, relevance and autonomy to the noted characteristics. Origin is understood as the ability of virtuality to create a virtual reality of the next level, becoming primary for it. Moreover, such a process can continue indefinitely. Such a sign as relevance is presented in science as the existence of virtuality in the present reality, i.e. between the past and the future, generated by the activity of reality. The relevance of virtuality for a person presupposes involvement in an event when a person directly manifests themselves as acting or is in the illusion of action. Autonomy characterizes the ability of virtual reality to 'have' its own time, space and laws of existence, it leads to the acquisition of an alternative world that replaces reality.

Focusing on the characteristics of virtual reality proposed by foreign researchers Burdea and Coiffet (2003), Antonova (2008: 122) notes: 'If we agree with the definition of virtual reality as ideal, 'immersive' and interactive, then it will appear as a complex system with many parameters, including a huge variety of diverse objects. In this regard, a very important question arises about the local consistency of this system, which, as it turned out, cannot be

solved without a clear separation of the two levels of this system: the subject and the meta-level. The necessity of this distinction is connected with the issues of studying the mechanism of functioning of virtual reality objects. The fact is that the information we receive about a virtual object at the 'subject level' is sensorially incoherent, that is, contradictory. Sensory experience in virtual reality is very often contradictory and paradoxical, but the object of virtual reality, which consists of this kind of information, must be uncontroversial'.

Virtual space and its corresponding virtual reality are only one part, a segment of the media picture of the world formed by various mass media. The media picture of the world reflects the processes of constant change in political, economic, social and cultural reality, which is becoming more complex, information-rich and difficult to perceive and describe. But at the same time, we have to take into account that the media, thanks to their technical and technological properties, are used in politics to implement strategies aimed at changing the behavior of individuals, achieving certain political goals. 'A media space filled with political content turns into a political media space formed mainly by political actors interested in influencing their target segment, for example, the electoral audience. The most effective political influence on people is exerted by the visualized media space, i.e. the social environment in which they are under the influence of visual means that carry a political burden' (Sharkov, 2016: 97).

As a result, the audience is offered not a real picture of the world, but a certain construct. The constructed media reality is a simplified interpretation of what happened with a certain degree of approximativeness and conditionality, corresponding, in general, to objective reality.

Media reality tends to replace social reality. Individuals are subject to constant massive media pressure, due to which there is a gradual replacement of direct live communication with a broadcast image of reality. The consumers of media messages are moving from social reality to media reality, and they are no longer able to distinguish truth from fiction, which is directly possible in real life. Noting the interrelationships and dependencies of culture and values, values and virtuality, scholars write: 'Culture as a set of accepted values and norms has been largely captured by electronic hypertext, which combines, articulates and expresses meanings in the form of an audiovisual mosaic capable of expansion or compression, generalization or specification depending on the audience. The digital environment is no longer reduced to sending messages. The message is the decoding of the environment, because the media system is so flexible that it is adapted to send any message to any audience. Accordingly,

the message structures the environment. We assume that we are talking about a new culture, a culture of real virtuality, since our reality is largely made up of daily experiences gained within the virtual world' (Castells, & Kiseleva, 2000).

The mass media space created by the media turns into a totality that forms ideas, priorities, and the format of everyday and consumer behavior. The only way to oppose media reality is to get out of it, which is impossible in the digital age, also given new challenges brought by the digital environment (Vartanova, & Gladkova, 2022).

Virtual communication, along with the destruction of spatial barriers to dissemination of information, has also removed obstacles to the dissemination of opposing and antagonistic values, but not touching, and therefore not directly conflicting value systems. 'Utilitarianism and egalitarianism, created to unify a person under the consumer's template, rhizomatically grow on the basis of virtualization of information flows. Taking into account the global trend of unification in relation to the system of values within the whole of humanity, there is a real problem of preservation by local cultures of traditional values for them' (Volobuev, & Kuzina, 2021).

In the process of virtualization, not only value conflicts appear, but also contradictions in the assessments of the activities of people who generate these conflicts. 'Among the phenomena characteristic of modern mass media, the tendency to virtualize a fact or event should be particularly noted. Hoax, presented in the form of mockumentary, pastiche, fake or various types of infotainment, increasingly appears on the pages of the press, on television and on the Internet. At the same time, the line between a joke and misinformation is becoming increasingly blurred' (Poznin, 2014; Mustapha et al, 2022).

Another consequence of virtualization capabilities is a decrease in the 'pain threshold of public opinion'. Based on the ability of modern mass media to virtualize objective reality, to turn the chronicle of the course of real events into a set of clips, many bloody conflicts turn into a spectacle for the audience. The researchers note that 'the modern armed conflict develops in the genre of reportage and according to the laws of this genre, so that the news generated by it in its format corresponds as closely as possible to the format of the PR material necessary for the implementation of information and psychological impact technologies' (Manoilo, 2005).

The virtual expansion of media reality is on the agenda. Zamkov (2017) analyzes the possibilities of a promising direction of digital media – immersive journalism (immersive media), understanding by it such a technique of presenting digital content that extracts advantages for the user from the elements of the virtual environment. He notes that 'the most general goal of immersive

technology is to create a direct connection between content and its perception for deep immersion in the event environment of stories. The essence of the immersion effect itself is that it changes the observer's perception of their own position to the media image, i.e. turns them from an external observer into an internal one. At the same time, a number of spillover psychological effects may occur, such as a sense of presence, penetrating communication, participation (in interactive environments)'.

The author sees the prospect of the development of immersive journalism as the 'hottest' branch of the media industry in the fact that the synthesis of reality phenomena and knowledge in immersive virtual reality systems will 'blur' the boundaries between real world events and their machine simulation and create a mixed virtual world.

Baeva (2013) refers to the most significant consequences of the spread of digital culture, bearing in mind its existential and value-ethical aspects: the formation of a new type of value – virtual existence; the formation and development of digital culture that contributes to the solution in virtual space of such existential personality problems as death, loneliness, lack of freedom; technocratization and virtualization of the person themselves, gaining superpowers; the 'existential vacuum' that increases under the influence of virtualization, associated with the loss of the boundaries of reality; the decline in the role of real interpersonal communication and the transition to communication mediated by the information space; the formation of a new ethics of communication in which value pluralism becomes a new challenge to the moral imperatives of the individual.

Thus, the identified existential problems and risks take on new forms. By smoothing out individual contradictions of interpersonal and social relations, they create new, more complex causal relationships, which contributes to the development of other conflicts.

As a result, the analysis of the works of various researchers allows us to state that virtual reality as a property of the mass media space has the following characteristics: 1) this is a reality, ontologically grounded by a person's desire to create an alternative world; 2) it manifests itself here and now, mainly signally, unlike the virtual reality of art; 3) its orientation is much broader in terms of impact; 4) it radically changes the space-time continuum.

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Digital divide challenges of media co-ops in Argentina and Uruguay

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Abstract

This study analyzes the experiences of two media co-ops, *Tiempo Argentino* newspaper (Argentina) and *La Diaria* newspaper (Uruguay), with the aim of understanding media strategies to reduce the digital divide. These media co-ops are characterized by creating a bridge of exchange and trust with their readers, who are kept informed of the media's actions, projects, and main decisions. We analyze the digital divide in both countries and how the media co-ops implement special methods of membership / subscriptions, along with other strategies that promote communicative feedback so that their news content and work agenda include issues that affect subscribers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight journalists from Argentina and Uruguay, and documentary material was consulted. The methodological approaches for this research are situated in a constructionist perspective, hermeneutic/dialectical, that uses methods and techniques for collecting contextual and situated information. The findings show that both media co-ops adopted strategies – in the internal organization, connection with the audience and news productions – presented as actions that promote the reduction of the digital divide.

Keywords
Digital divide, media co-ops, Argentina, Uruguay, digital journalism.

Introduction
Traditional media around the world are in crisis, leading to job insecurity for their employees, and, as noted by Cag (2016: 14), it is a situation that "has radically deepened over the past years. Traditional media are now threatened

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and desperate". Various studies have been carried out based on the experiences of U.S. media startups as new forms of entrepreneurial journalism (Cag , 2016; Coates Nee, 2014; Schaffer, 2010). In the case of Argentina, media converted into cooperatives is still a new and flourishing sector. While there is a great deal of experience in creating cooperatives, there are few precedents in the media sector (Escudero, 2020).

This study focuses on two cases of media co-ops in Argentina and Uruguay. *La Diaria* and *Tiempo Argentino* are cooperative media that have focused on reducing the digital divide by creating direct spaces of exchange with their readers to discover their needs and priorities. This interaction suggests a connection to the second wave of the digital divide based on socio-cultural, economic, educational, and political contexts. This study sought to answer the following questions. First, what is the current situation of cooperative media, and how do they manage the readers' memberships? Second, how do they experience the digital divide? Third, how do both cooperatives keep up-to-date on digital literacy?

Argentina and Uruguay are neighboring countries in South America, with various factors in common related to history, politics, culture, and linguistic processes, together with differences, such as their demographics. Argentina has a population of 45,376,763, while Uruguay is populated by 3,473,727. Both countries appear to have similar interests related to their global presence and international relations as they are members of organizations such as the IMF, MERCOSUR, OAS, UN, and USAN (Expansi n, 2021).

For both countries, we examine national newspapers that have become cooperatives managed by their workers, the journalists, analyzing and comparing their media systems. Chadwick (2013) notes that the terminology, media systems, has become hybrid, meaning that ICTs have triggered a new process of "simultaneous integration and fragmentation" (p. 15), where older media, such as newspapers and television, merge with and adapt to the formats, genres, norms, and actors brought about by newer digital media.

According to the most recent classification of Freedom of the Press by Reporters Without Borders (RWB, 2021), the state of journalism in Latin America is deteriorating across the board. The international organization also specifies in its Country Ranking, classifying countries from best to worst for the state of the freedom of the press: Uruguay maintains its position at number 18 while Argentina is at number 69. The report emphasizes that in Latin America, with a few rare exceptions, the working environment of journalists, which was already hostile and complicated before the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis,

has deteriorated even more (RWB, 2021). In a survey based on the number of journalists killed, the Caribbean shows that between 2017–2021, Mexico recorded 57 murders of journalists, which represents more than all other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean together (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2020). During that same five-year period, Colombia witnessed the killings of 12 journalists, while Brazil and Honduras reported the murders of ten journalists each. Argentina and Uruguay represent a small number of countries with no journalists killed between 2017 and 2021 (Navarro, 2022).

The precariousness in the media industry continues to increase, as Romero (2021) pointed out based on a survey conducted in June and July of 2021: 80% of the opinion leaders and prominent journalists surveyed responded that job creation was the most important problem Latin America would face in the incoming 18 months; the second main issue according to these experts was the economy recovery.

The aforementioned precariousness is also represented by the number of closed newspapers in both countries. In Argentina, more than 150 newspapers can be read online (Editorial Ox, 2021); in the last ten years, four emblematic newspapers, around 10 magazines, and two news agencies have closed. In Uruguay, there are about 72 newspapers (Uruguay Total, 2021); in the last 30 years, 32 newspapers have closed.

These reflections have been manifested by the journalist members of those cooperatives through various actions, one of which materializes in the Second National Meeting of Recovered Newspapers, held in the city of Rosario (Argentina) in which 15 self-managed media companies from Latin America participated, and one from Germany. Their representatives decided to meet to "recover the notoriety and value that their independence acquires when doing journalism" (Tiempo Argentino, 2019). The gathered group discussed various dilemmas, recognizing that cooperative media are as free as they are vulnerable, and hence the need to discuss the challenges, claims, and strategies that these cooperatives develop to strengthen the sector and inform its readers by overcoming the dictatorship of paper, gender coverage, and new narratives. One of the main points of this meeting was to discuss the digital divide present in self-managed media that is sustained by the public's interest and the interactions between the media and the audience.

Among the central issues of the debate was to generate spaces for exchange with readers to bring quality information free of charge, which tends to democratize information access by bringing public opinion closer to those topics that are not covered by traditional media. Thus, favoring not only the coverage

of highly relevant topics for the reading community, but prioritizing the content and making the information more accessible in a language understandable to the reading public.

Notably, in the case of the media under study, there is marked interest in reducing the gaps with their readers; both newsrooms promote horizontal relations with the reading population. Both media outlets design their work spaces for democratic and participatory promotion, not only for elections and news production, but also when it comes to promoting spaces for exchange with their readers and shareholders, reducing cultural gaps and democratic participation.

These cooperative models of journalistic production and news construction ultimately result in newspapers reaching a greater number of readers in their digital version free of charge for them. It is a fundamental difference from their competitors that offer printed versions at relative costs.

Literature review

The digital divide has been widely studied in academic literature worldwide (Monge, & Chac n, 2002; Hilbert, 2011; Gladkova, Vartanova, & Ragnedda, 2020; Ragnedda, 2020; Kampes, & Brentel, 2021). Many authors have suggested definitions of the digital divide, most of which differ mainly in terminology and emphasize various aspects of the phenomenon, such as media literacy, digital skills, digital inclusion, digital inequalities, etc. One of the approaches that allow us to recognize the characteristics of the digital divide is found in the questions suggested by Hilbert (2011):

- Who? (Establish the type of gap: between individuals, groups, countries, etc.)
- With what characteristics? (Refers to types of income, education, geography, age, gender, etc.)
- How does it connect? (Types of access, effective networks)
- Because?
- So that? (for example, telephones, Internet, digital television, etc.)

This approach is used by authors such as van Dijk (2005), among others. However, it is important to specify that in the field of the digital divide, two main research streams can be distinguished: (1) offers rather technical explanations of the phenomenon, and (2) takes into account various socio-cultural aspects.

First-wave researchers describe the digital divide as a matter of infrastructure development, technology adoption, and the cost of both Internet access and ICT devices. Hilbert (2011) describes the digital divide as the gap between those

who have access to digital technologies and those who do not. Monge and Chac n (2002) note that the digital divide "refers to the different access that people have to information and communication technologies, and the ability to use these tools, the current use that is made of them and the impact they have on well-being". However, Bianco and Peirano (2005) propose different ways of classifying gaps: internal (refers to a study within society), temporary (a segment of the population at a given time), and structural (obstacles and drawbacks). That makes the dissemination and use of ICT impossible and cannot be improved by implementing specific measures or actions.

Second-wave digital divide researchers argue that framing it as a technology issue and an adoption issue means ignoring other variables, such as the broader socio-cultural, economic, educational, and political context (Ragnedda, 2020; Vartanova & Gladkova, 2019, 2022). DiMaggio and Hargittai (2001) defined five levels of the digital divide. The upper level represents the social context, education, age, and other characteristics of the users, which define different experiences and patterns of ICT use (Torres-Diaz, & Duart, 2015).

This last aspect is the one we use to understand how the digital divide has been and is an obstacle and, at the same time, a significant challenge in the development of proposals for the creation of self-managed media: *Argentine Time* and *La Diaria*. This approach provides detailed and focused information, allowing reasonable conclusions to be drawn about the reasons for the deepening of the digital divide.

The digital divide can be seen from various approaches to draw reasonable conclusions about the possible causes that lead to a deepening. In the second-wave of the digital divide, researchers adopt anthropological approaches to study the phenomenon by analyzing social status, individual characteristics, and capabilities of different users, which make the use of the Internet and mobile devices successful or not (Vartanova, & Gladkova, 2019). Therefore, the study of these characterizations within the digital divide leads to the conclusion that the existing divisions and differences affect it (Trappel, 2019).

According to Trappel (2019), "the imperfections of the economic market that privilege wealth over talent can be observed in the field of media and communication" (p.13). It can easily be shown that economic divides, such as those faced by these media outlets in Argentina and Uruguay, widen the digital divide: lower income groups are less represented in Internet communications and are more likely to interrupt their connection to the global network due to financial problems. Trappel (2019) noted that algorithmic targeting, surveillance, big data, and the Internet of Things are creating new forms of inequality that

follow traditional patterns of class, gender, wealth, and education. There are other examples of social gaps that transform into online gaps and widen the digital gap, such as age gap (Escudero, 2020).

Methods

At the time of carrying out the inquiry design of this study, we started ontological, epistemological, and methodological depositions close to constructionism. In this sense, we conceive the study of the phenomena that make up reality, of which we are also a part, from a constructionist perspective (Burr, 1995; Gergen, & Gergen, 2004; Holstein, & Gubrium, 2008). This perspective guides us in the analysis and the understanding of "the social bases of knowledge and the symbolic origins of reality" (Ema, & Sandoval, 2003: 7).

From this point of view, we base ourselves on the existence of a singular real world while we distinguish between the reality of the real world and our knowledge about it, without forgetting the fact that the social phenomena of that real world are not natural; rather, they are socially constructed. Hence, we are especially interested in the process of construction of discourses, theories, and visions on different social phenomena. The methodological approaches we adopt are situated in a hermeneutic/dialectical perspective that uses methods and techniques for collecting contextual and situated information (van Manen, 1990). Likewise, we are mindful of the fundamental changes or transitions of the so-called narrative turn in research, which constitute many challenges. Among them, an in-depth review of the relationship between the researcher and the researched, while the research objects/subjects become biographical individuals with the capacity for action and active builders of knowledge and visions of the world while recognizing the inter-influences between the researcher and research participants/collaborators (Clandinin, & Connelly, 2000).

Studying the digital divide in both media involves approaching reality and from the voice of its protagonists to understand the scope and consequences of the dilemmas observed. Hence, this study presents interrelated sections where both case studies are developed (Stake, 1999) for both countries and the current situation of journalism.

The case study uses a qualitative approach and is designed based on purposive sampling. The information from the newspapers *Tiempo Argentino* in Argentina and *La Diaria* in Uruguay were collected through unstructured interviews (Johnson, & Christensen, 2004; Rodr guez et al., 1996; Vall s, 1997) conducted with eight journalists, as well as media publications from both countries. The

unstructured interview method was selected for its compatibility with the research topic. The use of open questions allows them to be modified according to the specifics of each interview, which allows the interviews to resemble a natural conversation while the interviewer retains a guiding role (McLeod, 2014). To maintain the anonymity of the journalists who have participated in this study, we use acronyms: Argentine Journalist (AJ), Uruguayan Journalist (UJ), Argentina: AJ1, AJ2, AJ3, AJ4, and Uruguay: UJ1, UJ2, UJ3, UJ4.

Digital divide in Argentina

Regarding Internet access, Argentina has one of the highest rates in the region: among 45 million inhabitants, 93% are active users on the network, and 86% connect through cell phones. The information, then, circulates through smartphones: news sites are among the most visited by Argentines, behind Google and social networks such as Facebook[2] and YouTube (Molina, 2019).

The Permanent Homes Survey collected accessibility data for homes from 31 urban centers in Argentina up until 4Q 2020. The data published in the report *Access to and Use of Information and Communications Technologies* point out that 60,9% of urban homes have access to a computer, 82,9% to the Internet, and 84,3% to a cell phone, with equality of access between men and women, respectively at 84,4% and 84,2% (INDEC, 2021). The highest level of accessibility, 95,9%, was found in those between 18 and 29 years.

In Argentina, work practices were not exempt from the impact of the pandemic (D az-Struck, 2021). They generated, just as in education, a need to be reformulated for virtuality, a change that affected 35,7% of those surveyed. The EPH study also showed that, in the City of Buenos Aires, 42,6% of these experiences took place with equipment provided by the employer, while in the towns on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, this figure was only 26,9% (INDEC, 2021).

Digital divide in Uruguay

Uruguay is in a "privileged situation" given that it carries out a sustained digital policy, reflected in its successive "digital agendas" put into action by the country since 2008, as laid down in the Digital Citizens Strategy for a Society of Information and Knowledge, a document drawn up by the Agencia del Gobierno Electr nico y Sociedad de la Informaci n (AGESIC, 2020) (National Agency for the development of e-Government and the Information Society) and the UNESCO office in Montevideo.

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[2] Belongs to Meta company, banned on the territory of the Russian Federation.

This commitment to extending coverage at a technical level was expanded and reinforced with the launch of Plan Ceibal, a policy implemented during the leftist government. Inspired by the One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) program, the initiative was presented at the World Economic Forum by its co-founder Nicholas Negroponte in January 2006 and implemented throughout Uruguay from December of the same year to the present day. In these first weeks, around 360,000 laptops were distributed (Rivoir, & Pittaluga, 2011).

This policy also positioned Uruguay in the software development market, currently being one of the Latin American countries with the largest number of technology incubators, attracting investments from foreign companies. The Ceibal plan marked a milestone in reducing the digital divide and has served as inspiration for the implementation of the access and training model for other countries.

The Uruguayans demonstrate an "extensive use of the Internet," with nine out of ten people being Internet users, eight out of ten being daily users. The remaining 10% of the population is not evenly distributed, but rather the greatest divide in access to the Internet and digital skills is related to the level of education and age. People with lower levels of education use the Internet less, with less diverse and sophisticated searches, and are less critical of the Internet than those with a higher level of education. Data shows that for people considered of a low level of education (those not having completed secondary school), the percentage is 71%. For people 65 and over, the percentage reduces to 49% (AGESIC, 2020).

The Uruguayan people prefer to use their mobile phones as 90% of the population use them daily. Personal computers are used by 60% of internauts, and only 30% do so on a daily basis. In Uruguay, one of every three Internet users connect using their mobile device; this occurs mainly in 57% of people with a low level of education, while those with a high level of education (7%) connect to their mobile without using another device (AGESIC, 2020).

Co-ops and media in Argentina

In Argentina, various strategies in the field of social and solidary economics set a precedent through socio-productive experiences and processes such as the country's cooperatives. In this way, new production spaces were created, and innovations were made institutionally, aiming to increase and promote social power (Wright, 2010).

This recovered factory movement began with the former Gip-Metal S.R.L factory in August 2000 in the Buenos Aires Province. This was the day the

workers received their dismissal telegrams as the factory's owners had filed for bankruptcy. They realized something unusual was happening as they had normally been working. The workers, who decided to stay and resist, and from this space, made progress with the creation of the Cooperativa de Trabajo Uni n y Fuerza Limitada. They rented out the machinery and succeeded in the first expropriation legislation being passed for a manufacturing factory (National Movement of Recovered Factories, MNFR, 2000).

Even if the media industry seems to continually seek a way out of the economic crises that the country is going through, media consumption denotes an inevitable adaptation to changes: 95% of the population watch television, 70% listen to the radio, and 57% read newspapers regularly, either in its paper or digital version (Molina, 2019). *Infobae* is the most visited news portal, followed by clarin.com and lanacion.com.ar. The *Infobae* newspaper climbed to first place in 2019, and it is the only newspaper on that list that does not have a printed edition (Molina, 2019).

In terms of media situation in Argentina, the *State of the Country's Local Journalism* explains how the tendency towards work precariousness grew in the country's media. The investigation concludes that most local journalists work in precarious conditions and are forced to deal with high levels of instability (Fopea, 2021).

Faced with such a hostile situation for the press, several Argentinean journalists sought new paths while not abandoning their profession in communications. This is when several editorial teams found support in the Argentine Bankruptcy Law (1995, 2011), enabling workers to take over bankrupt companies and thereby recuperate the media and register it as a cooperative. Between 2016 and 2017, at least six media outlets were recovered by their workers after they were closed or abandoned by their owners. In 2018, the National Meeting of Recovered Newspapers was created, and the newspaper *La Diaria* from Uruguay was one of the international guests (Media Ownership Monitor, 2019).

According to the survey by the Buenos Aires Press Union (*SiPreBA*, in Spanish), between 2018 and 2019, over 3,100 journalists lost their jobs in the City of Buenos Aires and over 4,500 in the entire country. This took place alongside the silencing of critical voices and increased the concentration of the media in ever increasingly powerful groups that disregard current laws (Escudero, 2020). Moreover, the report by the *SiPreBA* on the situation for workers in the press states that since 2016, there have been 3,127 registered job losses, solely in the City of Buenos Aires. According to the report, business owners took advantage of the critical situation to make journalists' jobs more precarious, turning them

into "collaborators" and freelancers and thereby "violating the Professional Journalist's Statute".

Tiempo Argentino **newspaper**

The asset stripping of the *Tiempo Argentino* newspaper became increasingly obvious for its employees when the Balkbrug SA Company did not pay half of the annual bonus. Trips for special reports were canceled, and there was a lack of supplies for the printers and other supplies for the editorial office. All of which led to the first non-payment of the *Tiempo Argentino* employees in December 2015. "On that day, absolutely all of the group's employees lost their jobs. Some of us decided to carry on, file complaints, continue to write despite not being paid; other colleagues couldn't afford it and had to go and look for work" (Personal communication, AJ1, 2020). Their wages for January and February were not paid either. On the night February 5, 2016, when the workers had finished the newspaper's edition, they found out about the lockout. They improvised an assembly and that very night decided to occupy the building to preserve the tools of their trade, organizing round-the-clock watches to ensure no one came in.

The Ministry of Labor decreed that the *Tiempo Argentino* employees were the custodians of the company's property, clearly abandoned by management. On March 24th of the same year, on the 40th anniversary of the coup d' tat, they published a four-page special edition telling their story. They went out to sell the copies, talking to people and asking them if they would be interested in lending support to a project of self-management. "The supplements sold out, and we returned to the newspaper, where we were sleeping, with hundreds of emails and renewed energy" (Personal communication, AJ3, 2020).

Although the journalists took turns to continue occupying the T.A.'s editorial office, on the night of July 4, 2016, a group of people entered and destroyed much of the office, intimidating three representatives of T.A. The journalists decided to do what they do best – write and report on what happened – and the next day, 30,000 copies were printed of a publication explaining what had occurred in the offices that were still occupied as a "pay protest".

In April 2016, the workers created the *For More Time Cooperative*), returning as a digital daily newspaper with a Sunday printed edition (as this is the day on which newspaper sales tripled): *Tiempo Argentino*, Due os de Nuestras Palabras (Owers of our words). The first printed edition as a cooperative sold out (30,000 copies), somewhat unusual because when the newspaper was not run by its workers, it sold ten times fewer copies; thus, it became the largest media co-op

in the country. "We decided to create a non-profit work cooperative, where all members take part in decision-making, and we rely on the financial support of our readers" (Personal communication, AJ2, 2020).

The media has subscribers (printed edition at home), members (who pay extra to support independent journalistic projects), and many more readers with free access to content. "We have chosen a solidary model: those who pay don't do so in order to have exclusive information but so that more people have access and can read us" (Journalist from *Tiempo Argentino*, Personal communication, AJ1, 2020).

In the last four years of intense work, the cooperative members have managed to survive and maintain themselves in a national context with ups and downs. Currently, the community that supports this undertaking consists of 4,000 partners and 1,000+ subscribers between its online and paper editions. According to the current president of the Cooperative, the newspaper receives an average of 2.5 million monthly visits to its online version and maintains a print run of 25,000 copies on Sundays. Thus, income is generated, whereas 70% of *Tiempo Argentino's* revenue comes directly from its readers, and the remaining 30% comes from advertising (Personal communication, AJ4).

Co-ops and media in Uruguay

In case of Uruguay, the decriminalization of press felonies, as well as the existence of legislation regulating the community radios and guaranteeing access to information, create a favorable atmosphere for journalists' work. The Law for Audiovisual Communication Services, passed in December 2014, favored the pluralism of the press and provided for the foundation of an independent Board of Audiovisual Communication. Reporters Without Borders (RWB) registered cases of journalists who suffered threats, intimidation, and political pressure when investigating sensitive cases implicating civil servants with the presidency of the Republic; the investigating journalists were also under legal pressure (RWB, 2021).

There is a long history of the Cooperative Movement in Uruguay, with the first initiatives dating back to 1870 and undertaken by collectives of Spanish and Italian immigrants (Terra, 1986). The deep socioeconomic crisis of 2002 was a turning point; the cooperative movement was re-assessed in post-crisis Uruguay and with the arrival of a left-wing party (Frente Amplio) to the government in 2005. According to the Instituto Nacional de Cooperativismo (2018), over the period of ten years, the number of cooperatives tripled, from 1,164 cooperatives in 2007 to 3,490 in 2017.

Despite that, in most cases, the Companies Recovered by Workers (*ERT* in Spanish) adopted a cooperative legal structure to produce collectively; the processes of recuperation require the collective movement to have a particular character, given the close relationship with the trade union from which most prior experiences arose and the subsequent relation they have with this organization. For example, in 2008, ten out of 16 ERT and in 2015, 25 out of 41 noted a significant union background at their previous company and the union's central role in their recovery (Rieiro, 2008, 2016).

The ERT may therefore be taken as a specific social economy sector, given that, to a large extent, it takes on the legal form of cooperatives, becoming a member of the Federaci n de Cooperativas de Producci n del Uruguay (FCPU) [Federation of Production Cooperatives of Uruguay], but concurrently maintaining a strong link to the union movement through the Inter-Union Plenary of Workers – National Workers' Convention and even creating its own representative organization in 2007: the National Association of Companies Recovered by their Workers.

Regarding media consumption in Uruguay, *Montevideo Portal* is the first on the list, with 53% of respondents who say they have read news on the portal, followed by *El Observador* and *Subrayado*, both with 46%, *El Pa s* (45%), and *La Diaria* (34%) (Montevideo Portal, 2021).

La Diaria newspaper

As communication was challenged, Uruguayan media went through a period of crisis while uncertainty – even greater following the pandemic – still has the media and journalists in a state of alert. Based on the Federation of Production Cooperatives in Uruguay's (2020) report, *La Diaria* managed to avoid one of the main scams of the press in Uruguay, the monopoly of newsstand sales. According to UJ1: "the fact of being a cooperative medium added to the fact that the community accesses the contents of the newspaper by subscription reinforces our position as an independent medium" (Personal communication, UJ1, 2022).

"Its agenda is not dictated by the establishment, but rather it creates its own news with the new agenda of rights as its pillar" (Personal communication, UJ1, 2022). As expressed by a member of the team: "I always say that if the newspaper were not a cooperative, it would not exist as a means of communication. It is not a profitable business for capitalist profit. And the only way to survive without high volumes of advertising, without giving in to pressure from companies and/or political parties, is to be a cooperative media outlet that relies on its community of subscribers" (Personal communication, UJ2, 2022).

The *La Diaria* newspaper was founded in 2006 as the initiative of citizens who wanted to read a good newspaper and professionals who wanted to practice good journalism. Fifteen years have passed since its first edition. This media not only filled the need for an independent newspaper in Uruguay at the time, but also revolutionized how readers were traditionally accustomed to getting their copies: *de la imprenta a casa/* from the printing house to home. *La Diaria* began with a subscription model and home delivery for 100% of copies.

"We have formed a community of subscribers and readers collaborative and supportive, in which cultural, recreational, leisure, products, and promotions proposals are shared. In times of economic difficulties, we have increased the price of products, explaining the reasons to our community, and generally, we have not lost customers. This implies understanding and solidary support" (Personal communication, UJ2, 2022).

Commitment to a close and direct dialogue with the reader favors the reduction of the gaps insofar as it is from the dialogue and the exposition of the problems of the medium that the subscriber community forms part of the decisions of the management of the media itself. It is through this exchange of information, of sharing the responsibility in decision-making, that both the community and media continue to promote the news spaces.

The situation required adapting to the characteristics of the environment and the demands of its readers. For the cooperative team, this adaptation marked a turning point at an economic level. As one of the journalists points out, "we did not have sources of financing for this type of investment. We have obtained support to develop software and digital platforms, but not for the equipment of the newsroom" (Personal communication, UJ2, 2022).

Analyzing digital reconversion process, journalists point out: "When we started developing our website a few years ago, there was a digital divide between our colleagues in the newsroom. But after various changes, which involved adapting to the digital world with education and training, I think we managed to overcome the differences. For our work, keeping up with technological advances is vital" (Personal communication, UJ2, 2022).

Regarding pending challenges, as journalists point out, we could summarize them in two great reflections. On the one hand, a challenge for the team has focused on imagining new ways of managing a newspaper "In a difficult context for the print media, cooperative management collectivizes some threats that perhaps in a traditional company would not occupy your horizon of concerns" (Personal communication, UJ4, 2022).

Results

Digital divide is an important part of the public agenda, both in Argentina and Uruguay. From a broader perspective of the digital divide in a regional context, "the region is faced by a real risk of digital exclusion which in the mid-term may worsen structural gaps in terms of low productivity and high social vulnerability" (CAF, Development Bank of Latin America).

The report was titled towards a comprehensive agenda for the adoption of technologies for 4.0 learning in Latin America and used as reference indicators in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay linked to the incorporation of digital technologies in education. It revealed that 46% of the 144 million students between the ages of five and twelve in Latin America who could not have in-person classes during the five months when people were completely stopped from circulating due to the COVID-19 health crisis could not access online classes either (Tellez-Tejada, 2021).

This report specified the importance of joining forces within the public and private sectors, civil society, academia, and multilateral bodies to drive a comprehensive model for the adoption of technologies that are focused not only on the provision of devices with quality access to the Internet, but rather to improve the quality of learning.

In addition, the connectivity problem is broached in this study, with domestic access found within 60% to 80% of households. The assessment revealed that Uruguay possesses digital maturity and comprehensive programs, already boasting high rates of connectivity and access to devices; meanwhile, Argentina is in the process of reaching the same rates.

In Argentina, more than 20 media outlets have closed across the country since 2016, and at least 3,500 media employees have lost their jobs (2,700 in Buenos Aires alone). Eight out of those 20 media outlets were recovered by their staff and continue to operate as workers' cooperatives with initiatives that promote independent journalism where the aim is independence from the official guideline, at times achieved and at others, less so. Nevertheless, "in Argentina, the media sector is leading the ranking of successfully recovered businesses across all industries" (MOM, 2019).

In certain self-managed media companies from Argentina, income distribution is equitable, whereas solidarity and equality between workers are central to its legitimization. In many cases, wage differences are not significant but have a symbolic value to express the organization's internal social differentiation. As for AJ2, he recalls when they were occupying the media as a wage protest, and it became a cooperative: "We occupied the editorial department for four

months. In this process, we also understood that we could not only focus our efforts on the printed edition, and we began a long debate about how our website should be and how we would be represented and identified. We were clear that it should have different characteristics" (Personal communication, 2021).

It is crucial to understand the rupture that occurred when it stopped being a newspaper belonging to a media holding company and became a recovered media in a cooperative. AJ4 recalls: "We realized in a moment that we had to learn and improve everything related to ICT: learn to upload information to the media website, to know what would have the greatest impact on the web, to begin to learn to use tools such as Google Analytics to know in which platforms our news was most read, to understand more about our presence and impact in social media" (Personal communication, 2021)

This initiative aims to reduce the gap between press organizations working for the public interest and the large corporations that profit from news. This initiative becomes particularly important in times of profound changes in news consumption, where it is then necessary to create a structure of the media market.

In the case of *La Diaria*, after 15 years of producing news and becoming the second most-read newspaper in the country, its basis for success was and continues to be to remain free, focusing on a human, professional and empathetic style of journalism. UJ1 points out: "What is representing a divide is the digital literacy, the knowledge of what it means to manage news media in the digital economy" (Personal communication, 2022).

The transition of this media over 15 years has been to focus on the digital, as stated by UJ2: "It was a media in print. Today, it is much more than that. It's a media that has diversified its formats, its content, strongly backing digital and with a transition of the editorial towards digital" (Personal communication, 2021). UJ2 shares the priorities for publication when hiring journalists:

"The last two journalists we hired have a profile more dedicated to data journalism, and journalism and technology (…) It's great to make quality content, which is really important, but just as important, or even more, is that people feel part of a project they believe in and with which they share certain values" (Personal communication, 2021).

Conclusion

Tiempo Argentino and *La Diaria* newspapers correspond to the characterizations that various scholars attribute to this type of cooperative based around two central axes: cooperation and solidarity (Altuna-Gabilondo, 2019; Coraggio, 2011; Cruz, 2011; Guerra, 2007; Hinkelammert, 2009; Razeto,

2007; Santos-Ara jo et al., 2019; Singer, 2007). Solidarity, in this case study, is extrapolated to the audience in a bond of exchange and empathy to comprehend their needs. All these aspects are contemplated in the studies of the second wave of the digital divide since they have anthropological approaches to examining the phenomenon by analyzing social status, individual characteristics, media and audience, and capabilities of different users (journalists and readers), which make the use of the Internet and mobile devices ICT whether successful or not (Vartanova, & Gladkova, 2019).

In both media co-ops experiences, we observe the interest and commitment of their workers in creating a high-quality communication product, corresponding to the needs of an audience (that they already know and want to maintain loyal through new digital actions), the need to add more knowledge related to ICTs, their recognition of the need to reduce the digital divide through collaborative projects and the recruitment of staff with knowledge of new technologies.

Although in both media, their readers' subscriptions cover most of the journalists' wages, they have adjusted their internal finances to invest in material acquisitions, recruit staff with digital experience and knowledge, and create platforms allowing them to stay up-to-date and in touch with their audiences. As Martin (2008) notes, journalists need to acquire the necessary "digital literacy" to cope with the changes and challenges in their profession. This confirms and answers part of the questions posed for this research.

One of the limitations of this study that should be mentioned, was inability to interview 'traditional' media journalists in both countries to find out their strategies for reducing the digital divide and acquiring digital literacy.

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Student media as a part of urban communication and an actor of inclusive place branding[1]

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Abstract

The paper examines the participation of student media in inclusive place branding. Today, the territory is no longer viewed as a specific product, but as the place of interaction between different parties (authorities, businesses, residents, etc.). Inclusive place branding considers residents not just as brand ambassadors, but also as brand co-creators. This branding practice is consistent with increasing complexity of the city communication. Media and the variety of symbolic systems do not only construct the reality of the city, but also transmit socio-cultural experiences to the urban community. Not only various institutions (including official media), but also ordinary people participate in the symbolic exchange in the contemporary digital environment. The article presents the results of the study of 53 regular media projects created by students in 25 universities in 15 Russian cities. A content analysis of publications according to the degree of connection to the life of the territory (hyperlocal, local, regional, national themes) has shown that student media had already been involved in inclusive place branding practices.

Keywords

Student media, participatory journalism, inclusive place branding, place branding, urban communication studies.

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Introduction

Student and university media have traditionally been seen as a means of nurturing, educating and promoting the university, as a type of corporate media. This is partly due to the hyperlocal nature of such projects. In the meantime, such media can help with other tasks, enabling to develop urban communities, preserve local history, and strengthen local ethno-social brands. The latter is particularly important because the global communication space associated with the standardization of social practices is changing the intercultural and inter-confessional dialogue between local cultures and the question of the preservation and reproduction of ethnic mentality arises (Kesheva, 2016). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic in many countries (e.g. Smirnova et al, 2022; Stampouli, & Vamvakas, 2022; Spyridou, & Danezis, 2022) has actualized the development of regional tourism. The tourism industry faces the challenge of adapting to the world of VUCA – a world of instability, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. Youth initiatives in this field are assessed as relevant (Zamyatina, 2021).

Importantly, urban participation projects (i.e. those implemented with the help of citizens, activists, academics) are relatively inexpensive. At the same time, they increase residents' loyalty to the city and the authorities, strengthen identity, and produce long-term results (Bystrova, 2018). In addition, as the rapid transition to digital reality due to the pandemic COVID-19 has shown, some universities have been able to adapt quickly to the new environment and reduce the digital divide between students and teachers with different skill levels thanks to what is already in place (Gladkova, Ragnedda, & Vartanova, 2022). Similarly, university media projects can already have significant potential for inclusive place branding.

This paper hypothesizes that student media not only can participate in place branding, but are already doing so in some cases. The hypothesis is based on the following statements:

First, student media are part of complex urban communications. Involving them in social processes within the city depends solely on editorial policy.

Second, in today's technological environment, local and hyperlocal media are able to reflect not only official but also alternative views of citizens on local events. That is, in the context of multi-layered urban communications, city managers should use not only formal channels of communication but also informal ones, involving citizen journalists. Official structures sometimes cannot simply block the dissemination of undesirable opinions and images about a place or event. For example, during the Olympics in Tokyo in 2021, the

whole world became aware of the discontent of residents over its hosting during the pandemic and the rising incidence of COVID-19.

Third, the state has to find new forms of dialogue with young people in the context of the politic mediatization. It is young people who are becoming the driver of this process: they are interested in the socio-political agenda, ready to participate in decision-making on important issues and poorly receptive to the monological and vertical model of political interaction. The logic of social media has permeated politics, creating additional risks in the form of increased 'conflictogenicity' (Gureeva, 2020).

This paper examines the specifics of modern urban communications and mechanisms of inclusive branding of the territory based on the analysis of academic literature and different publications on this topic. Then, the empirical study of student media in 15 Russian cities with a population of millions was conducted to assess the potential of participation in place branding.

The city as the physical location and the space of communication

Attempts to make sense of life in big cities have been made since the early 20th century by Simmel (Simmel, 1903), Weber (Weber, 1922), and others. Although methodological reflection on urban communication studies began in the second half of the 20th century. For example, Deutsch described the city as a communication machine whose effectiveness is linked to the amount of contact it offers (Deutsch, 1961). The research direction has gone through several stages of development and is reflected in the popular concepts of the 'information city' and the 'digital city'. Since 2000s, scholars have stopped seeing urban space as two interrelated but separate parts (physical space and social communication space), recognizing its ambivalence. That is to say, the city is a hybrid and multi-layered space that accommodates diverse cultural and social practices and competes for a variety of resources, including material ones (Kvyat, 2014).

The convergence of mass communications with urban spaces has turned the city into a media architecture complex: the media map the city, making it accessible to perception, cognition and action (McQuire, 2014). Media and a variety of symbolic systems not only construct the reality of the city, but also transmit socio-cultural experiences to the contemporary urban community. Citizen communication influences the formation of collective and personal identity, shaping a particular image of place, including such components as a) historical memory, b) cultural heritage, c) global trends, d) state, regional and local politics; e) new communicative practices as a result of social activism

(Leontovich, 2020). The modern man, and above all the urban dweller, has become a *homo mediatus* – 'a man of media'. Its "existence is shaped by the process of receiving, consuming and making sense of mediatized information, the media environment" (Vartanova, 2017).

The complexity of urban communications is determined by at least two circumstances. First, it is the heterogeneity of the communication environment itself. Media and a variety of symbolic systems (making themselves known in the layout, architecture, routes of people's movement) define the character of individual urban spaces: public or private. In this way, they construct the reality of the city, help to establish and maintain (or destroy) social relationships, and maintain the cultural memory of the area (Kostromitskaya, 2021). 'Nodal points' arise artificially or spontaneously at the crossroads of communication flows. In the physical space of a city, such hubs are airports, subways, art clusters, and so on (Makarova, 2018). In media space, traditional media, popular websites, social networks and other communication platforms are becoming focal points. Here again, there is some division into public and private areas. There is an institutionalized segment (purposefully created and censored media space), a non-institutionalized segment – a naturally occurring uncensored audience space and a hybrid space – the internet (Pimenov, 2014). Some researchers also pay attention to the direction of information flows and the nature of the participants' interaction. "Top-down" communication is created by the official, centralized media and the peculiarity of this flow of information is the aggressive strategies, conflicts and scandal aimed at attracting the attention of a wide audience. "Bottom-up" communication is created through interpersonal communication. Such communications are influenced by global media, but displays positive features as a way of counterbalancing the flow of negativity (Leontovich, 2019).

Second, modern city dwellers, as homo mediatus, do not just exchange a variety of information live or indirectly, but also create different images, meanings and practices and thereby change the urban reality. Cognitive, normative and value-based representations of reality are no longer conceivable outside of is no longer conceivable outside of communication, dialogue with the environment world. Continuous communication and interaction with different sign systems is necessary for humans to constantly update their 'database' of the surrounding reality in order to successfully interact with others within the same socio-cultural fields. The paradox is that an imaginary, fake, mediatized reality has become a tool for changing real life in society. This reality is no longer based on real things, but on people's attitudes, on the interweaving of opinions

and assessments (Mansurova, 2010). The nature of the digital space encourages people to be socially creative. Individually or as part of a group, people create digital artefacts (e.g. digital content or their own digital identity), new practices of social participation (e.g. petition posting, independent investigations), and new norms and patterns (e.g. rules of online etiquette). Creativity becomes a tool for a user of the global network to tell others about him or herself, to engage, adapt and act in virtual space (Ustyuzhanyna, 2020).

We can conclude that the social creativity of ordinary residents, as well as their involvement in communication, has a marked effect on both the perception of the place where they live and on many processes of urban life. Public spaces in real or media environments, where citizens voice their opinions, participate in the creation of new norms and values, images of places are as important today as formal urban development institutions. Moreover, the traditional local press, as well as the new urban media, combining the principles of participatory journalism and simple communication of citizens in social networks, can be actors in urban development. At the same time, while the role of local media in urban development has been studied, student media have been hardly considered in this context. Although such media are created in important urban 'hubs' such as universities, which, like other urban communication hubs, accumulate flows of people and information and organize individual events or entire programs that contribute to the development of the city or region. Many universities today strive to generate social capital, university medical clinics, and free legal services for the public. Student and university media can be a venue for discussing urban development issues, broadcasting the cultural memory of an area, and fostering social relationships. Involving them in social processes within the city depends solely on editorial policy and position of the university.

Place branding: from a 'commodity' to an inclusive approach

Traditional place branding, in which a geographical place is perceived as a kind of commodity, emerged in the West in the 1970s as a tool for the growing competition between cities and districts (Kotler, 1993). In recent decades, more and more cities and territories around the world have turned to global market promotion as a way to develop because of a set of challenges related to increased competition. Boisen, Terlouw, Groote and Couwnberg highlight the following reasons for this process. First, in the context of late capitalism, city authorities are shifting from a managerial to an entrepreneurial approach. "This 'entrepreneurial shift' has brought the terminology, the concepts and instruments and the mechanisms of the corporate sector to the public sector;

and competitiveness is a chief goal of nearly all of these". Second, the dominant neoliberal paradigm has brought a strong focus on competitiveness onto the agenda of many states. Third, in many countries central governments are delegating increasing responsibility for social and economic development to regional and municipal authorities. Fourth, "the idea of a growing global network of cities with new urban hierarchies wherein the position of any given city is perceived as much more volatile as compared to the one it holds within its national urban hierarchy" (Boisen, Terlouw, Groote, & Couwnberg, 2018).

Russian scholars have considered the technologies of creating territorial brands (Pankrukhin, 2006; Bazhenova, 2013; Vazhenin, & Vazhenina, 2008; Vizgalov, 2008). The practice of Russian regional branding and image-making of territories has been extensively studied and researched. However, in Russia regional branding in the 2000s became fashionable rather than a necessary tool of regional policy, and was predominantly focused on scientific justification of practical activities of territorial authorities in developing branding documents. This has led to formulaic solutions in territorial branding, when branding is reduced to the choice of corporate identity or a slogan. This is due both to the misperception of the territory's brand as a 'pretty picture' for tourists, and to the eclecticism of approaches to the formation of the territory's brand. The result is a mismatch between the brand and the regional policy. Today, the topic of place branding is once again gaining popularity among representatives of the authorities. This is due to the need to promote national and regional brands of goods and services, the 'Made in Russia' and 'Export of Agricultural Products' projects. And also, with such an international trend as the process of non-standard regionalization (Butova, Demakova, Kazakov, Ulina, 2019).

The marketing approach alone is not a one-size-fits-all approach, especially in place branding. Vanolo (2020) argues that for many skeptical academics, a place is a fictitious commodity: it cannot be produced for sale, it cannot be completely separated from people's lives. Apologists for the commodification of cities take many things for granted, in particular the claim about the global competitiveness of territories. Kotler and others have been particularly straightforward in this respect. Later, they clarified that territory is a specific product. Still, there are important questions that have been explored not only within marketing theory, but also within sociology, critical studies in urbanism, etc. Among those is the following question is: is place branding the activity of city managers and special agencies, clearly following the ideology of competition and entrepreneurship, or should territorial branding also allow that other (even minority) actors create their discourses and practices, which eventually also

influence territorial brands and images? Vanolo emphasizes in this vein: in early 1990s, some foreign authors pointed out that branding and marketing of territory are definitely political objects, because they are closely linked to social conflicts, to problems of inequality, framing, exclusion and inclusion (Vanolo, 2020).

Contemporary scholars have called for a reconceptualization of place branding. In 2012, Kavaratzis suggested that the role of stakeholders should be reconsidered (Kavaratzis, 2012). The branding process is a process of co-creation (Vargo, & Lusch, 2004; Warnaby, 2009) and dialogue between stakeholders, among which residents play an important role (Kavaratzis, & Hatch, 2013; Zenker, & Seigis, 2012). Russian authors have also argued that it is not enough to create territory brands relying only on marketing tools. Zlotnitsky (2008) justified the need to include the system of social management of the territory in the region branding, the core of which should be a real rather than declarative social policy. Chechulin (2016) pointed out such a condition as the presence of political democracy institutions (including direct democracy) and a developed competitive market environment. At the territories with a low level of development of democratic institutions, the main marketing tool becomes GR, which is focused on building relations with the central government to obtain benefits and subsidies. However, once the activity of the territory's residents is awakened, that will help to attract private investments, as well as taxpayers' payments.

One of the main ideas within early approaches to place branding was to divide all stakeholders into two main groups: residents (internal community groups – staff) and non-residents (more diverse external community groups from investors to clients). Within corporate branding, the main focus is on external audiences. The same simplistic logic was used to develop the branding of places. Practice has shown nevertheless that corporate branding strategies are poorly suited to place branding. For example, branding is often understood as a process of reduction to a few key associations (see for example: Paris, the city of art and love). However, residents with more knowledge about their place of residence may disagree with simplified brands. Residents of an area are not just 'brand ambassadors', they are part of the brand itself and their activism can help the brand-building process as well as destroy it. For example, many of Berlin's brand ambassadors have a vested interest in increasing the visibility and relevance of their own projects, even if their projects may be irrelevant or less relevant to non-residents (Zenker, Braun, & Petersen, 2017). Branding a territory will only be successful if the key messages, the values conveyed by the

authorities through internal policies, are supported by the residents. That is, when the residents are co-creators of the brand. If there is no agreement on the values, the attitude towards the territory between the authorities and the residents, this can change the brand of the territory being created or destroy it. For example, the refugee crisis in Germany has not only created political problems, but also made the branding of the territory more difficult. The debate between the German chancellor and the leader of the state of Bavaria led to fears that the previously created brand 'Munich is colourful', reflecting the idea of an open and friendly city, might be reassessed in a negative way due to residents' fear of migrants (Vallster, von Vallpach, & Zenker, 2018).

According to Rebelo, Mehmood and Marsden (2020), the traditional marketing approach to territorial branding has the following shortcomings. First, it sometimes neglects many features of local history, culture, social practices, socio-political and environmental context, which ultimately leads not to an increase in the diversity of territories and their identities, but to an increase in monotony. Second, the branding of territories as a phenomenon associated with neoliberal ideology often reflects only the view of elites on a particular territory, which leads to grassroots proteSaint For example, in Hamburg, where marketing efforts were aimed at tourists and high-income residents, public protests arose under the slogan 'Not in our name!' against the city's branding. Such forms of protest illustrate well the degree of delusion of those officials who believe that territory branding is just a publicity stunt (Rebelo, Mehmood, & Marsden, 2020). The gradual understanding of the real role of residents has begun to be reflected in the new paradigm of participatory or inclusive place branding.

Participatory place branding approach was introduced by Zenker and Erfgen (2014). The authors highlighted the need to involve residents in the place branding process. Residents ought to be given the power to influence both the content and the goals of branding, but also to play an active role in the implementation of the place brand. "The process starts with Analysis, with the goal to capture key components of the place and to define a shared vision for the place. Stage two, Structure, deals with implementing a structure and guidelines for stakeholder participation in the place marketing, while stage tree, Monitoring, handles the issue of how residents can be supported in implementing their projects and how the success of the initiatives can be measured" (K llstr m, & Siljeklint, 2021). Scholars describe the importance of Place-based contextualization, Re-appreciation, Repositioning and Consolidation. First of all, residents should be

informed about the characteristics of the area, its potential and strengths, and involved in shaping visions for the future of the area. This process should lead to a consolidation of ideas, which should inspire active participation and shared responsibility and ownership of the place brand (Rebelo, Mehmood, & Marsden, 2020).

Within traditional branding, one can only work with those parties who have an interest and power in building a brand. Place branding has become a part of politics. According to Jernsand (2016), the five characteristics of inclusive place branding are evolutionary process, transformation, participation, plurality and democracy. The complex nature of place (city or territory) and the inclusive approach make it necessary to take into account different actors in the process, different representations of place and to use different methodological approaches in the brand building process. "Plurality and complexity are what makes places alive, unique and interesting. Allowing multiple identities to flourish contributes to a more authentic picture of the place, since fragmentation and non-coherency are what our society consists of…" (Jernsand, 2016).

The concept of inclusive branding is partly similar to that of patriotic journalism. The emergence of a new approach to place branding has a clear media and technology determinant. Residents' disagreement with both territorial branding practices and other social processes has occurred before, just not many people have noticed it. Today, in the context of a radically changed media landscape, the development of information and communication technologies and the emergence of new practices of media activity, it is becoming easier for residents to express their opinions. If previously the image of the regions was formed under the influence of information from the media (it was a media image), nowadays, due to the development of blogs, social networks, the 'online image of the territory' is becoming very important (Lashova, 2015). In the old offline marketing, the agenda was strictly dependent on the basic actors – governments, governors, etc. (Gavra, 2016). The social capital of the territory was monopolistically created by the institutions of power, monopoly brands, leaders of the territory. Today, under the conditions of online marketing, brands, reputations of territories have been corporatized in a special way: residents have redistributed these resources in their favor.

Current research on the role of social media in the promotion of territories shows that resident messages (as a part of word-of-mouth marketing) and other user-generated content are gradually becoming the primary and influential sources of information for non-residents (tourists) and have a noticeable impact on the competitiveness of particular territories. Although the roles of

residents in social media differ. For example, in the spring of 2017, a study was conducted in Japan on how residents of the Japanese city of Onomichi, whose landscapes attract many filmmakers and anime creators, represented their city on the social network. The city has faced economic hardship and a shrinking population, so boosting its tourism appeal was part of the area's development strategy.

Researchers identified four roles of residents on the social network: 1) 'contributors', i.e. those who write everything about the city, 2) 'photographers', i.e. those who post photos of the city, poems, etc., 3) those who write about their hobbies (and often hobbies were directly related to Onomichi), 4) 'retweeters', i.e. those who engage in reposting of other's posts. It turned out that co-tweeters were the most active: they felt that their knowledge about Onomichi helped them gain respect for the city, and that their sense of attachment to their territory made them more active in introducing the city to the outside world than those who took one of the other three roles (they promoted the city unintentionally). Although, as problems in some parts of Europe show, residents may also see tourism development as a negative factor, provoking 'touristophobia' in them (Uchinaka, Yoganathan, & Osburg, 2019).

Thus, the change in place branding, away from the traditional marketing approach towards inclusive branding, correlates with a deepening understanding of the complexity of urban communications. This is reflected in a rejection of ready-made brands in favor of dialogue, co-creation with the residents. In this context, it is important to look for actors who are actively involved in mass communication processes and processes of social creativity, including young people.

Methodology

Young people, especially students, are one of the social groups that can be involved in inclusive branding programmes. First, students are involved in socialisation processes, exploring urban spaces and territorial communications. They, like other young people, are active users of many social networks and messengers. Secondly, educational and scientific organisations can provide good technical, organisational and even financial support to media activists (funding of student trips, involvement in research and grant activities), as they are interested in strengthening their own position at local, regional and sometimes national level. Thirdly, student-generated text and audio-visual material as part of projects can be disseminated both through social media and become part of the content of conventional media.

Russian universities already have experience in creating similar media products, less in the popularisation of science and more in the popularisation of local history. However, regular student media in terms of participation in inclusive branding of the territory has not been specifically addressed.

In order to study the potential of student media projects to promote territories, the following framework was defined.

1. A student media or media project is created by students pursuing a degree in journalism. Practice-oriented training for journalists allows for the expectation of regular media output and a degree of freedom from the corporate university agenda. It is difficult to teach practical journalism by writing only about university life.

2. The media of universities located in Russian cities with a population of more than 1 million people were taken into consideration. Obviously, such cities have a saturated information field and there may be exclusive topics, poorly covered by the professional media.

According to the website vuzopedia.ru, as of January 2022, 52 universities teaching journalism were found. Of these, 23 universities are located in Moscow, 7 in Saint Petersburg and 22 universities are located in the remaining 13 cities with a population of a million. The official websites of the universities, the pages of journalism departments, as well as the accounts of the universities on YouTube and VK were also studied. The main objective was to search for students' media and media projects, their profiles or mentions on them. These social networks were chosen as the most popular in the 18-30 age group, according to the Public Opinion Foundation in March 2021. Those media and media projects that continued to be produced regularly in 2019 were taken into account (in 2020, student media may not have been produced due to restrictions related to COVID-19 measures). The results were found in 25 out of 52 universities with journalism as a field of study. Of these, 11 are located in Moscow, two in Saint Petersburg and 14 in 13 regional cities with a million inhabitants.

The next step was to examine the content of the media projects. For this purpose, a content analysis was conducted of the material created by the student media projects for the autumn semester 2021-2022 of the academic year (i.e. from 1 September 2021 to 31 January 2022). If there was no publication activity during this period, the last semester when materials were posted was considered. Print publications were examined using websites and/or publicly available DPF versions of publications. For video content, materials in YouTube and VK accounts were studied. For the analysis of materials of student radio stations accounts in VK social network were used.

The method of continuous sampling was used. Due to the difference in technological and organisational conditions of the student editorial offices, all types of publications within the project (i.e. podcasts, videos and text posts) produced by the editorial office were taken into account. Reposts from other publishers were excluded from the sample, as well as duplications of own publications (both repetitions within the same platform and duplication of the same content on different platforms). In a few cases where it was not possible to determine the exact dates of publication, a conclusion on content was made on the basis of an analysis of a few random publications.

As the sample consisted of material that differed fundamentally in both genre and method of production, the topic of the publication was chosen as the unit of analysis. Thus, all the published materials in print media were considered. In TV and radio pieces both the whole programme (e.g., interview, topical talk show, review) and separate stories within newscasts were used as units.

Due to the fact that the purpose of the study was to examine the integration of student and university media in informing their audiences about life in the city and region, all content found was categorised according to four categories.

1. Hyperlocal content (H). This category included all topics related to university life: all events of student and academic life associated with the university regardless of scale and status (university, nationwide, international), as well as lectures delivered by university representatives and guests on campus, interviews with university scientists and students.

2. local content (L). this category included events related to city life (including other universities in the city) held on the territory of the city regardless of scale and status; interviews with city residents, thematic materials about interesting places in the city and historical characters.

3. Regional content (R). This category included all topics related to the events within the region (oblast, krai, republic), residents of other territories of the region outside its capital.

4. National content (N). This category included all events and topics about life in Russia (including national holidays), as well as student and academic events in other regions of the country, if the authors of the material did not focus on the participation of university representatives in the event, but on the event itself (i.e. covered it objectively, detaching from corporate identity).

5. Other. This category included materials that either did not have a sensitive territorial affiliation (for example, an interview that there is procrastination, a story about youth slang, and so on), or related to international events (for example, film premieres, a story about world famous writers, about the directions of science), as well as materials of an artistic nature.

Such a classification does not allow taking into account all aspects of the interaction of university media with the external environment. For example, publications about university scientists that fall into the category of 'hyperlocal content' can be intended not only for the internal public, but also for the external one: for residents of the city, students and researchers from other regions. However, such a separation allows you to find those projects that consciously participate or can participate in the place branding.

Data was also collected on the integration of student media projects into the mass-media flows of the professional media: information about the placement of materials on the air of city and regional TV and radio companies and on their websites.

Results

A study of open-source data found student-generated media at only half of the universities where journalism training takes place (25 out of 52). Of these, 11 are located in Moscow, 2 in Saint Petersburg and 14 in 13 regional cities with a million inhabitants. The results are presented in *Tables* and . Perhaps there are more projects in reality, but there is no information about them on the pages of the websites of departments and faculties of universities, as well as their publics on social networks.

In total, 30 student media outlets and regular media projects were found in 13 regional universities, and 23 in 13 metropolitan ones (Moscow and Saint Petersburg). A problem arose with the classification of HSE projects (the HSE Media Centre and the Media Communication in Education Project Learning Laboratory): the projects exist as professional ones, are created by hired specialists, and it is extremely difficult to find out whether the students themselves are directly involved in them.

Table 1

Student media in Moscow and Saint Petersburg universities, journalism programmes

City, in descending order of population	University	Student media/media project (with direct link if available)	Social media with a media account	Content created in in the autumn semester 2021 (or the last six months of the project operation / the latest issue of print media)		Integration with the professional media environment
				Total number of original materials	Content type: H - hyperlocal; L - local; R - regional; N- national	
Moscow	The Litchin Humanitarian Institute for Television and Radio Broadcasting	Film and Television Institute (GITR) Channel https://www.youtube.com/user/gitrmr	YouTube	64	H – 34 L – 9 R – 4 N – 0 Other – 17	None
Moscow	Lomonosov Moscow State University	Mokhovaya 9 TV channel https://vk.com/mohovaya9_msu	YouTube	90	H – 49 L – 19 R – 2 N – 2 Other – 18	None
Moscow	Lomonosov Moscow State University	Radio Mokhovaya 9 https://radio_mohovaya9.tilda.ws/ https://vk.com/radiomsu9	VK	226	H – 12 L – 24 R – 33 N – 70 Other – 87	None
Moscow	Lomonosov Moscow State University	The online edition of Journalist Online https://journonline.msu.ru/	None	47	H – 5 L – 19 R – 10 N – 9 Other – 4	None

Moscow	Lomonosov Moscow State University	Science Journalism Lab portal http://sciencemedialab.ru/	YouTube, VK	33	H – 22 L – 5 R – 1 N – 4 Other – 1	None
Moscow	Lomonosov Moscow State University	Projects in English by the Department of Media Linguistics http://www.journ.msu.ru/smi/proekty-na-angliyskom-yazyke.php	None	42	H – 6 L – 5 R – 3 N – 7 Other –21	None
Moscow	Moscow Humanitarian University	Newspaper Proba Pera (PDF) https://mosgu.ru/journalist/periodicheskie-izdaniya/	None	43	H – 16 L – 4 R – 1 N – 1 Other –21	None
Moscow	Moscow State Pedagogical University	The 7th Workshop https://vk.com/sedmayam	YouTube, VK	94	H – 18 L – 37 R – 10 N – 15 Other –14	None
Moscow	Moscow University of Finance and Law	MFUA TV (YouTube channel) https://www.youtube.com/@MFUAvideoblog	YouTube	30	H – 27 L – 0 R – 0 N – 0 Other –3	None
Moscow	National Research University Higher School of Economics	HSE Media Centre* https://mc.hse.ru/	YouTube	?*	?*	None
Moscow	National Research University Higher School of Economics	Design and Training Laboratory for Media and Communication in Education* https://cmd.hse.ru/education/	VK	?*	?*	None
Moscow	National Research University Higher School of Economics	The Vyshka online publication** https://thevyshka.ru/		53	H – 7 L –18 R – 7 N – 16 Other – 5	None

City	University	Media	Platform	Number	Counts	None
Moscow	National Research University Higher School of Economics	HSR Radio** https://vk.com/highschoolradio	VK, Telegram	5	H – 1 L – 0 R – 0 N – 0 Other – 4	None
Moscow	Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration	Journalism Department video channel https://www.youtube.com/@migsuchannel	YouTube	31	H – 29 L – 0 R – 0 N – 0 Other – 2	None
Moscow	Russian State University for the Humanities	ZhuRnal workshop https://www.rsuh.ru/media/journalchik/	None	16	H – 11 L – 2 R – 0 N – 0 Other – 3	None
Moscow		STC RGGU video channel https://www.rsuh.ru/media/stk/	YouTube	61	H – 46 L – 6 R – 1 N – 1 Other – 7	None
Moscow	Russian State Social University	Orthodox Media Centre https://vk.com/cpmrssu	VK, YouTube	24	H – 23 L – 0 R – 0 N – 0 Other – 1	None
Moscow	Kosygin Russian State University	The voice of the WGU (YouTube channel) https://www.youtube.com/@user-ol6ld8hy8i/videos	YouTube	38	H – 34 L – 3 R – 0 N – 0 Other – 1	None
	Peoples' Friendship University of Russia	RUDN University https://www.youtube.com/@rudn_university	YouTube	66	H – 63 L – 0 R – 0 N – 3 Other – 0	None

St. Petersburg	St. Petersburg State Institute of Film and Television	KiT TV (YouTube channel) https://www.youtube.com/@KiT4TV	YouTube	11	H – 7 L – 1 R – 0 N – 0 Other – 3	None
	St. Petersburg State University	St. Petersburg State University TV and Radio Channel MOST http://jf.spbu.ru/1_linia/	YouTube	167	H – 106 L – 50 R – 2 N – 7 Other – 2	None
		St. Petersburg State University Television and Radio Channel (radio) http://jf.spbu.ru/radio/	None	? ***	H / L ***	None
		The First Line Information Portal https://1-line.spbu.ru/index.html	None	32	H – 6 L – 10 R – 1 N – 3 Other – 12	None

* The media exists as a professional, created by employed professionals, identifying an active role for students is difficult.
** Media is created by students from different specialisations and several universities.
*** Content analysis was not carried out due to the inability to determine the dates of creation of the submissions. The availability of the content type was determined by randomly sampling a few published programmes.

Table 2

Student media in Russian regional cities with population over one million people, journalism programmes

City, in descending order of population	University	Student media/ media project (with direct link if available)	Social media with a media account	Content created in in the autumn semester 2021 (or the last 6 months of the project's operation / the latest issue of print media)		Integration with the professional media environment
				Total number of original materials	Content type: H (hyperlocal); L (local); R (regional); N (national)	
Novosibirsk	Novosibirsk National Research State University	TV FW NSU (YouTube channel) https://www.youtube.com/@user-pz4wm3tu2z	YouTube	10	H – 6 L – 4 R – 0 N – 0 Other – 0	None
		Radio Cactus NSU https://vk.com/radiocactus	VK Yandex	88	H – 39 L – 8 R – 0 N – 1 Other – 40	None
		Mesto Vstrechi – Siberia magazine https://mesto-vstrechi.org	None	36	H – 4 L – 17 R – 3 N – 1 Other – 11	None

City	Media	Platforms	Number	Statistics	Broadcast
Ekaterinburg	Yeltsin UrFU Faculty of Journalism (YouTube channel) https://www.youtube.com/@user-bo4th6cj4l	YouTube	4	H – 3 L – 1 R – 0 N – 0 Other – 0	None
	Underwood newspaper (PDF) https://urgi.urfu.ru/ru/student/underwood/	None	12	H – 7 L – 3 R – 0 N – 0 Other – 2	None
Kazan	UNIVER TV https://universmotri.ru https://vk.com/univertvhd	VK, Telegram	457	H – 283 L – 39 R – 42 N – 64 Other – 29	Separate broadcast TV channel integrated with cable operators
	Radio Umradio https://vk.com/ufmradio	VK	?*	H / L / R*	Has its own FM channel*
	Shakird newspaper http://shakird.ru/	YouTube, VK, OK	77	H – 22 L – 22 R – 8 N – 4 Other – 21	None
	Islamic portal http://www.islam-portal.ru	None	210	H – 22 L – 29 R – 59 N – 54 Other – 46	None

Ural Federal University named after the first President of Russia B. N. Yeltsin

Kazan Federal University

Russian Islamic Institute

City	University	Media (name / URL)	Platform	Number	Counts	Notes
Nizhny Novgorod	Lobachevsky Nizhny Novgorod State University	The newspaper Zhurfact (PDF) http://www.fil.unn.ru/studentam/zhurfakt/	None	37	H – 15 L – 2 R – 0 N – 0 Other – 21	None
	South Ural State University	SUSU TV (website and YouTube channel) https://www.tvr.susu.ru/	YouTube	289	H – 239 L – 8 R – 8 N – 12 Other – 22	Broadcasting TV channel in the online environment; cooperation with GTRK Yuzhny Ural
Chelyabinsk		SUSU Radio https://www.tvr.susu.ru/	VK	32	H – 15 L – 9 R – 0 N – 0 Other – 8	None
	Chelyabinsk State University	TV program PO_SETY https://vk.com/po_sety	YouTube, VK	13	H – 2 L – 4 R – 0 N – 0 Other – 7	The programme is broadcast on Channel 31
Omsk	Dostoyevsky Omsk State University	OmSU TV journalism laboratory (website and YouTube channel) http://tv-omgu.ru/	YouTube, VK	8	H – 2 L – 2 R – 0 N – 0 Other – 4	None
		Faces of Modern Russian Studies http://phil.omsu.ru/6223	None		N**	None

City	University	Media outlet	Platform	Number	Statistics	Other
Rostov-on-Don	Southern Federal University	SFU Student Media Centre SFEDUMEDIA https://vk.com/sfedumedia	VK	93	H – 68 L – 10 R – 0 N – 229 Other – 9	None
	Southern Federal University	A media project about poetry Prosodia https://prosodia.ru	None	283	H – 2 L – 0 R – 0 N – 231 Other – 52	None
	Rostov State University of Economics (RINH)	Rinhbourg magazine https://vk.com/rinhburg	VK	157	H – 98 L – 10 R – 0 N – 1 Other – 48	None
Ufa	Bashkir State University	Student publication Repost (PDF + website) https://repostmagazine.mystrikingly.com/	VK		H / L***	None
Krasnoyarsk	Siberian Federal University	TV SFU (website and YouTube channel) https://tube.sfu-kras.ru/tv-sfu	YouTube, VK	71	H – 21 L – 31 R – 13 N – 2 Other – 4	None
Krasnoyarsk	Siberian Federal University	TV project Siberia through the Eyes of Foreigners **** https://www.youtube.com/@user-bm9pw9to3r	YouTube	2	H – 0 L – 0 R – 2 N – 0 Other – 0	Outlets aired on Channel 7 (trk7.ru)

Krasnoyarsk	Siberian Federal University	Popular Science TV project**** https://www.youtube.com/@user-bm9pw9to3r	YouTube	10	H – 0 / L – 1 / R – 1 / N – 1 / Other – 7	Outlets aired on Channel 7 (trk7.ru)
Krasnoyarsk	Siberian Federal University	School of Inter-Ethnic Journalism project**** https://www.youtube.com/@user-bm9pw9to3r	YouTube		H / L / R****	None
Krasnoyarsk	Siberian Federal University	Belka Radio https://vk.com/ifiyakradio	VK	50	H – 12 / L – 11 / R – 1 / N – 2 / Other – 24	None
Krasnoyarsk	Siberian Federal University	Online publication Krasnoyarsk Underground https://krasmetro.media/	VK	297	H – 58 / L – 190 / R – 15 / N – 27 / Other – 7	None
Voronezh	Voronezh State University	The Faculty of Journalism at VSU (YouTube channel) https://www.youtube.com/@user-ji1ng3hz9j	YouTube	46	H – 13 / L – 17 / R – 2 / N – 0 / Other – 14	None
Voronezh	Voronezh State University	Radio Navigator https://vk.com/radionavigator	VK	47	H – 20 / L – 15 / R – 3 / N – 3 / Other – 6	Repost on a Russian portal https://me-diauniversity.ru/

Perm	Perm State National Research University	University-TV / HochuVuniversity (YouTube channel) https://www.youtube.com/@user-sf6of3kh6f	YouTube	97	H – 2 L – 37 R – 0 N – 1 Other – 57	None
	Perm State National Research University	PiPerm, a student magazine about the city and urban youth http://pi-perm.ru/	None	26	H – 2 L – 22 R – 0 N – 0 Other – 2	None
	Perm State National Research University	The Stories of Perm https://vk.com/arhiv_lpkn	VK	6	H – 0 L – 6 R – 0 N – 0 Other – 0	None

* Content analysis was not performed due to the lack of direct links to radio programs. The conclusion about the content type is based on the group data on the social network VK (not supported since 2019) and the description in the description of the UNIVER TV group on the social network VK.

** Content analysis was not carried out due to problems with access to video files of the project. The content is classified as national based on the description of the content of the project on the faculty website.

*** Content analysis was not carried out due to the lack of publication dates for materials on the site. The type of content was determined based on familiarity with several random materials.

**** The project materials are published on the YouTube channel TV SFU, it is not possible to allocate their exact number for content analysis due to the lack of labeling. The content type is defined based on a random sample.

Discussion

Content analysis made confirmed the hypothesis that student projects of journalism faculties can participate in territorial branding, since the authors of such media are interested not only in life inside the university, but also outside it. In the materials of UNIVER TV (Kazan) 283 out of 457 thematic content units (that is, approximately 60%) were associated with the life of the university, and in Chelyabinsk 239 out of 289 units (that is, approximately 70%) were associated with university life. This is due to the fact that these media are semi-professional (in addition to students, content is created here by full-time employees) and perform the functions of corporate media. At the same time, other media projects created content mainly about life outside the walls of the university. This is, for example, the Islamic portal (Russian Islamic Institute in Kazan), where out of 210 thematic units only 22 turned out to be hyperlocal, 29 local, 59 regional, 54 national. This is the online publication *Krasnoyarsk Underground*: out of 297 units, 190 were devoted to the life of the city, 15 lives of the region and 27 lives of the country. This is the online publication *Prosodi*a, where 231 out of 283 units covered events in the country.

At the same time, it is difficult to draw an accurate conclusion about the degree of involvement in the coverage of the life of the city and region of those projects that, in more or less different degrees, represented different types of content. In the fall of 2021, restrictions on events were introduced in Russia due to the COVID-19 pandemic, universities were transferred to distance learning. The absence of events could not but affect the content of student media. The same circumstance is probably associated with a significant amount of content classified as 'Other'. In the context of a shortage of events, student media made materials about world events, and on the so-called distracted topics. The general trend was also the shortage of content about the life of the region. This can be explained by two reasons. First: a significant part of the regional events is associated with large cities. Second: student media do not have the means to organize trips to other settlements of the regions.

During the study of media projects, a difference was also noticed between the media in Moscow and Saint Petersburg on the one hand, and other cities on the other hand. Firstly, universities in both Russian capitals (i.e. Moscow and Saint Petersburg) show less diversity in terms of type and content of student media than the regional ones. In Moscow, student TV/video channels operate in eight out of 11 universities, online and print (PDF) editions in five, radio in two. In Saint Petersburg, television media are available in two universities, and online publishing and radio in just one. In regional universities, there is

regular video production in ten universities out of 14, online and printed (PDF) publications in nine universities and radio in five.

Secondly, student media and media projects of regional universities are more oriented towards external audiences, while those in the capital are more oriented towards internal ones. This may be due to the fact that many student media outlets at regional universities were created before those in the capital. Most media from regional universities appeared in the late 2000s and early 2010s, while projects in metropolitan universities continued to appear in the late 2010s. Regional student media outlets were either initially set up as online media or quickly acquired social networking sites. This means that the media in regional higher education institutions have a great deal of sharpening potential.

Thirdly, only regional universities have detected the integration of student media into the professional journalistic environment of the city. In Chelyabinsk, South Ural State University has been broadcasting *YUrGU TV* since 2004 and collaborates with the Yuzhny Ural State Television and Radio Company. Chelyabinsk State University has been producing a programme called *PO_SETY*, which has been broadcast on *Channel 31* since 2012. *UNIVER TV* has been operating as a full-fledged channel in Kazan since 2012, it is broadcast by local cable operators and is available online. *Ufmradio* radio broadcasts on the FM band. In Krasnoyarsk, Siberian Federal University's *TV SFU* has been airing programmes *Siberia Through the Eyes of Foreigners* and *Popular Science* on *Channel* since 2020.

Furthermore, a study of student media and media projects revealed that not only they have the potential for inclusive branding, but that they are already actively involved in it. This is evidenced by the number of media projects purposefully created to highlight or promote the local history, culture and image of the region. At the same time, the activity of regional universities in this direction is higher than that of those in the capital. A few interesting projects can be mentioned here:

1. YouTube channel *The 7th Workshop* actively covers the events of the creative life of Moscow, sometimes concerns socio-political topics. Of the 94 thematic content units, 37 are classified as 'local content', ten as 'regional', and 15 as 'national'.

2. *Islamic portal* (Russian Islamic Institute in Kazan). The portal focuses on events from the life of the Muslim world not only in Kazan and the Republic of Tatarstan, but also in Russia and abroad. Interestingly, out of 210 thematic content units, more than a half are associated with the life of the republic (59 units) and the country (54 units), while only 22 topics were associated with the life of the university.

3. Online publication *Krasnoyarsk Underground* (Siberian Federal University) is similar to the Novosibirsk edition: students cover events that take place in the region. Of the 297 content items, 190 are related to the life of the city and 15 to the life of the region.

4. The magazine *Mesto Vstrechi – Siberia* (Novosibirsk National Research State University) tries to highlight cultural life in Siberia. 20 content items out of 36 are related to the life of the city and region.

5. The YouTube channel of the Faculty of Journalism of Voronezh State University actively covers not only the life of the university, but also the city. Of the 46 content items, 17 are linked to the city. These are interviews with citizens, as well as documentaries.

6. The YouTube channel *Hochu V universitet* (Perm State National University) also pays a lot of attention to the life of the city: out of 97 thematic units, only two are associated with the university, 37 are local content, the rest are creative and thematic works of students classified as 'Other'.

7. TV project *Siberia through the Eyes of Foreigners* (Siberian Federal University) introduces the viewer to how Siberia is perceived by visiting foreign students. The program was released on one of the city TV channels.

8. School of Inter-Ethnic Journalism project (Siberian Federal University) is a series of student interviews and stories with representatives of different religions and nationalities who live in the Krasnoyarsk region.

9. *PiPerm*, a student magazine about the city and urban youth can also be considered a local project: out of 26 content items, 22 cover city life.

In addition, two more projects supported by journalism departments can be considered as projects that participate in national branding:

1. *Prosodia* media project on poetry (Southern Federal University in Rostov-on-Don) introduces readers to events in Russian literary life, highlights the lives and work of famous poets, and publishes poems by contemporary authors. In this case, 231 out of 283 content items are coverage of literary life in Russia, 52 are news about world literature.

2. The project *Faces of Modern Russian Studies* (Dostoyevsky Omsk State University) is an academic project aimed at a narrow audience. In this case, students and teachers introduce viewers not even to local heroes, but to prominent Russian philologists.

Thus, our study showed that student media and media projects can participate in inclusive place branding. However, it should be understood that the quality of such participation, as well as the degree of involvement depend on many factors. This includes the level of professional skills of the authors and curators, the

funding of the project, and the awareness of the need for student participation in branding on the part of both the university administration and the region. For example, the greatest involvement of student media in the region's image-making processes can be seen in Kazan. There, university television not only promotes the university, but also meets the needs of its residents (for example, it fulfils the educational function of journalism).

Conclusion

The complexity of urban communications correlates with a deep change in place branding: there is a departure from the traditional 'commodity' relationship to the territories. That is being replaced with inclusive place branding, which manifests itself in a rejection of ready-made brands in favor of dialogue and co-creation with the residents.

In these circumstances, it is important to look for actors who are actively involved in mass communication processes and processes of social creativity. One of local communication actors can be university media. Previously, university media have only been considered in two capacities. On the one hand, such media have either been seen as a kind of corporate media, whose main function has been to organize internal communications and form a favorable image of the organization in the external environment. On the other hand, they were seen as a means of educating young people and as a kind of educational tool. This study hypothesised that university media can perform another important function: to engage in place branding.

The idea that university media can perform such non-traditional functions correlates with current research of local media, including non-institutional media. Firstly, authors note the high activity of the youth in expressing opinions on current socio-political issues (Gureeva et al, 2022). Of course, the content and forms of political participation have by now undergone a substantial transformation. Media activism among young people include the leisure context of activity: the activity takes place in free time and is associated both with the search for satisfaction from consuming a certain type of content (Gureeva, Dunas, & Muronets, 2021). Secondly, media philosophy researches emphasizes growing interest in local and unique events, people in an evolving digital reality: everything related to topos, region, local territory and local culture is preserved within the framework of an increasingly universal media reality (Savchuk, 2013 : 87). While at the end of the 20th century interest in local and community media was predominantly expressed by European and American researchers (e.g. Heinz, 1980; Howley, 2005), today such studies are found everywhere (e.g. Das, 2021).

The work showed that modern student media exist in a complex system of urban communications, where not only official institutions (for example, authorities, institutionalized media), but also ordinary residents can be facilitators of the development of the territory. Meantime universities are one type of territory 'hubs' where the flows of information and people constantly intersect: applicants, students, scientists, various visitors to university events. University and student media projects can cover not only the internal life of the organization, but also meet the various needs of residents of the city or region in which the organization operates. This is relevant in the context of transformation research the process of transformation of syncretic communicative and cultural memory in the digital environment (Simons et al, 2021). It is also relevant to investigate the participation of student media in the construction of meanings in the context of the robotization of journalism (Zorin, 2018).

We believe that student media can be seen as possible creators of territorial branding. In the context of the complexity of modern urban communications, city officials cannot independently, without the participation of residents, create a full-fledged and viable place brand. At the same time, the residents themselves, without organizational and resource support from the authorities and businesses, will also not be able to complete this task.

Further research in this direction could be devoted to a more detailed consideration of the factors of such participation, including financial, organizational, and creative conditions which are required to increase the participation of university media in the promotion of territories.

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